

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Volume 1: Matthew- John

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Preface

I've been writing about the Bible for over 25 years. Whilst my basic doctrinal convictions haven't changed in that period, my views on many other things have matured. Problem is, I write as a way of thinking, indeed I still have the exercise books of original notes written in my time in Central Africa which became my first published books. With the advent of notebook computers, I ended up tapping everything out rather than writing it up... And as I read and processed more material, in both volume and breadth, I added in what I'd picked up. What this means is that if you scour through my material, you can find many contradictions, differing viewpoints and approaches being suggested by the same author. I've never really been bothered to regularly purge my material... I've let it stand. I'm not ashamed or worried by the changes and developments, it's normal and natural. Anyone who uses this commentary in any depth will soon discern that this is no uniform presentation. It's one man chatting to himself over the years, and to you, about God's word. I see it all as a sowing of seed rather than a dogmatic presentation of final Truth- a stimulation of your mind, your own Biblical research, your searching for the God and Son of God who are "in all the Scriptures".

Some of the material was published as hard copy books, and all of it can be found online on the Aletheia Bible College website [aletheiacollege.net/heaster.htm]. I'd always been against the verse-by-verse approach to Bible study, as it seemed to result in potted thinking and simplistic dogmatism by those who swallowed it. I preferred thematic study rather than verse by verse. But as I settled down in life and began running a church in Riga, Latvia, I found myself almost daily being asked [in essence]: "Please explain the Bible to me... this chapter... that book... and what does this passage mean?". Running several public meetings per week, I saw the advantage of simply reading the Bible together systematically, and then explaining the chapter read to the folks and considering their questions. So I found myself talking chapter by chapter, if not verse by verse; and needing to prepare material on specific Bible chapters ahead of time. Everything I've written on Scripture is online and searchable, and I've tried to use the same abbreviations for books of the Bible all through. So naturally I found myself hitting the search key rather often late on Saturday nights. But it has become useful and convenient for me to reassemble the material in my books and articles into a form which corresponded to Bible chapters and verses. So I went through the material and cut and pasted the material on specific Bible verses into a Biblically chronological sequence. And out came this commentary. And hence the rather disjointed nature of some of the comments as they stand. But let me repeat the caveat about any verse-by-verse approach- there is not just one lesson to be learnt from each Bible verse, there's the real possibility that the explanation you read is wrong or incomplete or skewed in some way.

The personal background given above will explain why the 'level' and nature of the commentary varies. Some of it's high theology; other parts are simple encouraging remarks on a few words of Scripture, initially prepared for the illiterate or barely literate. For the most part I've removed theological and academic references and similar footnotes; but if you want to get into a comment further or find the academic support for a historical or factual statement, you can look up the phrase on the CD or use the search facility at aletheiacollege.net/heaster.htm . Then you'll see the commentary in its original setting, with academic apparatus. If you want to engage with me over anything written- don't be shy. You can reach me via the publishers or through [dh \[at\] heaster.org](mailto:dh[at]heaster.org).

May God's word become flesh in us as it was in the Lord Jesus. May we rejoice in His word as one who finds great riches. May it be sweeter than honey, needed and valued by us more than our daily food; may we live not by bread alone, but by every word of God. May the word of Christ dwell in us richly. May it be seed for us, bread in our wilderness, until we reach the promised land.

Duncan Heaster

Riga, Latvia, 1st December 2010

MATTHEW

1:1 *the book* – a reference to the entire Gospel, or to the genealogy which follows?

generation- Gk. 'nature' (s.w. James 1:23; 3:6). If "the book" refers to the entire Gospel, this could be read as implying that Matthew wished to develop the theme of the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ; hence he begins by showing His human roots through the genealogy Matthew presents.

Matthew begins his presentation of the Gospel with the claim that Jesus is the promised Son promised to David and Abraham, thereby fulfilling the promises made to them about the future Saviour. Negatively, we could say that the Gospel begins with a denial that Jesus personally pre-existed, and with an emphasis upon His humanity.

1:2 The Abraham-Isaac-Jacob family is unusual, in that most of the other 'sons of' in Matthew's genealogy refer to grandsons or great-grandsons- see on Mt. 1:4. Clearly this was a father-son-grandson family situation which all played a significant part in God's purpose.

1:3 Why the mention of Zara? Maybe because he was the firstborn, but God delights to work through the weak, the 2nd best, the underdogs; those who are not the firstborn. Likewise this explains the mention of the fact that a woman who acted as a prostitute, Tamar, was in the line of Jesus. We cannot blame our sin and failure on a poor spiritual background... for Jesus had prostitutes, questionable people, murderers etc. as His ancestors, and yet achieved perfection.

1:4 Naason was prince of the tribe of Judah in the time of Moses (Num. 1:7; 2:3; 7:12). Four generations are given by Matthew's genealogy, but it covered at least 470 years from Israel being in Egypt, walking through the wilderness, and entering the land. It's clear that some generations are omitted- because he wished to present as fourteen generations from Abraham to David (Mt. 1:17).

1:5 Matthew's genealogy features [unusually, for Jewish genealogies] several women, who had become the ancestors of Messiah through unusual relationships. It's almost as if the genealogy is there in the form that it is to pave the way for the account of Mary's conception of Jesus without a man.

Rahab the Gentile prostitute married a prince of the tribe of Judah, Salmon. Was he one of the spies who stayed with her? It was the tribes of Judah and Ephraim whose spies had been faithful the first time Israel approached Canaan, so perhaps the two spies who were sent to Jericho were the princes of those tribes?

Boaz married Ruth to raise up seed unto the childless Mahlon (Ruth 4:10 cp. Dt. 25:5,6). But the letter of that law is put aside here- to develop the point that Jesus really is descended from a bunch including murderers, Gentiles, women, whores and gamblers.

1:6 Gk. *The David, the King*. This may be in order to set up a juxtaposition between the fact David was the King, and the fact that David although the great King of Israel, had an affair with "her that had been the wife of Urias". Again, the genealogy would be highlighting the spiritually weak, so human, ancestry of the Lord Jesus. However the definite article occurs again in 1:16, *the Joseph*. It may be a way of marking off the central and finishing point of the genealogy as intended by 1:17.

1:8 Ahaziah, Jehoash and Amaziah are excluded by the statement that "Jehoram begat Uzziah"- because they were all descended also from Athaliah and Jezebel, whose name God so wished to blot out?

1:12 Jeconiah was to be written childless (Jer. 22:30)- but God's sensitivity to human repentance is even greater than His insistence upon fulfilling His word, and so it seems to me He rejoices to let this apparent contradiction stand for all time. If the Bible were a forgery, such a bloomer of a contradiction just wouldn't have been made. Instead, we find in this 'contradiction' an insight into the depth of God's grace and eagerness to accept human repentance.

1:14,15 The names mentioned here are the ones we have least information about throughout the entire genealogy.

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

Joseph was therefore directly in the Kingly line- he should've been King, by descent. And yet he appears to have fallen upon hard times, given the information we have surrounding the babyhood of Jesus. A faithful yet depressed 'man born to be king' who hadn't made it in life, whose family had fallen a long way, at least in his own eyes, was the very one whom God chose to work with.

1:17 Mt.1:17 mentions that there were 42 generations before Christ. This must have some connection with the 42 stopping places before Israel reached Canaan, as described in Num.33:2. Thus the birth of Christ would be like God's people entering the promised land of the Kingdom in some way. Note too that the numerical value of 'David' is 14. And yet the third '14' is only 13 names- because the ultimate completion of the Christ story is in the bringing forth of Christ's seed, i.e. His body, the glorified church (Is. 53:10)?

1:18 - see on Lk. 2:19.

1:19 The righteousness and justice of Joseph is shown by his choosing not to make his pregnant fiancée an example, but to save her from the humiliation of her apparent sin. He may well have sensed, of course, that the pregnancy was from God. Justice and righteousness aren't shown by displaying others' sins. The Law allowed for several different responses to adultery- the trial of jealousy of Numbers 5, stoning, divorce- or, simply, forgiveness. Likewise we are given different levels upon which it's possible to serve God.

1:20 The descriptions of Jesus as a "man", a human being, have little meaning if in fact He pre-existed as God for millions of years before. The descriptions of Him as "begotten" (passive of *gennan* in Mt. 1:16,20) make no suggestion of pre-existence at all. And the words of the Lord Jesus and His general behaviour would have to be read as all being purposefully deceptive, if in fact He was really a pre-existent god. There is no hint of any belief in a pre-existent Jesus until the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century- and he only develops the idea in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The Biblical accounts of the Lord's conception and birth just flatly contradict the idea of pre-existence.

While he thought- insofar as we struggle to understand, to spiritually make sense of life, God in turn acts to enlighten us. As Abraham's servant was himself "in the way", so God led him.

1:21 "You [singular- Joseph personally] shall call his name Jesus".

for He shall save... - Joseph's naming of the child showed his faith in the salvation which Jesus would achieve.

There was a Rabbinic saying about how the seventh one whose name was given before his birth would be the Messiah: "Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, Josiah, and the name of the Messiah, whom may the Holy One, blessed be His name, bring quickly in our days".

1:22 A classic explanation of the inspiration process- spoken of the Lord by a prophet.

Are 1:22 and 23 the words spoken by the Angel to Joseph, or Matthew's commentary?

1:23 A *virgin*- Gk. *The virgin*.

They shall call His Name Immanuel. Was Joseph being invited to unite himself with this faithful group by the command to him personally to call the baby "Jesus", 'Yah saves'? Or is the "they" every believer, who comes to see in Jesus that God is with us? Is. 7:14 Heb. says that the virgin is

the one who would call her son's name Immanuel; but this is here changed under inspiration to "they" in that Mary becomes a pattern for all believers.

'God with us' can imply that God is 'for' us, on our side; not just that God is amongst men through Jesus as His representative. In this case, the "us" refers to the believers, not the world at large; and it is the believers as a group who come through personal experience to each give Jesus the title of 'God with us'. Matthew ends his Gospel with Jesus saying that *He* is with us always (Mt. 28:20)- an allusion back to the opening of the Gospel, in which Jesus is prophesied as being "God with us". This would be through the active presence and work of Jesus as His Son amongst us.

Interpreted- The Greek can mean 'to explain'. Often the Bible gives *explanations* for Hebrew names rather than strict literal translations of them. This is the difference between interpretation and translation.

1:24 The obedience of Joseph is a theme of the infancy narratives.

1:25 *he called his name Jesus-* in specific obedience to the command of 1:21. Again, his obedience is stressed.

2:13 The Angel told Joseph to stay in Egypt "until I bring thee word" (Mt. 2:13)- as if He was going to physically go to Egypt, and once there inspire Joseph to have a dream in which this would be revealed to him. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

2:1 *Jerusalem-* see on Mt. 2:3.

wise men- the kind of group we meet in Dan. 2:48.

2:2 *to worship Him-* presumably because they were themselves Jews, wishing to meet their King? It would seem that they had understood from prophetic study that Jesus was to be born, decided to make the journey, and were confirmed in that by Divine guidance in the form of the "star". Such confirmation of human response to and interest in God's word is typical of how God works with people. Their desire to come and "worship" means that their journey wasn't taken from the motivation of mere scientific curiosity.

2:3 *Jerusalem-* why would all Jerusalem be troubled because of the possibility of a "King of the Jews" being born? Surely the Jewish people would've been happy or at least fascinated- but not "troubled", surely? It may therefore be that "Jerusalem" is put here for the Herodian, pro-Roman group who were governing Jerusalem. "Jerusalem" and "Zion" are frequently used with the sense of 'a group of people in Jerusalem' rather than the geographical city as a whole (for examples within Matthew, see Mt. 3:5; 23:37). If this is how "Jerusalem" is used in 2:3, perhaps it is also to be understood that way in Mt. 2:1- the wise men come to Jerusalem, i.e. the leadership of the city, and enquire of them [rather than the geographical city as a city] where the newborn King of the Jews is to be found.

2:4 *all the high priests* [Gk.]- there should've been only one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and beneficial that there were at times more than one High Priest; this led to a situation whereby the High Priesthood changed hands most years- hence the references to Caiaphas being "High Priest that year" (Jn. 11:51; 18:13). Once politics get into church life, those affected can never do their spiritual job properly. The personal relationship which was intended to develop between priest and people could never be, if the priest kept changing. Being a pastoral carer or leader of others should never, ever be perceived as a job which has material advantages.

Christ- Herod clearly equated Messiah with the literal, political King of Israel (2:2); and this was the Jews' understanding also.

It may be that there's an intended contrast with Pharaoh (yes, Pharaoh himself, such was his obsession!) calling the Hebrew midwives and telling them to destroy the Hebrew babies (Ex. 1:15-20). But they disobeyed that great Gentile ruler; whereas the record here in Mt. 2:4 seems to imply that the Jewish leadership eagerly and automatically acquiesced to Herod's demand.

2:5 The Jews were therefore fully expecting Messiah to be born in Bethlehem. He was the very Messiah Judaism was expecting- but they rejected Him.

2:6 *not the least*- emphasis should be on the word "not". Bethlehem *was* the least of Judah's towns- but it was *not* the least because Judah's King was to be born there. God delights to use the weakest and most despised things in His service. His son was born in the least of Judah's towns, in a cattle shed, and raised in 'that despised Nazareth'. And He searches for those whom man has rejected to be His servants, children and saviours of others to this day. The same Greek word is used for "Princes" and "Governor" / shepherd / ruler.

They were very sure, therefore, that "out of" Bethlehem implied Messiah would be born there. He came "out of" Bethlehem- not Heaven, as would be required by the pre-existence myth.

rule- Gk. 'shepherd'. The shepherds came to worship the One born to be shepherd, born amongst the sheep and lambs. All this speaks of the identity of Jesus with those whom He came to lead, rule over and save. From God's viewpoint, leadership / governance of others is equated with shepherding them- and shepherds were the most despised within rural Palestinian society. Long hours of hard, lonely work for little or no pay, being despised by others... that's the image which 'shepherding' would've conjured up to the first century Palestinian ear. And yet *this* is equated with governing / ruling over God's flock. Church leaders today need to 'get it'. See on Rev. 7:17.

2:7 *what time*- the Greek suggests he was asking 'For how long a time has the star been visible since it first appeared?'.

2:8 *He sent them to Bethlehem*- perhaps implying that he sponsored their journey there. He clearly believed what the Jews said about Messiah being born in Bethlehem. The wise men had been led by the star to Jerusalem, but not any further. God brought them into providential contact with Herod, who effectively directed them to Bethlehem. It seems the star disappeared- but then, once they started on the way to Bethlehem, it reappeared (2:9).

worship him also suggests that the wise men had made it clear that they had come with the aim of worshipping Jesus. They were not merely hobbyist astronomers; they wanted to worship the King of the Jews. They were either Messianic Jews or very strong proselytes; and they made that huge journey and risked their lives before Herod all on the basis of their understanding of God's word. In their low moments, they must have returned time and again to their understanding of the prophecies, and allowed this to spur them onwards. On the journey, they must've encountered fellow travellers who would've enquired where they were headed, and why. What they were doing was humanly speaking foolish, a massive investment of time and money on what would've appeared to the flesh as a mere whim. They were so convicted by God's prophetic word that they brought expensive treasures with them- to travel with them was a risky business and also a risk to their lives.

2:9 *Heard him*- the wise men clearly perceived Herod's plan to destroy Jesus. They listened to him but didn't state their agreement, and yet didn't voice their disagreement. That often is the way of wisdom.

The star obviously wasn't constantly with them pinpointing the way; presumably it ceased providing direction once they had come to Herod. Perhaps they shouldn't have gone to Herod, and therefore because they sought human guidance, the Divine guidance ceased. Or it could've been that God wished them to go to Herod and witness to him, he sent them on their way to Bethlehem, and then the star reappeared to guide them.

2:13,14 Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

2:14 Be aware that when it comes to *prophecy*, in the sense of foretelling future events, the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

3:2 The image of Dan.2 has its' main fulfilment in the events of the second coming; but Is.41:25 describes the Lord's first advent as coming "upon princes as mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay"- Daniel 2 language (and cp. Mt.3:2 with Dan.2:44).

3:3- see on Lk. 3:5.

3:7 John the Baptist rhetorically asked his hearers: "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt. 3:7). The answer, of course, was 'Well, you, John'. And John continues: "Bring forth *therefore* [i.e., because I am the one who taught you] fruits meet for repentance". John recognizes that his converts will be after his image in one sense; as Paul put it, what his hearers had heard and seen in him as he preached, they were to do.

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

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

"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" must be connected with our Lord's description of the Gentile believers as "a nation bringing forth the (vineyard) fruits" of the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43). These are defined in Rom. 14:17: "The Kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy". Christ's parable of the vine in Jn. 15 explains that it is the word abiding in us which brings forth fruit. Bringing forth fruit is therefore a way of life (cp. Rom. 6:21,22). In each aspect in which we 'bear fruit', we have in a sense 'repented'. Our repentance and fruit-bearing is not something which we can set time limits on within this life. Christ would have been satisfied if Israel had borne at least some immature fruit (Lk. 13:7). Only when there is no fruit at all, in any aspect of spiritual life, will

Christ reject us. Some will bear more fruit than others- some sixty, some an hundredfold. Mt. 3:8 connects repentance with fruit bearing. This shows that God may recognize *degrees* of repentance and response to His word, as He recognizes degrees of fruit bearing. It is far too simplistic for us to label some of our brethren as having repented and others as being totally unrepentant. In any case, the fruits of repentance are brought forth unto *God*, not necessarily to fellow believers (Rom. 7:4). There is a marked dearth of evidence to show that a believer must prove his repentance in outward terms before his brethren can accept him.

Paul describes his preaching in language which is directly alluding to how John preached (Acts 26:20 = Mt. 3:8). As John said that he was *sent* to baptize, but especially to witness of Christ (Jn. 1:33), so Paul felt that he too was *sent to baptize*, but his emphasis was more on the preaching of Christ than physically baptizing (1 Cor. 1:17).

3:11 Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural (Mt. 3:11) was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

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

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so (Mt. 3:11). The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy") to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

3:12 "He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. See on Mk. 9:49.

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

3:16 Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that Christ saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from Christ's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

4:1

The Temptation of Jesus

Comments

1. Jesus "was in all points tempted, like as we are" (Heb. 4:15), and: "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). We are tempted by the "Devil" of our own lusts or evil desires, and so was Jesus. We are not tempted by an evil being suddenly standing next to us and prompting us to sin – sin and temptation come "from within, out of the heart of man" (Mk. 7:21). They "proceed" out of the heart, as if to stress that the heart really is their source. Jesus was tempted just as we are (Heb. 4:15,16), and in this sense He becomes for us a legitimate example. Paul borrows the language of "the tempter" coming to Jesus and applies it to "the tempter" coming to Christians (1 Thess. 3:5). And we can note that Matthew alone records how Jesus fasted during the temptation period – and it is Matthew alone who records instruction to *us* about fasting (Mt. 16:16–8 cp. 9:14,15). Seeing we're not physically encountered by a literal personal Satan in our times of testing, it surely follows that neither was Jesus our example.

2. The temptations are hard to take literally:

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

– A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in different orders. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Matthew 4:2,3 says that "when he had fasted forty days... The tempter (Satan) came to Him". We can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus His mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7:9, and doubtless those images often merged in His tortured mind – although always to be brought into swift control by His recollection of the Word.

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

– It seems unlikely that several times the Devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening – presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at

the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the Judean wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness – He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the Devil (he only departed at the end – Mt. 4:11). If Jesus was tempted by the Devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

– If the Devil is a physical person who has no respect for God’s Word and is interested in making people sin, then why would Jesus quote Scripture to overcome him? According to the popular view, this would not send the Devil away. Notice that Jesus quoted a Bible passage each time. If the Devil was the desires within Jesus’ heart, then it is understandable that by His having the Word in His heart and reminding Himself of it, He could overcome those desires. Psalm 119:11 is so relevant that perhaps it is specifically prophesying Christ’s experience in the wilderness: “Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You”.

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

We can of course understand the ‘Satan’ figure to be a literal person who as it were ministered the suggestions / temptations / tests to the Lord Jesus. This would be in keeping with how in Old Testament times God had raised up various adversaries through whom to test His children. But those individuals were very much under God’s control and as it were on His side. John Thomas, who shared our view of Satan completely, put it like this: “If Deity became Satan to Israel, and to Job, it is not to be denied that an angel may have assumed the same attitude in the case of Jesus Christ” ⁽¹⁾.

3. The Devil left him “for a season” to return later. The temptations from ‘the Devil’ returned when the Jewish people, the Pharisees and Herod demanded of Jesus that He pull off a miracle (Lk.23:6–9; Mk. 6:1–6; 8:11–13; 15:31; Mt. 12:38–42). This was just the temptation He had faced and overcome in Mt. 4:5–7. Yet there is no record of a creature literally approaching the Lord later in His ministry. And yet the essence of the three temptations did indeed return to Him later, and the three of them found their quintessence in the experiences of the cross. Thus “cast thyself down” was matched by the Jews [again associating things Jewish with the Devil] tempting Jesus to come down from the cross. There is a strong association between the ‘Satan’ and the Jewish system. The whole structure of the record would have sounded to first century ears like a debate between the Jewish rabbis and their disciple: “Matthew’s and Luke’s stories are in the form of a three–part conversation not unlike the debates of the scribes which utilize proof–texts from Scripture” ⁽²⁾. The triple temptations are to be compared with the Lord’s triple temptation in Gethsemane, and His three trials for His life (before the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate). In this sense the Satan ‘returned’ to Him. This is especially clear in Mark’s Gospel. The Jews – the Jewish Satan as it were, the adversary to the Lord’s cause – are recorded as putting Him to the test, just as He was tested in the desert (Mk. 8:11–13; 10:2; 12:13–17).

We note that the Gospels go on to call Peter “Satan” and Judas “a Devil” – perhaps because both of them offered the Lord Jesus the same temptations to immediate glory without the cross which “Satan” did in the wilderness. They would therefore have been occasions of where Satan ‘returned’

to the Lord as predicted at the close of the account of the wilderness temptations. A good case can be made for Judas' betrayal of the Lord being rooted in his desire for an immediate Messianic Kingdom, and his bitter disappointment and anger when he finally understood that the Lord's Kingdom was not to come about in that way. It's been suggested that 'Iscariot' is related to the Latin *sicarius*, an assassin, which would suggest that Judas [like Peter] was a zealot willing to use force and violence to bring about the Kingdom of Jesus ⁽³⁾.

<i>John</i>	<i>The wilderness temptations</i>
The Jewish crowd wanted to make him king (Jn. 6:15)	Satan offers him the kingship of the [Jewish?] world
The Jews ask for miraculous bread (Jn. 6:31)	Satan invites him to make miraculous bread
The [Jewish] disciples want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to show His power (Jn. 7:3)	Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem and tempts Him to show His power.

John's Gospel omits many of the incidents and teaching accounts of the synoptics, but repeats their essence in a different way ⁽⁴⁾. It seems John's equivalent of the temptation narratives is his account in Jn. 6:1–14 of the Jews tempting Jesus to do a miraculous sign to prove Himself Messiah, and to provide manna in the wilderness. In this case, John is casting the Jews and their thinking in the role of the "Satan" of the wilderness temptations. The following parallels between the wilderness temptations and the Lord's experience as recorded in Jn. 6 indicate how the 'Devil' of temptation returned to the Lord Jesus – and note in passing how the equivalent of 'Satan' is the Jews:

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

In any case, the temptation to produce manna in the wilderness was a temptation to play the role of Messiah as the Jews would have expected it to be played – and this was exactly the temptation that Jesus overcame. Likewise, the temptation to appear on the pinnacle of the temple and jump down to Israel from there was a temptation to again be the Messiah Israel wanted, rather than the One God wanted; for according to the rabbinic *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36, "When the King, the Messiah, reveals himself, he will come and stand on the roof of the temple". These temptations repeated themselves, as "the Devil departed for a season" to return later – e.g. in the form of the relatives of Jesus tempting Him to go up to Jerusalem and to some dramatic works to prove His identity. It was the Jews who repeatedly demanded from Jesus a dramatic "sign from Heaven" (Mt. 16:1; 22:18,35; Mk. 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Lk. 11:16) – "tempting him" to give one. They are the ones continuing the tempting of Jesus which we first encounter in the record of His wilderness temptations. Hence we can connect the wilderness "Satan" with the Jews / Jewish thinking and the temptation to be as *they* wanted rather than as God intended.

4. In Lk. 11:21,22, the Lord Jesus speaks of how He has already overcome ‘Satan’ and is now sharing Satan’s goods with His disciples. Now this may be prophetic of the Lord’s faith in victory over ‘Satan’ in the cross. But it could also be a reference back to His successful struggle with ‘Satan’ in the wilderness. If this is the case, then He is reflecting how He understood ‘Satan’ not as a literal strong man who guards his house, for Jesus didn’t fight with such a person in the wilderness, but rather to the symbolic power of sin with which He had fought and overcome ⁽⁵⁾.

5. There is an evident similarity between the temptations / testing of Jesus and the temptations / testing of Israel, also in the wilderness. That’s why each time, the Lord replies to the temptation with a quotation from Deuteronomy relevant to the wilderness temptations of Israel. The point is that it was *God* who tested Israel. The Greek words *peirazo* and *peirasmos* which are translated “tempt” in the wilderness temptation record are used in the Greek Old Testament in connection with *God* testing His people (Gen. 22:1; Ex. 15:25; 17:7; Num. 14:22; Dt. 4:34; 8:2; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 95:8). Quite simply, whoever or whatever “the Devil” was in the Lord’s temptations, it was under the control of God. We’ve earlier pointed out how *God* tested Israel in 2 Sam. 24:1, but the parallel 1 Chron. 21:1 says that “Satan” did this.

6. The Lord Jesus overcame the temptations by quoting Scripture. This is an understandable way to overcome temptation that goes on within the human mind; but there is no logical nor Biblical reason why an evil being such as a personal Satan would be somehow scared off by quoting Scripture. If tempted or threatened by an evil person, let alone a personal “Satan”, it would be quite useless to merely quote Bible verses to the person so that they leave us. But once the real ‘Satan’ is understood to be the adversary of our own internal temptations and thoughts, all becomes clearer.

7. The idea of the Lord being led by the spirit and then seeing things like Him standing on a high mountain, or perched on a temple pinnacle, all have some similarities with the experience of Ezekiel. He was likewise ‘led of the spirit’ of God to the captives by the river Chebar; he was ‘in spirit’ transported there, but I don’t think that means he literally went there (Ez. 1:4–28; 3:11–15; 11:1,24,25). It seems the same happened with the Lord Jesus, the “son of man” whom Ezekiel typified in so many ways.

8. The account of the temptations begins and ends with reference to “the spirit”. The Lord Jesus was led by God’s spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, and then “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Lk. 4:1,14). The nature of the record hardly suggests that ‘Satan’ was in radical, independent opposition to the spirit of God; even if we take ‘Satan’ as a personal being in the narrative, clearly there was a co-operation between him and God in order to test God’s Son (cp. Paul’s delivering of people unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme, 1 Cor. 5:5). And that runs counter to the classical view of Satan as a rebellious being locked in combat with God, ever seeking to oppose Him.

Suggested Explanations

1. When Jesus was baptized in Jordan by John, He received the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16). As soon as He came out of the water, He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted. Knowing that He had the power of the spirit to turn stones into bread, jump off buildings unharmed etc., these temptations must have raged within His mind. If a person was suggesting these things to Jesus and Jesus knew that person to be sinful, then the temptations were a lot less subtle than if they came from within Jesus’ own mind.

2. The temptation to take the kingdoms to Himself would have been far more powerful if it came from within Christ. Jesus’ mind would have been full of Scripture, and in His afflicted state of mind, caused by His fasting, it would be tempting to misinterpret passages to enable Him to use them to justify taking the easy way out of the situation He was in.

Standing on a high mountain recalls Ezekiel being shown what the Kingdom would be like from a high mountain (Ez. 40:2), and John, seeing “the holy Jerusalem” from “a great and high mountain”

(Rev. 21:10). Jesus saw the world's kingdoms as they would be in the future (Lk. 4:5), i.e. In the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Maybe He would have thought of Moses at the end of 40 years' wilderness wandering (cp. His forty days) looking out at the Promised Land (the Kingdom) from Mount Nebo. It is emphasized in Daniel (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21) that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will"; Jesus would have known that only God, not anyone else, could give Him the kingdom. Therefore it would not have been much of a temptation if an evil monster claimed to be able to give Jesus the kingdom, when He knew only God had the power. However, Jesus knew that it was His (the Father's) good pleasure to give Jesus the kingdom, and it must have been suggested by the "Devil" within Jesus that He could take that kingdom immediately. After all, He could have reasoned, 'God has delegated all authority to me in prospect (Jn. 5:26,27)', to the extent that He had power to both give His life and take it again (Jn. 10:18), although ultimately all power was given unto Him only after His death and resurrection (Mt. 28:18). Jer. 27:5–8 and Jer. 34:5–8 in the LXX speak of how God has made the earth and will give it (Gk. *doso*) to whomever He wishes; and these are the very words of the 'Satan' in Luke's record: "I will give (*doso*) it to you... I give it to whomever I wish". One could say that this is a way of explaining how the Lord Jesus was tempted to 'play God' and seek equality with God – which temptation He refused (as Paul points out in Phil. 2).

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

4. "And the Devil said unto Him, If you are the Son of God..." (Lk. 4:3). It must have been a constant temptation within the mind of Christ to question whether He really was the Son of God, seeing that everyone else thought He was the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23; Jn. 6:42) or illegitimate (so Jn. 9:29 implies), and that the official temple records described him as the son of Joseph (Mt. 1:1,16; Lk. 3:23, where "supposed" means 'reckoned by law'). He was the only human being not to have a human father. Philippians 2:8 implies that Jesus came to appreciate that He really was a man like us, inferring it was tempting for Him to disbelieve He was the Son of God, and to misunderstand His own nature.

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

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

Deuteronomy 8:2 “The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no.”

Matthew 4 / Luke 4 “Jesus led up of the spirit” “forty days” “in the wilderness”. Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.

Deuteronomy 8:3. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord...”

“He was afterward an hungered”. In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. “He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God”.,

Deuteronomy 8:5 “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee”

Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus – 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:32.

Notes

- (1) John Thomas, *Eureka: An Exposition of the Apocalypse* (West Beach, Australia: Logos Publications, 1985 ed.), Vol. 3 p. 65.
- (2) G.H. Twelftree, ‘Temptation of Jesus’, in I.H. Marshall, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) p. 822. Ernst Lohmeyer likewise noted that the account of the wilderness temptations reads very much as a disputation between two Rabbis – as if Jesus was arguing with a Jewish mind about the interpretation of Scripture. See Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965) p. 224. Henry Kelly sees the record as “a typical rabbinical “show–debate”. Such debates were a form of midrash (meditation on Scripture) that displayed an authoritative figure responding to a series of challenges by citing the correct passage from Scripture” – *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 87. There’s a passage in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 89b) where ‘Satan’ three times tempts Abraham, and is rebuffed by Abraham’s quoting of Scripture. There’s another example in the *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.5 where Moses likewise is portrayed as having a triple dialogue with an Angel about agreeing to his death. The more researchers explore the Jewish literature contemporary with the Gospels, the more it becomes apparent that the style of the Gospel records is similar to that found in the contemporary literature – and such a show trial was very much Jewish rabbinic style. “The Gospel tradition presents much of Jesus’ teaching in literary forms akin to those characteristic of rabbinic literature. Such “forms” include miracle stories, parables, disputations, and “cases”, examples drawn from real life situations” – M. Wilcox, ‘Semitic Influence On The New Testament’, in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Leicester: IVP, 2000) p. 1094.
- (3) See Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribners’, 1956) p. 15.
- (4)

The Synoptic Gospels

John’s Gospel

Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus The great preaching commission The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	Jn. 20:21,23
	Jn. 1:1–14
	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's 'confession', shortly before Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. The need for water baptism	In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas' confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place? Jn. 3:3–5
The account of the breaking of bread	John's version is in John 6:48–58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.
The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.	John expresses this in more abstract language: "The word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).
The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.	John's Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but "became flesh" when He was born of Mary.

(5) This is actually the view of Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) p. 73.

Jesus in the Wilderness: A Study in the Language and Nature of Temptation

It may well be argued that the language of the wilderness temptations implies there was physical movement going on, e.g. the tempter came to Jesus and led Him. We now consider how such language is relevant to internal desires within the human mind.

"And when the tempter came to Him..."

I want to show that temptation and desire are often described in terms of physical movement, thus enabling us to analyze them in a way which is easier to visualize than to describe them in purely abstract terms.

The Lord “was tempted in every point like as we are” (Heb. 4:15); and “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts (desires) and enticed” (James 1:14). For Jesus to be tempted like us, He had to go through the same process of temptation as we do. So to some extent He also was “drawn away” by the evil desires – the ‘Devil’ – which He had within Him. This would explain why the Devil is described as taking Jesus into Jerusalem and onto a mountain; this “taking” is the same as being “drawn away” in James 1. This association of our natural desires with the idea of physical movement is picked up frequently in the New Testament. “Lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13) is a case in point. We are led by our desires, as Jesus was to a small extent in the wilderness; and yet God is expressed here as ultimately in control of these things. He is greater than those desires, and is able to stop them leading us, to “keep us from falling” (note the connection of temptation and physical movement again). The world generally makes no resistance to being led by the Devil – thus “silly women” are “led captive... led away with divers lusts... led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Tim. 3:6; 2 Pet. 3:17). Jesus was not led by the Devil – His lusts which He shared with us – to the same extent as these people were. But nevertheless, the same basic idea of sin leading us in order to tempt us was true of Him. The Greek word translated “taketh” in Matthew 4 in relation to Jesus being ‘taken’ by the Devil is used both figuratively and literally in Scripture. The following examples show its figurative use:

“...customs they have *received* to hold” (Mk. 7:4)

“His own *received* Him not” (Jn. 1:11)

“You have *received* Christ” (Col. 2:6).

Similarly, the Devil ‘coming’ to Jesus can also be subjective; the Greek word for ‘coming’ can also be used either figuratively or literally. It is translated ‘consent’ in 1 Timothy 6:3: some “consent not to wholesome words”. Hebrews 12:1 describes “the sin that does so easily beset us” as if sin – the Devil – comes up to us and besets us. The language of Revelation 20 regarding the Devil and Satan being loosed and going out throughout the world now falls into place, once it is appreciated that the diabolism – our evil desires – are likened to coming to people. The Lord Jesus answered each temptation by quoting Scripture, as if the whole experience was a living demonstration of Psalm 119:11: “Your word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against You”. Although Jesus had the word in His heart, He had our lusts / desires, and for a brief moment it was possible that “the lusts of other things *entering in*” (Mk. 4:19) could try (albeit in vain) to choke that word, even in *His* heart. For them to try to ‘enter in’, they must ‘come’ to us; and thus the Devil – those desires – came to Jesus. The parable of the sower equates all the various reasons for failure to produce fruit, seeing they all have the same effect. Satan ‘coming’ to take away the word from the new convert is parallel, therefore, to “the lusts of other things entering in (choking) the word” (Mk. 4:15,19).

There’s another example of our internal lust being described as physically moving in to us ⁽¹⁾. Nathan’s parable about David’s sin with Bathsheba blamed the act on a traveller ‘coming to’ David asking to be satisfied. The traveller of the parable represented David’s lusts which led to adultery and murder (2 Sam.12:4), although both these come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mk. 7:20–23).

The Diaglott translates James 1:14 “each one is tempted by his own inordinate desire, being drawn out and entrapped”. This is the language of hunting animals – drawing them out and trapping them. 1 Timothy 3:7 talks of the “snare of the Devil” – our inordinate desires. Thus for Jesus to be tempted He had to be drawn out of the tremendous shell of His own spirituality, like a mouse is attracted out of a hole towards cheese set in a trap; and then having the self control and self possession to withdraw back again.

Note

(1) This and other observations in this section are confirmed in Wayne E. Oates, *Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991).

The Wilderness Temptations: a Window into the Mind of Jesus

We have shown that our Lord's experiences were similar to those of Israel in the wilderness. The following are additional comments which give greater insight into His temptations:

- The Lord realized He was in a similar position to Israel in another wilderness, and therefore personalized Scripture in Deuteronomy concerning *their* experience then to apply to Himself.
- The personification of the sinful temptations in the Lord's heart as a person called 'the Devil' shows how clearly His mind was divided between flesh and spirit – without the hazy overlap so characteristic of our semi-spirituality. It was probably with this in mind that He deftly broke the bread representing his body into two at the Last Supper – to show that clear division within Himself (Mt. 26:26). A psychotherapist friend of mine, Dr. Artur Dombrovsky, suggested to me in discussing the wilderness temptations that the more in touch with themselves a person is, the more clearly they will be able to see themselves from outside themselves; the greater the distance they are able to place between them and the 'self' whom they analyze and dialogue with in self-examination. Much of our self-talk is vague; that of the Lord Jesus was specific and focused. He was the man ultimately in touch with Himself.
- The quotation of Dt. 6:13 "You shalt fear the Lord your God (alone)" was probably made with Dt. 6:14 in mind "You shall not go after other gods". Perhaps He interpreted the pagan idols as the evil thoughts of His heart. Earlier Dt. 6:7,8 had warned that not repeating the Law would result in idol worship – and Christ saw that His neglect of the Father's word would result in His serving His evil desires. Thus the purpose of the temptations was to prove whether Christ would really keep and apply the word in His heart (Dt. 8:2), as it was for Israel in their wilderness.
- God alone has the power to give the Kingdom (Dan. 4:32). That Jesus was tempted to take it for Himself (Mt. 4:9) indicates He was tempted to make Himself equal to God. Phil. 2:6 comments on this: that although He had the same perfect mind as God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be even considered. This shows (again) how conscious Christ was of His sinless mind, and how this tempted Him to proudly assume equality with God. This was probably in the back of His consciousness as He argued in Jn. 10:34–36 that men in the Old Testament had been called God, but He was not then taking that title to Himself as He could have done, but only calling Himself the *Son* of God. His appreciation of the many passages which functionally applied the Name of Yahweh to Him would have tempted Him to use the name in His own right because of His ultimate manifestation of God. Christ reflected that to whomsoever *He* wanted He could give the Kingdom (Lk. 4:6) – and He thought of giving it to Himself. Note how later He promised to give the cities of the Kingdom to us (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 19:17).
- His 'adversary', His own mind, quoted Ps. 91:11,12 to Himself (Mt. 4:6): "He shall give His Angels charge over you". This Psalm has primary reference to Joshua being protected by the Angel during the wilderness wanderings when the apostate Israelites were consumed by the destroyer Angel. The specific reason for this protection is given in Ps. 91:1; because he had remained in the tabernacle, no doubt from the motive of wanting to hear as much as possible of God's word spoken by the Angel to his master Moses (Ex. 33:11). Our Lord was in a similar position – dedicated to the word of God, the rest of Israel apostate. It would have been tempting to abuse the subsequent Angelic power which His spirituality had made available to Him.
- There is the implication that it took the Lord 40 days to overcome the Devil, at which point the Devil departed. This is more easily understandable in terms of an internal battle, than a literal

struggle against a supernatural being. And the fact it took 40 days shows how hard was the struggle for the Lord.

– The Lord standing on a high mountain beholding the coming Kingdom of God ⁽¹⁾ points forward to an identical scene in Rev. 21:10. There are other connections with Revelation – “The kingdoms of the world” = Rev. 11:15; v.9,10= Rev. 22:8,9; v.5= Rev. 21:2. It is almost as if the Lord Jesus in giving Revelation was looking back to His wilderness trials, rejoicing that what He had been tempted to have then *illegitimately*, was now His and ours legitimately. The wilderness temptation was to take the Kingdom and rule it for Himself rather than for God; i.e. not to manifest God, even if externally there would not be any evident difference between whether He was manifesting God in an acceptable spirit or not. For these temptations to be real, it must have been possible that God would have allowed Christ to take the Kingdom; as He would have allowed the Lord to use the Angels to rescue Him from his ordeal in Gethsemane. That God was willing to accept a second best, to allow His plan for salvation to go as far as Christ’s freewill effort allowed it to, would have been a tremendous temptation and yet stimulation to Jesus. Hence God’s supreme delight in the totality of Christ’s effort and victory, as described, e.g., in Is. 49:5–9.

– There can be little doubt that standing on a mountain looking out over God’s Kingdom would have reminded Christ of Moses on Nebo, who for one slip was denied it all. And that must have sobered Him (Dt. 34:1). And having quoted Dt. 8:3 to Himself about living on the bread/word of God, His mind would have gone on to Dt. 8:9 with its description of eating bread without scarceness in the Kingdom – i.e. feeding fully on spiritual things, in the allegory.

– The Lord was tempted to believe that He would be miraculously preserved from dashing His foot against a stone. This is an allusion to Prov. 3:23, which promises that the Father will keep the Son in whom He delights from ‘stumbling in the way’. Prov. 3:4 is specifically applied to the Lord Jesus in Lk. 2:52. But ‘stumbling in the way’ in the context of Prov. 3 refers to sinning, and the need to not stumble by the hard effort of applying Divine wisdom in daily life. Do we get another window here into the mind of the Lord? Is not the implication of all this that He was tempted to think that as God’s Son, somehow God would preserve Him from sinning, and so He could do as He wished? Thank God, and Him, that He put that thought so far behind Him.

Note

(1) Christ seeing “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Lk. 4:5) surely refers to the future Kingdom of God on earth – all the kingdoms as they would be in the future (cp. Rev. 11:15).

The Wilderness Temptations: Internal Struggle With Self-Doubt

The essence of the wilderness temptations appears to me to be connected with a tendency within Jesus towards self-doubt; to question whether He really was God’s Son. After all, everyone around Him thought He had a human father. Perhaps Mary’s mid-life collapse of faith involved her going quiet over the visit of the Angel and her strange son’s Divine begetting. Perhaps it all seemed as a dream to her, especially if Joseph was dead or not on the scene. Jesus was so human that it must have been unreal for Him to imagine that actually, His mother was the only woman to have become pregnant directly from God. And we all have the essence of this temptation; to wonder whether in fact we really are any different from the world around us, whether we have in any meaningful sense been born again, whether God actually sees us as His children; whether we will receive the salvation of God’s children and eternal entrance into His family which is ours if we are now His children. To have those struggles isn’t sinful; for the Lord endured these temptations without sinning. Here, then, is the evidence that the wilderness temptations hinged around His own questioning of His Divine Sonship:

- The promise to receive ‘the Kingdoms of the world and their glory’ was framed in the language of Ps. 2:7,8 LXX. Here God proclaims His Son to the world, and invites His Son to ‘Ask of me, and I

will give to you the nations of the earth for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession". The Greek words used are similar to the words of 'the devil' to Jesus. Clearly the Lord was being tempted not only to misapply Scripture, but also to just check that He really was in fact God's Son.

- "If you are the Son of God..." was the repeated temptation the Lord faced. Either, as I believe, the 'devil' refers to the 'enemy' of the Lord's internal temptations; or, if we are to read the temptation records with reference to a literal person, then that person was unsure as to the identity of Jesus.

This latter option is another nail in the coffin for the orthodox understanding of 'the devil' as a personal, omnipotent fallen Angel who set out to target Jesus.

- "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Mt. 4:3) can also be translated: "Give the command to God, so that he will provide bread from these stones". The idea is that if Jesus is God's Son, then, God will do what Jesus asks Him. The temptation to jump off the temple was really the same thing- 'If God's really your father, then surely He'll give you unlimited protection?'.

- The temptation to worship the devil, and *then* to receive all the Kingdoms of the world, was also self-doubt- that as God's Son, the Kingdoms of this world belonged to Him in prospect there and then, and would be later given to Him, according to Psalm 2.

- The Jews expected Messiah to authenticate Himself by creating manna. The *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36/126a stated that "When the King Messiah reveals himself to proclaim salvation he will come and stand upon the roof of the temple". The Lord Jesus was a Palestinian Jew, who would've been familiar with these ideas. His temptations therefore involved an element of doubt as to whether He, who had just opened His public ministry, was actually the Messiah after all. He was tempted to 'prove it' in terms which the Jews would've understood, rather than God's terms.

- The temptations involved an element of doing visible miracles in order to prove that He was indeed God's Son. Several times, the Lord stresses that experiencing miracles would not of itself prove to anyone that He is the Son of God. He taught this on the basis of having faced acute temptation in that very area.

These temptations to self-doubt recurred. We read that the devil left Jesus for a while, implying he / it returned to Jesus. If the devil refers to a literal person, then Scripture is silent as to this ever occurring. But once the devil is understood as the personal temptations of Jesus, then all becomes clearer. The essence of what He internally struggled with as He sat in the desert returned to Him. In fact whenever the Lord is described as being 'tempted' later in the Gospel records, it's possible to understand those temptations not merely as 'tests', but as moral temptations which repeated the essence of the wilderness temptations:

- The Greek wording of 'command that these stones be made bread' recurs in Mt. 20:21, where a woman likewise asks Jesus to command, to utter a word of power, that would give her sons the best places in His Kingdom. Likewise in Lk. 9:54, where the Lord is asked to issue a 'command' for fire to come down against the Samaritans. Fire will only come from Heaven in the final judgment (Rev. 20:9). Again, the essence of the temptation was to try to prove that He was Son of God by forcing the Kingdom to come in His lifetime, to avoid the cross. Whereas it was His death and resurrection which actually declared Him to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)- not simply His miracles. For many men have done miracles, but this didn't prove they were the begotten Son of God. And all this is what He faced in the wilderness.

- Another example of the 'devil' returning is to be found in the way that the Lord Jesus is described as being 'tempted' to provide a 'sign', a miracle to prove He is actually Son of God (Mt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4).

- The temptation to produce a miraculous sign to validate Himself was of course repeated as He hung on the cross (Mk. 15:27-32).

- The temptation of the Lord about the divorce and remarriage question was also a moral issue (Mt. 19:1-9). John the Baptist had lost his head for criticizing Herod's divorce and remarriage; and surely

the intention of the question was to lead the Lord into making a statement which Herod would see as critical of his situation. The temptation for the Lord was perhaps to assert Himself as a King in opposition to Herod and thus proclaim His political Kingdom there and then. Likewise the 'temptation' whether to pay tax to Rome or not (Mk. 12:14). Refusing to pay tax to Rome was the classic issue raised by the Jewish revolutionaries- for the tax was seen as funding anti-Jewish and pagan functions and rituals. Again, the essence of the temptation, as in the wilderness, was to proclaim Himself as King of Israel and Son of God there and then, rather than wait for His death and resurrection to be the true declaration of that Sonship (Rom. 1:4).
 - Peter tempts the Lord to consider that being Messiah didn't mean that He had to suffer, and that He could start His Kingdom there and then (Mt. 16:21-23). Perhaps the way the Lord called Peter 'satan' at that point was an intentional reference back to the wilderness struggles with 'satan'.

4:1 Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing (Mt. 4:1); and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16).

4:3 It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, Jesus was tempted "If you are the Son of God..." (Mt. 4:3), and He replies by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*.

4:5 Elijah being sent "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mat. 4:5) seems to consciously connect with Joel's prophecy that some among latter-day Israel will possess the Spirit gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:31). It would therefore appear certain that Elijah and his group of prophets will possess the Spirit gifts in the last days.

4:6- see on Ps. 91:11,12

Christ overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and Christ's experience in the wilderness:

Deuteronomy 8

v. 2 "The Lord thy God [an Angel] led thee. . in the wilderness"

Forty years in the wilderness

v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered thee to hunger".

The Angel "fed thee with manna" (Ps. 78:25)

"Man doth not live by bread alone"

Matthew 4

v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.

Forty days in the wilderness

The Angel made Jesus hunger.

Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.

v. 4 "Man doth not live by bread alone"

Thus Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2).

God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, Christ's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since Christ showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. Christ was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of Christ spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, Israel and Christ among others. In the same way as our spiritual strength is due to our personal effort in studying the word along with the Angel acting upon us, so our temptations come from our own internal lusts, but to some degree the Spirit-Angel is also active here. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e.g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us.

The temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple because of the Angelic care He knew was about Him, was also answered by a quotation which has an Angelic context- "Ye (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

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

4:18- see on Lk. 5:5.

4:19 The Lord called His followers to be "fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). The Qumran documents spoke of 'the fishers of men' as being those who would condemn Israel in the last day; and yet the Lord clearly had the idea that they were to 'catch' people out of the 'sea' of the nations and bring them to salvation. So the preachers as 'fishers of men' actually have a double role- as Paul put it, to some our preaching is the savour of death, to others, the savour of life (2 Cor. 2:16). Not only does this encourage us as the preachers to *plead* with men to choose life rather than death; but it is a sober reminder that we too face the impact of the very Gospel which we ourselves preach, and must likewise live lives of ongoing response. We preach, therefore, aimed at a decision- not merely 'witnessing', nor simply imparting helpful information.

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

4:23- see on Acts 4:2.

4:24 “They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them” (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word “and...” gives the impression that every kind of illness – physical and mental, understood and not understood – was healed by the Lord Jesus. “Lunatick” translates the Greek *selēniazomai* – “to be moon struck”, derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It’s not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction – just as the idea of ‘demon possession’ is in the preceding phrase.

5:3- see on Mt. 5:43.

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

5:5 To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: “Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness”.

5:6 Notice how some of the Lord’s very first words on opening His ministry were “*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)” (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is alluding to His mother’s own description of herself. It’s as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying ‘This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you’. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel’s visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

5:7 Mt. 5:7 = 2 Tim. 1:16. Paul saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

5:11 Paul’s extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets” . These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles.

Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11).

5:12- see on Mt. 5:7.

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

5:13 We are the salt of the earth, and one characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that

basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more 'in there' than many of us are.

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

We are the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13). The Lord doesn't say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don't just hold the light in our hands; *we* are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do.

The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

5:14 All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise "could not be hid" in His preaching (Lk. 7:24).

Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him.

5:14,15 In Mt. 5:14,15, the Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

5:15 The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of

the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

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

5:16 Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the public's gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

5:17- see on Rom. 10:4.

Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself.

5:19- see on Mt. 20:11.

The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19); although not the only one.

The Lord explained that "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven" would have broken "the least" commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet "the least in the Kingdom" was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the Kingdom (Mt. 11:11). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding ('teaching men so').

5:20 He asks us to *exceed* the “righteousness” of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By “righteousness” he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a “quiet room” of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, “ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”. Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around.

5:21- see on Mk. 2:25.

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

5:22- see on Mt. 12:36.

Without a cause- the Greek is always translated elsewhere ‘vainly’, the idea being ‘in vain’, ‘without an effect’. Anger which doesn’t achieve anything positive is wrong. God’s anger is creative- e.g. the ‘anger’ of His judgment through the flood brought about the salvation of the faithful.

One of the major themes of the Lord’s teaching in the sermon on the mount was the need to respect others; to see the value and meaning of persons. Indeed, it can rightly be said that all sin depersonalizes another person. Sin is almost always against persons. Relentlessly, ruthlessly, the Lord drives deeper, and yet deeper, into the very texture of human personality in demanding that, e.g., we are not even angry with others, lest we effectively murder them. To say “Raca” to your brother was to commit sin worthy of condemnation, He taught (Mt. 5:22). “Ra-ca” was the sound made when a man cleared his throat to spit, and it was a term of abuse in earlier Semitic languages. To despise your brother, to disregard his importance as a person, was to be seen as an ultimate sin. In this light we should seek to avoid the many terms of abuse which are so common today: “a right idiot” etc. The Law taught that one should not curse a deaf person. Think what this really means. Surely the essence of it is that we should never be abusive, in any form, to or about anyone, even if it is sure that they will never know or feel our abuse.

His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more-a* moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX) was liable to eternal condemnation by Him.

Lev. 19:16-18: “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people... thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise (frankly, NIV) rebuke thy neighbour... thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. The fact this passage is expanded upon so many times in Proverbs would indicate that gossip was as major a problem among the old Israel as it is among the new. But notice the fine psychology of the Spirit here: gossip in the church is related to having a grudge, to hating your neighbour in your heart, to not loving your neighbour as you love yourself (and we are *very* conservative about our own failings). When the Lord spoke about hating your brother being the same as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15), he may well have been thinking of this passage in Leviticus. To hate your brother in your heart, to gossip about him, was and is as bad as murdering him. And this same connection between gossip and murder is made in the prophets (Ez. 22:9 cp. Prov. 26:22). But the Law provided a way out. If you had something against your brother, frankly tell him about his failure, *so that* you would not hate him in your heart. If we don’t do this, or try to get someone else to do it, we will end up hating our brother in our heart and we will gossip about him.

5:23 I'd always read this, or perhaps glanced over it, as saying that I shouldn't offer my gift on the altar if *I* had something against my brother, but I should reconcile with him; but seeing *I* have nothing against anyone, well I can just go on in serving the Lord. There may be others who have a problem with me, but then, that is for them to sort out with me. But no. The Lord is saying: 'If your brother has something *against you*; if the fault is *his*... then *you* take the initiative and try to reconcile it, before doing anything else'.

5:24 Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period.

5:25- see on Lk. 6:47; Rev. 14:10.

We must agree with our adversary quickly, for we are on our way to judgment (Mt. 5:25). The call of the Gospel is effectively a call to go to judgment. If we truly perceive this, and our coming need for the utmost grace, we will settle our differences with our brethren- "quickly". The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). This urgency of our approach to preaching is in harmony with the generally urgent call to spiritual life which there is everywhere in the Lord's teaching. He gives the impression that we are living life on a knife edge. He saw men as rushing to their destruction. We are the accused man on the steps of the court, whose case is hopeless. Now is the very last moment for him to settle up with his brother (Mt. 5:25 cp. Lk. 12:58). We're like the unjust steward, with a knife at our throat because all our deceptions have been busted. *Everything* is at risk for the guy. Life in prison, goodbye to wife and kids, poverty... stretch out before him. He *must* get right with his brethren by forgiving them their debts. We can't come before God with our offering, i.e. our request for forgiveness, if our brother has any complaint against us regarding unforgiveness (Mt. 5:23). Forgiving each other is as important as that. As we judge, so we will be judged. Our attitude to the least of the Lord's brethren is our attitude to Him. There are likely no readers who don't need this exhortation- to ensure that they have genuinely forgiven all their brethren, and that so far as lies within them, they are at peace with all men. At any moment the bridegroom may return... so have your lamp burning well, i.e. be spiritually aware and filled with the Spirit. Put on your wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus, before it's too late (Mt. 22:11-13). He's just about to come. The judge stands before our door, as James puts it.

There will be degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion.

The sense that the day is drawing near should find expression in the love and care we show towards our brethren. The Lord exhorts to agree with our adversary quickly, whilst we are on the way to judgment- and He says this in the context of warning us to be reconciled with our brother (Mt. 5:23,25). In the light of approaching judgment there is an urgency about our need for reconciliation both with our brother and thereby with God (is He the "adversary" in the parable?). See on Lk. 12:57.

5:27-30 Mt.5:27-30 is an allusion to Job. The Lord says that looking on a woman lustfully was the same as actually performing the sin, albeit within the man's heart. This is the language of Job 31:1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?". Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

5:28 Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*" (2 Sam. 11:2). And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looketh on* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28).

5:29 Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has.

He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest". See on. Rom. 12:1.

The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and "cast it [away] from you"- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be "cast [away] into hell" (Mt. 5:29). What He's saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and *we* must condemn them now in this life- for this is the meaning of the figure of 'casting away'.

We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29.30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then. Note how 'casting out' is a common phrase for rejection by Divine judgment (e.g. Mt. 7:19; 13:42,48,50; Jn. 15:6; Rev. 20:15).

5:30- see on Mt. 7:19.

The Lord taught that if our right hand offend, we must cut it off (Mt. 5:30). The right hand was a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

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

5:34 The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence.

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

5:39 The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15).

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

5:40 It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil.

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

And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:43 The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44- see on Ex. 9:28,29.

Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30).

5:45 See on Mt. 6:26.

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

Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation.

God "makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. "If he causes his heart to return unto himself", the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists... is proof

that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be in us His children.

5:46- see on Jn. 4:36.

5:47- see on 2 Cor. 8:7.

5:48- see on Phil. 3:12.

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

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, *as* your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal.

We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible if we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can *we* decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. "Be ye therefore perfect" has always been hard to understand (Mt. 5:48). Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation... so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that

the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

6:2,3 Mt. 6:2,3 = 1 Tim. 4:8. The implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

6:3 There had developed a strong Jewish tradition that the right hand side of a man was his spiritual side, and the left hand side was the equivalent of the New Testament 'devil'. The Lord Jesus referred to this understanding when He warned: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt. 6:3)- implying that the good deeds of the spiritual man would be misused by the 'devil', e.g. in using them as grounds for spiritual pride.

6:4 Mt. 6:4 "Thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly"; as if God is especially manifest in Christ when we stand before him in judgement to receive our rewards openly.

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

6:6 The Lord taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. Take Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage.

In the time of Elisha we read that when a problem arose, the people concerned went indoors and shut the door. Going inside and shutting the door is associated with prayer, both by the Lord (Mt. 6:6) and Elisha himself (2 Kings 4:33). The other instances of shutting the door don't involve prayer, but they involve obediently doing something in faith- the woman shut the door upon her sons and poured out the oil in faith; she shut the door upon her sick son (2 Kings 4:5,21). Perhaps the implication is that what she did in faith and hope was read by God as prayer, even though she didn't apparently verbalize anything. The widow woman shut the door and started to pour out the oil into the vessels (2 Kings 4:5); the way the Lord alludes to this implies that she prayed before she started pouring, and yet she was sure already that it would happen (Mt. 6:6). This should inspire a spirit of soberness in our prayers.

The Lord Jesus also looked forward to the development of His future body as the ecclesia (e.g. Ps. 22:25; Mt. 18:17). He must have seen the problems we would face, He knew our weakness; as Moses, superb type of Christ that he was, looked ahead to the future weakness of Israel, so did the Lord Jesus. Even in practical issues, He may have foreseen our state in the twenty first century far more than we realize; and again, in this we see the sensitivity of Jesus. Thus He speaks of the believer praying in his bedroom (Mt. 6:6)- at a time when private rooms were almost unheard of amongst ordinary folk. The degree to which the Lord foresaw our struggles even in His humanity should provide great stimulus in the difficult business of building up a personal relationship with Him now. For in His heavenly glory, His empathy with us is *even greater* than in His mortal life.

We should be saying and expressing things to God which are our most intense, essential, personal feelings. We cannot, therefore, easily use trite, stock phrases in our personal prayers. Note the

grammatically needless repetition of the personal pronoun in Mt. 6:6: "When *thou* prayest, enter into *thy* closet, and when *thou* hast shut *thy* door, pray to *thy* Father, which is in secret; and *thy* Father which seeth in secret shall reward *thee* openly". Likewise when reading the Psalms, especially 71, note how many times David addresses God with the personal pronoun: thee, thy, thou... it really is a personal relationship.

6:7 We will not use "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7); the Greek means literally 'to stutter / stammer with the logos'. We know what the man with a chronic stammer is trying to say before he actually finishes saying it. To hear him saying the same syllables again and again is a frustration for us. It's a telling way of putting it. God knows our need before we ask (Mt. 6:8). Say it, if we have to be explicit, and mean what we ask. And leave it there. 'Don't keep stammering on in your prayers' is to be connected with what comes a bit later: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)... but seek (i.e. pray for, Is. 55:16) the Kingdom of God, and His (imputed) righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:31-33). We are not merely to believe that what we ask for we will receive.

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

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

6:10 The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide.

The hope of the future Kingdom means that we will not now be materialistic. And the model prayer was given by Jesus in the context of His comment on how some tend to always be asking God for material things. The Lord teaches that the paramount thing we should request is the coming of the Kingdom, both in its glorious future 'political' sense as well as in the sense that the principles of the Kingdom should be manifested in our lives now. *This* is the request we should be making- for "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of... after *this* manner therefore pray ye..." (Mt. 6:9,10). Later in Mt. 6 the Lord repeats the same words: "Your heavenly Father *knoweth that ye have need of all these things...* seek ye first his Kingdom" (Mt. 6:32-34 RV). The structure of the Lord's prayer reflects this- for the first and only request in it is a seeking for the coming of His Kingdom. The RV of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: " Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg).

God *is in Heaven*, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven.

"*Hallowed / sanctified be thy name*" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom.

"*Thy will be done*" again uses an aorist which demands a one time fulfilment- in the sense of 'May Your will come about...'. The will of God is often associated with His ultimate plan of salvation (e.g. Eph. 1:5-12; Col. 1:20). It has been pointed out that "Hallowed be Your Name" is (grammatically) a request for action, rather than simply an expression of praise. Jesus prayed this in Gethsemane and it cost Him His life. We know from the Old Testament that God in fact "hallows" His own Name (Ez. 20:41; 28:25; 36:22,23; 38:16; 39:27). By asking God to "hallow" or sanctify / realize that Name in our lives, we are definitely praying in accordance with His will. He wishes to do this- and so He will surely do this in our lives if we ask Him. All the principles connected with His Name will be articulated in our lives and experience for sure if we pray for this- for we will be praying according to His revealed will in His word. And the ultimate fulfilment of all this will be in final coming of the Kingdom.

Greek scholars have also pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come Thy Kingdom, done Thy will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility.

6:11- see on 2 Cor. 8:15.

The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea.

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

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

6:12 "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt. 6:12) is probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves. See on Lk. 24:47.

"Forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" again uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

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

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

It's also been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered

from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. “Why do you make us err from your ways?” was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord’s Prayer. “Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation” (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”.

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

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

6:14- see on Eph. 4:32.

The command to forgive our debtors when we pray (Mt. 6:14) is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

6:19 Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it’s fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren’t rich, therefore we aren’t materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we’re not doing too badly; that really, we don’t care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture’s like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we’re OK in this area. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break (Gk. dig) through and steal" (Mt. 6:19) was spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn’t only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this ‘laying up’ mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands. See on Lk. 12:33.

6:22- see on 2 Cor. 1:12.

God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (Mt. 6:22 s.w.- this is one of James' many allusions to the sermon on the mount).

If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

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

6:24 Mt. 6:24 = Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word.

Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

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

There are only two masters whom we completely serve; we hold to either mammon, or God (Mt. 6:24). The idea of "holding to" in Greek implies holding *against* something else; the result of holding to God is that we are against everything else. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mt. 12:30)- rather than being passively indifferent.

Men reacted to the Lord in ultimately one of two ways- they either truly believed on Him, or supported the Jews in murdering Him (Jn. 11:45,46). Those who apparently believed on Him but kept it quiet were forced by the cross and resurrection to make their commitment one way or the other [and serious reflection on the memorials of these things in bread and wine leads us to the same decision]. So much for the philosophy of balance! The Hebrew word for vacillate (translated "dissemble" in AV) also means to go astray; indecision and indifference are effectively decisions against God's way. The Hebrew language often reflects God's characteristics and attitudes.

The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19). James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15). The man who found the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, sold *all* that he had, in order to obtain it. If he had sold any less, he wouldn't have raised the required price. These mini-parables are Christ's comment on the Law's requirement that God's people love Him with *all* their heart and soul, realizing the logic of devotion. Samuel pleaded with Israel: " Serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things [i.e. idols]" (1 Sam. 12:20,21). If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road. If we are God's people, we will flee from the false teacher (Jn. 10:5). If we do anything other than this, we reflect our basic attitude to God's truth.

There is fair evidence that in God's eyes, our attitude to materialism is the epitome of our spirituality. The Lord places before us only two possible roads: the service of God, or that of mammon (Aramaic for riches / wealth, Mt. 6:24). We would rather expect Him to have said: service of God or the flesh. Indeed, this is the choice that is elsewhere placed before us in the NT. However, the Lord evidently saw "mammon" as the epitome of all the flesh stands for. It is probably the view of many of us that while we have many areas of spiritual weakness, materialism is not one of them. But according to the Lord, if we are reading Him rightly, our attitude to the flesh generally is reflected in our attitude to wealth. This is why the Bible does have a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality.

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

think that there is a third way; a way in which we can love God and yet also love someone in the world. Yet effectively, in God's eyes, this is hating Him. Doubtless many Israelites thought Moses was going too heavy in saying that those who married Gentiles were hating God. And the new Israel may be tempted to likewise respond to the new covenant's insistence that our love of God means a thorough rejection of this world. Whoever even *wishes* to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

6:25 Mt. 6:25 = Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread.

We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

6:26 The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them" (Mt. 6:26)- God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them" (Mt. 6:26)- God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field. . . shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes.

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

wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 "If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on Mt. 6:26.

The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

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

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

7:1 For Paul, just one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5.

The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because

He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5).

Judge Not (Mt. 7:1)

Any religious individual or community, Christian believers included, will be tempted to morally and doctrinally retreat on issue after issue, until they come to a point where they cannot tell right from wrong; firstly, in the behaviour and belief of others, and then finally, in their own lives. The road to this position often involves the claim that we must not judge, and therefore we cannot label any behaviour or belief as right or wrong. This attitude arises from a faulty understanding of 'judging'. It may seem hard for the new convert to believe that such a clouding of right and wrong is possible; and yet Biblical and present Christian experience confirms that this is a major problem for us all.

Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

Judging Our Brethren

With this understanding of 'judging', it is inevitable that we need to apply our 'judgment' to other people, especially within the ecclesia. The decision to baptize Lydia into the fellowship of the one body involved 'judging' her "to be faithful" (Acts 16:15). If we cannot judge in any sense, it would be impossible to make *any* fellowship decision, e.g. interviewing a candidate for baptism. James was faced with the problem of deciding how far the conscience of some Jewish brethren should be imposed on the Gentile converts. He reasoned from Biblical principles, and then gave his "sentence" (Greek *krino*), his judgment- that they need not be circumcised (Acts 15:19). The elders of the Jerusalem ecclesia "ordained" (*krino*), they 'judged', some ecclesial rules for the Gentile ecclesias (Acts 16:14; 21:25). They didn't read "judge not" as meaning they couldn't ordain anyone. It is evident from all this that there is nothing wrong with 'judging' our brethren in the sense of forming an opinion about their behaviour or doctrine, and carrying this out. Paul reasons that disputes between brethren ought to be settled by other brethren in the ecclesia judging between them, rather than resorting to the judiciary of the world (1 Cor. 6:1-3).

Paul reprimands the Corinth ecclesia for not doing this. It is quite possible that they justified going to law with the excuse that 'Well, we can't judge our brother, you know'. Paul is saying: 'If you were spiritually mature, you would realize that you can judge your brother, indeed it's a shameful state of affairs if you lack the maturity to be able to do it'. In the same context, Paul rebukes Corinth for not withdrawing from the incestuous brother, and he says that although he is not physically present, his judgment is that the brother should be disfellowshipped; and he implies that they should already have made the same judgment (1 Cor. 5:3). Clearly disfellowshipping a brother involves judging- and we are not in accord with the spirit of Christ if we refuse to do this.

Don't Condemn

And yet, almost in designed contrast, just a few verses earlier Paul has warned his Corinthians not to judge each other, because Christ will be the judge at the last day (1 Cor. 4:3-5). This is one of Paul's many almost unconscious allusions back to his Lord's words in the Gospels; this time to Mt. 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" at the judgment. Likewise, 1 Cor. 11:31,32 looks back to the same verse; and again interprets 'judging' as condemning. We will all be judged (2 Cor. 5:10); yet if we do not judge, we will not be judged. Evidently, 'judge' is being used in the sense of 'condemn'. If we don't condemn others, we will not be condemned. It can't mean don't judge in the sense of don't form an opinion, don't analyze; because we will all be judged in this sense. If we don't judge / analyze/ form an opinion of others, this won't save us from the process of judgment at Christ's return. But if we don't condemn, this will save us from condemnation. The context of Mt. 7 confirms this; judging others is paralleled with confidently proclaiming that our brother is blind (7:4)- a common Biblical description of those condemned by God (Lk. 6:39; Jn. 9:39; Rom. 2:19; 2 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 3:17).

But there is an inspired commentary on the 'Sermon' of Mt. 5-7. Any good commentary on James will list the copious links between James and Mt. 5-7. The comment on Mt. 7:1 is in James 4:11,12: "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother...there is one lawgiver (judge)...who art thou that judgest another?". 'Speaking evil' here doesn't refer to slander; it is parallel with condemning. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:3-5, we must not judge each other in the sense of condemning, because Christ is the judge; we must not anticipate the outcome of the judgment. But it is inevitable that we must 'judge' each other in the sense of some amount of analysis and opinion-forming concerning doctrine and behaviour. Indeed, at least from my own self-observation, it would be impossible for the Lord to forbid us to 'judge' each other in this sense; it's an inevitable function of the human condition. It would be rather like condemning sneezing. We see and hear things, and inevitably we make a judgment concerning them. But we must "judge righteous judgment", judgment moulded by the word, but not anticipate the outcome of the final judgment.

It seems that the following context of Mt. 7:1 ("judge not...") concerns judging in the sense of condemning. And the allusions to "judge not" in James and 1 Cor. also seem to read it as forbidding us to condemn. When the Lord repeated His theme of "judge not" in Lk. 6:37, He seems to have underlined exactly what He meant by not judging: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; (i.e.) condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned". Either He meant 'don't judge in any sense', or 'don't condemn'. We have seen that He could not have meant 'don't judge in any sense', because He asks us to judge in this way. So He meant 'don't condemn'; and because He then goes on to say this explicitly ("condemn not"), it seems logical to read this as Him underlining the point, perhaps clarifying what had perhaps been misunderstood when He earlier said "Don't judge" in Mt. 7:1. So He was saying: 'Don't judge, what I mean is, don't condemn' ⁽¹⁾.

Self-examination

With this understanding of 'judging', we arrive at a telling interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:31,32: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged... should not be condemned with the world". The context is of self-examination at the breaking of bread. If, in the light of our reflection on the Lord's cross, we arrive at that level of spiritual contrition where we know ourselves to be worthy of condemnation, we will not be condemned at the judgment. In this sense, our confrontation with Christ in His time of dying should provoke in us a small foretaste of the judgment to come. It is an agony of the writer's soul that the breaking of bread rarely produces this sense in him. And yet, in all intellectual and expositional honesty, this seems to be Paul's point.

We must judge / condemn ourselves, but not others. Paul 'judged' the incestuous brother as worthy of withdrawal, he 'judged' Lydia to be in a position whereby she could enter fellowship through baptism. Yet Paul could make these fellowship decisions without 'judging' in the way in which Mt. 7:1 condemns. This fact in itself cannot be answered by those who claim that to disfellowship someone is to judge / condemn them, and thereby we condemn ourselves. Paul scolded the

Corinthians for their refusal to 'judge' as he judged. It seems the same rebuke is increasingly called for in the Christian community. If we cannot judge each other at all, the whole concept of ecclesial discipline must be dispensed with. The logical result of not judging is to have an 'open table', whereby we would fellowship any one for fear of not judging. The need to 'judge righteously' is destroyed by a refusal to judge at all. Yet we must not condemn- anyone. In this sense, "Judge not". For example, even though we know baptism is essential for salvation, it is not for us to label *anyone* as certain to be condemned at the judgment.

Thus the New Testament teaches that we must not condemn anyone, and yet we must keep separate from certain people. This in itself demonstrates that not fellowshiping someone is not the same as judging them in the manner forbidden in Mt. 7:1.

Notes

(1) It is often maintained that "judge not" refers to not judging motives. If we are not to judge motives, but we are to 'judge' in some sense, this would mean that we must judge the outward works of men. And yet Biblical and human analysis reveals that outward behaviour is often not a reflection of inner motive (e.g. Samson's marriage, Jud. 14:4). To judge outward behaviour without considering motives is almost pointless. There are countless cases of where the same action may be right or wrong depending on motive. Thus both David and Uzziah acted as the High Priest, but only Uzziah was condemned for it; David refused to choose his punishment as God asked him, preferring to leave it to God, whereas when Ahaz did something similar, he was condemned for it; Rahab's lie is commended as an act of faith, whilst other lies are sins; Samuel and Eli both had the same experience of their children being apostate and them being criticized for it, but only Eli is condemned for this. For a first century Christian to still keep parts of the Law of Moses was in some a reflection of their lack of full spirituality; whilst others did this in order not to offend other believers, and thereby showed a superior spirituality. The *motive* was all important to how the outward behaviour should be judged. The commands to discipline weak brethren nearly all involve an element of judging motives; thus false teachers suggest false doctrine because their motive is leadership (Acts 20:30); those who would not work because they claimed the second coming was imminent were in fact "busybodies", their motivation was not genuine, *and the Thessalonians were told to recognize them as such*, and "them that are such" should be reproved (2 Thess. 3:12); we should take note of those who "serve their own belly" by creating division (Rom. 16:17,18); and ecclesial elders should be appointed whose inner attitudes are right (Tit. 1:7). Indeed, one of the themes of Titus is the need for a sound mind, which should be evident in those the ecclesia chose to be elders (1:9,10,15; 2:2,5-7,12,15; 3:1,3,5,10 Gk.) This all demonstrates that there is a place for 'judging' motives, especially in ecclesial life.

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

7:4 Consider the story He told of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody

would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, it's presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on Mt. 13:28.

7:5 Let us beware of the tendency to think that our brother has a splinter in his eye, when we have a plank in our own (Mt. 7:5). This little parable surely teaches that it is *likely* that whenever we see something wrong with another believer, we are similarly guilty; for a splinter is also made of wood like a plank is. The Lord is saying that it's highly likely that we are failing in a much greater manner in the very area where we see a slight weakness in our brother.

7:5,6 If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to "cast out" the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to "cast [out]" our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for "cast out" in 7:5 and "cast" in 7:6 are related. The idea of being "cast out" is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be "cast out" and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be "cast out" into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be "cast out" into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be "cast out" at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor. 11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would've confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren't food but stones. They just wouldn't have appreciated them. This isn't any justification for hypocrisy; it's simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to "pearls"; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

7:6 The figure of seed is used by the Lord in His parables to represent both the word, and also the children of the Kingdom. If we have God's word of truth within us, we will of ourselves be the witness, for the possession of that word will naturally lead to witnessing it. Likewise the figure of pearls is used concerning the Gospel (Mt. 7:6) and yet also about the faithful (Rev. 21:21; Mt. 13:45). If we have the word of truth within us, we are identified with that word and will thereby witness it to men.

7:7- see on Ps. 32:6.

7:11 Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

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

7:14 "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He appreciated that from *our* perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right.

The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

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

7:19- see on Lk. 12:49.

The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19) is surely referring to these very words in Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather

than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

7:21 Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel.

7:22 Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this.

Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22).

When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom.

The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; these words of Jesus are set against the background of v.27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. v.41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. See on Jn. 13:13. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for "many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

7:23 Mt. 7:23 = 2 Tim. 2:19. Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

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

"Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual

house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question.

7:24 We build our spiritual house upon the rock, and He does just the same; we work together with Him in this, because we are in Him (Mt. 7:24; 16:18).

The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application.

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

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

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

There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

The parables of judgment have stress the theme of surprise at the process and outcome of the judgment. This ought to be a powerful influence on our thinking and behaviour. For all our study and preparation, that day will surprise us, it will shake us to the roots, as the newly built houses were rocked and battered to the foundations by the stormy wind and rain (representing Christ's interrogation of our conscience at judgment, Mt. 7:27). If that day is to be a surprise to us, we better

have an appropriate humility now, recognizing that ultimately our perceptions of many things will be shown to be wrong.

8:4 He had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true.

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

8:10- see on Lk. 2:33.

Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at the extent of other's faith (Mt. 8:10); and the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. Yet He "marvelled" at their faith, even uttering an exclamation, it seems, on one occasion (Mt. 8:10). "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Lk. 7:9) suggests the Lord thought that Israel's faith was something *very* high; when their rejection of Him was the cruellest tragedy in their history.

8:12 There will be "gnashing of teeth", the Lord seemed to really emphasise (in seven different places: Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once fain would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

Wicked men are called "righteous" because this is how they perceive themselves (Mt. 8:12; 9:13; Ez. 21:3,4) – God adopts their perspective in the way the record is written.

8:13- see on Mk. 9:23.

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

8:18-23 After Jesus had commanded the disciples to sail to the other side of the lake, a scribe came to Him. By talking to this man, who likely was just asking the Lord trick questions and trying to catch Him out, the Lord delayed their departure; with the result that they nearly lost their lives in the storm that came (Mt. 8:18-23). The disciples must have many times during that storm reflected with bitter annoyance how the Lord has gotten them in to this problem all because He had been wasting time with that Scribe. But the Lord had such a hopefulness and a spirit of passionate concern for the salvation of the individual, however arrogant and conceited they seemed to be, that He would risk danger in order to spend time with such a person. I find this an amazing example, surrounded as we are by a majority of people who appear like that Scribe.

8:19-21 The Lord Jesus had a way of gently turning comments and questions back on the person who made them, and of redefining the terms used. A man told Him once that he would follow him “whithersoever thou goest”, i.e. to whatever end point the road may lead to. The Lord replied that He had nowhere to lay His head. In other words, it’s the following of Him that we need to focus on, rather than the hardness of some possible great future sacrifice that may lie ahead. It’s the road, and not the destination, that are important (Mt. 8:19-21).

8:20 Jesus died because He gave out His Spirit, as an act of the will. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him by murder. The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul’s speaking in Rom. 6 of “the death that he died... the life that he liveth”. He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn’t just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person to have ever lived. When He “bowed his head”, the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: “The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head”. It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day’s work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

When the Lord spoke of how “the son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20), He was apparently alluding to a common proverb about how humanity generally [“son of man” as generalized humanity] is homeless in the cosmos. In this case, we see how the Lord took every opportunity to attest to the fact that what was true of humanity in general was true of Him. Perhaps this explains His fondness for describing Himself as “son of man”, a term which can mean both humanity in general, and also specifically the Messiah predicted in Daniel.

8:22 There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”. But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father’s coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt. 8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk.

He criticizes the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. “Let the dead bury their dead” (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- ‘let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave’. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love.

The Lord’s comment “Let the dead bury their dead” (Mt. 8:22) reveals how He had a way of so radically challenging the positions held by normal people of the world, to a depth quite unheard of- and He did it in so few words. And even more wondrous, the Lord appeared to have come out with this so pithy and semantically dense statement almost ‘off the cuff’, when presented with a man declining to follow Him immediately because he had to bury his father. So let’s see in what ways the Lord’s comment was so radical. Respect for parents as expressed in burying them “was at the

heart of Jewish piety... under Hasidic-Pharisaic influence the last offices for the dead had gained primacy among all good works... the duty to participate in a funeral procession could even override study of the Torah". And of course the Lord *knew* this, He knew just how fanatic the Jews were getting about burying parents- and it's exactly that issue which He chooses to pick on in His relentless demand for our 'all' in following Him. Quite apart from the particular obsessive situation in first century Israel relating to burying parents, in any case there was a widely held view amongst both Greeks and Jews that burial of a father could only properly be done by the son, and if this wasn't done, then the man was effectively not properly buried, which even Biblically is used as a curse. And 'just' for delaying doing the Lord's service for a day, the Lord demanded all this of a person. He's no less demanding today, even if His radical call is articulated over different issues. It may mean having to remain single when our parents want us to marry an unbeliever; giving up a good job; turning down promotion; relocating somewhere nearer our brethren; driving or sending our kids to a school a long way away for their spiritual sake... these, and far more, unto death and the complete giving up of life, are His demands. But there are other radical elements in those words of the Lord. Lev. 21:11 forbade the High Priest to be polluted by the corpse of his parents, which would've precluded him from the usual Jewish manner of burying the dead in the first century. By asking His followers to act as if under the same regulation, the Lord was inviting His followers to see themselves, each one, as the High Priest. We may merely raise our eyebrows at this point, as a matter of mere expository interest. But to those guys back then, this was major and radical, a man would have to sum up every ounce of spiritual ambition in order to rise up to this invitation. And psychologically, we could say that those first century illiterate Jews were subject to a very powerful systemic spiritual abuse. By this I mean that they were so emotionally hammered into the ground by the oppressive synagogue system that they felt themselves unworthy, no good, not up to much, awful sinners, woefully ignorant of God's law, betrayers of Moses and their nation... and the Lord addresses these people and realistically asks them to feel and act like the High Priest! No wonder people just 'didn't get' His real message, and those who did were so slow to rise up to the heights of its real implications. And we today likewise toil under a more insidious systemic abuse than we likely appreciate, with the same sense of not being ultimately worth much... until the Lord's love and high calling bursts in upon our lives, releasing us from the mire of middle class [or aspired-to middle class] mediocrity into a brave new life. And further. 'The prophets' were painted by Judaism rather like the Orthodox church paints 'the saints' today- white faced men of such spirituality that they are to be revered and worshipped as icons, rather than seen as real examples to us today. The Lord by contrast saw them as working models of the sort of spiritual life and walk with God which we too can just as realistically attain to. In Ez. 24:13-24, God forbade Ezekiel to carry out the mourning rituals associated with his wife's funeral. Likewise Jeremiah was forbidden to participate in lamentation for the dead in a house of mourning (Jer. 16:5-7). And again, the man who was bidden "let the dead bury their dead" was being invited to see himself on that level, of an Ezekiel or Jeremiah, being called to this behaviour by a person who could speak directly on God's behalf. And why were those prophets bidden to do those things? It was in order to be a witness to Israel, proclaiming judgment to come. And this was exactly the same reason the Lord bid His potential follower to 'let the dead bury the dead' - in order that the man could urgently proclaim the Gospel to Israel. Yet if we press further with the question as to *why* exactly God wanted Jeremiah and Ezekiel to not mourn for the dead, we find ourselves reflecting that actually, quite often God asked His prophets to engage in what some would call anti-social behaviour in order to attract attention to the message they were preaching. Remember that Jeremiah was forbidden to marry [most unusual for a Jew], go weddings etc. (Jer. 16:1-4,8). For other examples of 'anti-social behaviour' demanded of the prophets [e.g. walking about naked], see Ez. 4:9-15; 12:1-7; Hos. 1:2; Is. 20:1-6. Israel was a society bound together by 'norms' of behaviour and taboos regarding cleanliness. Yet prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel had been asked to openly break with the conventions of their environment, in order to draw attention to the message they were preaching- which was that God is likewise outside of the conventions of human environments, and His message is a radical call to quit them and be

ourselves, *His* children and not the children of this world. The Lord asked a man on the way to his dad's funeral to "let the dead bury their dead" and instead come with Him and preach the Gospel- and this chimes in seamlessly with the way God treated the prophets and commissioned them for witness to His people. The prophets were perceived as men raised up by God in a crisis situation, to do something special in their generation, to be God's men of the moment which we admire from the safe distance of historical study. And we too can feel the same about them. But the Lord bursts abruptly into this complacency- 'thou art the man!' is very much the message. Our lives are likewise to be lived [in this sense] in a spirit of all out effort for God's people in urgent crisis. A man in a desperate war situation might dodge out of his dear dad's funeral procession to fight the enemy or save a life that was immediately and urgently threatened. But it would have to be a pretty urgent and immediate crisis, that bore down very personally upon him. 'And this', the Lord is saying, 'is the intensity and pressing urgency of the spiritual battle I've called you to'. I salute the Lord as highly as I can for the totally artless and majestic way in which He packed so much challenge into those few words: "Let the dead bury their dead". There is to be an urgency about following the Lord, an urgency that can't be put off. This was one of the things which was so unique about the Lord's teaching style. It's been observed: "There is nothing in contemporary Judaism which corresponds to the immediacy with which he [Jesus] teaches"(5). Or as the Gospel records themselves put it: "Never man spake like this man". The total unusualness of His teaching style and content was enough in itself to make soldiers sent to arrest Him simply give up and turn back. If we ask *why* men followed Jesus, it's hard to think they did so because they thought He had promised them a great reward in the future; for He says little of this, and their reaction after the crucifixion indicates that they loved Him not because He had offered them anything that tangible. There was simply a Divine power of personality within Him, and by this I mean more than mere human charisma, and a message which demanded the immediate response of following Him wherever it might lead, even like Abraham not knowing where He was going. As Nebuchadnezzar proudly surveyed his capital city, the Angelic voice suddenly stated: "To thee it is spoken; the Kingdom is departed from thee" (Dan. 4:31). But it was 12 months previously that Daniel had bravely told the King that unless he repented, God's intention was to remove his Kingdom from him. The King had heard the word... and forgotten its' real import. But "to thee [you singular] it *is* spoken". So it can be with us. We may hear and perceive something from the word, but a year later we've forgotten it, and we tend to use the nature of human memory as an excuse not to have to take seriously the simple fact that if we hear something from God's word, we are to do it... and we are forever held accountable if we don't. The passing of time doesn't somehow produce an atonement for us. Therefore, and this point just outlined needs some reflection before we feel it's practical import, it becomes absolutely crucial to respond to God's word *immediately*. Hence there is an urgency to our Bible study- for as we understand, we are to *do*, not to merely jot notes in a margin or imagine we've taken a mental note. We are to *do*, to act, to take concrete action, as a result of what we perceive God asking of us. The immediacy of the baptisms in the first century were symptomatic of how the early church responded with immediacy to the Lord's call; but the immediacy of response to His word continues, of course. For we are to live "in newness of life", ever living out again that same basic response of baptism which we made when we first encountered the Lord's call.

The idea of leaving family and putting them last was uncommon but not unknown within Jewish circles. Again, the Lord was using familiar ideas, but with a radical and thoroughly unique twist to them. The schools of the Rabbis and Pharisees were full of both stories and examples of where men had indeed quit their families and given up their jobs in order to fanatically study the Torah, and had ended up materially and socially advanced. It's apparent from the Gospels that the Scribes and Pharisees were socially and economically better off than the mass of the population in Palestine. But the radicalness of the Lord's demand was that He asked people to leave all and 'follow Him'- in order to achieve an actual *loss* of material and social advantage. In all this we see a relentlessness in the Lord's demands of men and women, His dogged insistence as to the unconditional and total

nature of following Him. Once we grasp what following Him is all about, it becomes apparent that to tell a man on the way to bury his father 'Let the dead bury their dead' was actually quite in harmony with what the Lord was asking of those who would follow Him. On this occasion, He put it so baldly and bluntly to the man rushing to the funeral that both readers and hearers of those words of Jesus were and are shocked. But if only we grasped the real essence of His teaching, we wouldn't see that demand as in any way unusual or out of character with the general tenor of His message. And there was yet more radical, paradigm breaking demand within the Lord's words: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead". To 'Follow me' and be an itinerant student of the teacher Jesus of Nazareth was not unknown in first century Palestine. But to stop a man on the way to his dad's funeral and insist he had to join up right *now* and skip the funeral- that was just incredibly demanding. Further, it was always pupils who tried to get into a Rabbi's entourage or school- he didn't just walk up to a normal, non-religious working guy and say 'Hey you... come right now and follow me...'. This is where the attempts to make the Lord Jesus out to have been just another 'holy man' within the first century Jewish prophetic milieu are to me simply pathetic. Here was a man, a more than man, who spake and demanded and convicted and loved and ultimately saved like no other. There is an undeniable connection between the guerrilla groups who fought the Roman occupation and the schools of rabbinic teaching- the fanatic zeal for the Law was what drove the Jews to fight as they did. The idea of 'following after' a man is a Hebrew figure for men following their leader / general into battle. There are many examples: Josh. 3:3; Jud. 3:28; 4:14; 6:34,35; 9:4,49; 1 Sam. 17:13,14; 30:21; 2 Sam. 5:24 etc. In those early days, a general wasn't a smart guy with a degree who directed the battlefield from his laptop; he was the one who went over the top first with his men behind him, knowing full well he was the one whom his enemies would go for above all others. It was his bravery which inspired the followers to go after him, and which, over the battles and wars, solidified their trust in him and willingness to give their lives behind him. And this figure of speech was well understood by the Lord. Around him were false prophets and rabbinic teachers, asking young men to follow them, adopt their interpretations of Torah, study the traditions, and get hyped up enough to take weapons in their hands and go forth to fight the infidel. The Lord was fully aware of this, and He frames His calling of men in the same terms.

8:25 The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

8:26 When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O ye of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing.

The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God ‘rebuking’ the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we’re effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God’s people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He ‘rebuked’ the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He ‘rebuked’ demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn’t believe there was a Loch Ness–type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of ‘rebuking’ demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to ‘rebuke’ them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that’s your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working ‘in My name’.

8:34 Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away (Mt. 8:34). We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away. See on Jn. 6:60.

9:2-6- see on 2 Cor. 1:4.

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

9:9- see on Mt. 4:16.

Matthew’s preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events (Mt. 9:9). There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: “Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner.

Our preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom means that that very Kingdom 'comes near' to people (Mt. 9:9), in the same way as the judgment immediately precedes the final establishment of that Kingdom, so we bring the immediate prospect of the Kingdom right before men and women.

9:12-14 The preacher stands in the 'highways' (Mt. 22:9)- 'the place of two roads', the Greek means, i.e. the place where two roads divide. This is what our taking of the Gospel to people means. They are given their choice. We bring the crisis of the judgment seat right in front of them, and they make their choice. Thus in a village's response to the Gospel, they divided themselves ahead of time into 'worthy' and 'unworthy' (Mt. 9:12-14).

9:13 The Pharisees saw themselves as only teachers, not pupils. The Lord had diagnosed this problem, for He told them as a teacher would tell a pupil: "Go ye and learn what that meaneth..." (Mt. 9:13). He sent them away to do some homework. And there is a warning for speaking brethren here; the repeated experience of teaching can take away from the eternal sense of student-ship which the true believer will ever feel.

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

Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3).

The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament

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

9:17 The new wine, representing the blood of Jesus, gushes / pours out again each time a life fails to respond to Him in radical change (Mt. 9:17; the same word is found in Lk. 22:20: "This is... my blood which *is shed* for you").

9:21 She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today- that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by saying telling her that it was *her faith*- not the touch of His garment- that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). Again, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus' clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.

9:30 The Lord healed the blind man and then told him not to tell anybody (Mt. 9:30). Clearly the man wanted to shout out his good news. But by quietly walking around, seeing life as it really is, being his normal self, this would be an even more powerful witness.

9:36-38 One of the repeated features of the Lord's witness was His compassion towards humanity: "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. [Mk. 6:34 adds at this point that He *therefore*, as a result of that compassion, started to "teach them many things"]. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest..." (Mt. 9:36-38). It was their spiritual as well as their material and human need which evoked His compassion. I have to say that this spirit of urgent compassion is not as strong among us as it should be. There seem few if any tears shed for the tragedy of humanity. The world's desperation seems written off as 'they're not interested' rather than felt as a tragedy that should evoke our emotional and practical response. When Jesus saw the leper who wanted to be "clean"- not just 'cured' or eased of his discomfort- He made an emotional response. He put forth His hand, touched him, and made him clean- because He was "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:40,41). Mt. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 5:19 and Lk. 7:13 all record other times when the sheer humanity of the situation evoked the Lord's compassion: e.g. the woman in the funeral procession of her dear son, or the hungry crowds, unfed for 3 days...

9:37- see on Lk. 14:23.

He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest (Mt. 9:37). He saw the potential... Note how the phrase "the harvest is *plenteous*" uses the word usually translated "great"

in describing the “great multitudes” that flocked to the Lord (Mt. 4:25; 8:1,16,18; 12:15; 13:2; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 20:29) . Those crowds were seen by Him as a harvest.

His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it’s not being fully gathered. The fault for that lies with the weak efforts of the preacher-workers (Mt. 9:37).

The Lord Himself prayed that more labourers would be sent forth into the harvest (Mt. 9:37), but the real answer only came in the sending forth of labourers by the Father in the post-resurrection dispensation (Mt. 20:1).

10:3 The Gospel records were transcripts by the evangelists of their personal preaching of the Gospel. Matthew adds in the list of the disciples that he was “the publican” (Mt. 10:3). And throughout, there are little hints at his own unworthiness- in his own presentation of the Gospel to others.

10:5 The Lord Jesus describes Himself as sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”; and yet he sends his preachers likewise solely “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 10:5,6; 15:24). His mission was theirs, and it is ours. As He was sent out by the Father, so He sends us out; we’re all in that sense ‘apostles’, sent out ones.

10:7 In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is “the Kingdom”. The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was “among” first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king.

10:7,8- see on Mk. 1:15.

10:8- see on Lk. 15:7; 1 Cor. 9:18.

There is a connection between us 'freely giving' the Gospel now (Mt. 10:8), and being given 'freely given' salvation at the last day (Rom. 8:32; Rev. 21:6). The freeness of God’s gift to us should be reflected in a free spirited giving out of the Gospel to others.

10:14 The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

10:16- see on Mt. 24:14.

Bridge building involves us becoming 'as' our target audience- as Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles. Thus the Lord tells the disciples to go forth and preach as sheep / lambs (Mt. 10:16); in order to appeal to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 10:6). They were to be as sheep to win the sheep.

Matthew 10:16-39 And The Last Days

A careful reading of Mt.10:16-39 reveals many links with the Olivet prophecies concerning the latter day persecution of the saints; verses 17-21 are effectively quoted in Lk.21:12-18. However, Mt.10:16 prefaces all this by saying that these tribulations will attend those who go out preaching the Gospel. It is not unreasonable to conclude that during the 3.5 year tribulation period there will be a zealous outreach world-wide which will no doubt encourage our persecution. At this time, when many believers "shall be offended" (spiritually stumble) and "the love of many (true

believers) shall wax cold" for the truth (Mt.24:10,11), the "Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt.24:14)- i.e. the full establishment of the Kingdom. This in itself indicates the broad spiritual diversity there will be in the latter day body of Christ; a mixture of red hot zeal for witnessing and fellowshiping of our Lord's sufferings at one extreme, to cold indifference and doctrinal unsoundness at the other.

"Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Mt.10:22). The Greek phrase "the end" is normally used in the New Testament, and always in the Olivet Prophecy, regarding the second coming. This verse therefore has a distinctly literal application- he who spiritually survives the tribulation until the second coming will be saved fully, by receiving eternal life at the judgment. "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Mt.10:22) is another indication that the miraculous gifts may be evident around the time of the last day tribulation.

There are many other details in Mt.10:16-39 which fit in with our persecution thesis.

v.23 "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another... ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come". The coming of the Son of man must have reference to the last days as well as to AD70. His coming will be at a time of high speed witnessing, fuelled by persecution. The reference to the cities of Israel may imply that there will be a group of believers within the land, perhaps in the role of the Elijah ministry, witnessing the Gospel to the Jews.

v.27 "What ye hear in the ear (in quiet halls at the moment), that preach ye (then) upon the housetops". This seems to be giving special encouragement to persevere in preaching during the tribulation. There is a connection here with Mt.24:17, which advises those upon the housetops to go with Christ at the time of his coming. This implies that at the moment of Christ's coming there will be zealous "upon the housetops" preaching by the faithful. It is only persecution that will fire our community with that kind of zeal for evangelism, so that men may say of us that we have turned the world upside down by the power of our preaching, making us "the sect everywhere spoken against". These descriptions of the early church are yet to become true of its latter day counterpart.

v.28 "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" - some of us will perish in the tribulation. "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death" (Lk.21:16). "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (v.39).

v.31 "Fear ye not". The faithful will have peace within them as they both consider and experience these things.

v.32,33 "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men...but whosoever shall deny me". This may imply that those who do not participate in the world-wide witness will declare themselves unworthy. However, the Greek for 'confess' really means to assent- as if it will only be by an apparently nominal indication of our faith that we fly our colours- cp. 'only' having to burn a pinch of incense to Caesar to avoid death in the first century. In the light of this, there is a need to keep our conscience finely tuned so that we are ready to make or refuse the apparently insignificant action or statement which will result in the world rejecting us. Similarly, a 'mere' confession of belief in the name of Jesus in the first century resulted in being cast out of the synagogue and socially ostracized (Jn.9:22). This idea of denying Jesus is picked up in 2 Tim.2:12, again in a persecution context: "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: *if we deny him*, he also will deny us". This parallels not denying Jesus in the tribulation with dying with him; another example of our tribulations then being described in terms of Christ's sufferings.

v.34-36 "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth (i.e. in this life)... I am come to set a man at variance against his father... a man's foes shall be they of his own household". This is not really true today to such a degree. It may just be possible that the Greek tenses here mean 'I am coming to

set a man at variance...', implying that in the period of Christ's return there will be betrayal within Christian families, as made explicit in Lk.21:16.

v.37 "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" - apart from betrayal by family members, the persecutors will also put pressure on the relatives of believers as a blackmail to make them renounce their faith. The consequences of all this, given the close-knit nature of Christian families, are horrendous. But how can we skip over the verses we don't like the sound of?

v.38 "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me... he that receiveth a prophet... shall receive a prophet's reward". This is further proof that during the tribulation there will be an especial fellowshiping of the Lord's sufferings on the cross. The reference to receiving itinerant preachers fits in to the picture of a major world-wide witness. Those who assist us during the tribulation preaching will be blessed- as those who blessed the persecuted Jews of the 1940s were blessed.

Israel's suffering in Egypt is the prototype for our tribulation. Their sufferings eventually resulted in a "mixed multitude" leaving Egypt with them, presumably as a result of their preaching to them. There appear to be two stages to the coming of Christ. The virgins were told by the cry at midnight that the bridegroom was coming; there is then a delay, before they finally meet Christ (Mt.25:1-10). Song 5:4,7 describes Christ knocking on the door, the bride (the saints) rising to open, but being confused at finding him vanished (cp. the virgins finding the unexpected delay). On account of her preaching about the bride (Christ), the woman (the saints) was then severely persecuted: "The watchmen... found me, they smote me, they wounded me". It is likely that this 'delay' period will be the 3.5 years of persecution. We should therefore not think that because the tribulation has not started, Christ cannot come today. The news that 'He's back!' may be the beginning of the tribulation period.

Such a 3.5 year gap between being told Christ is about to come and his actual return would provide ample opportunity for many to fall away- "Where is the promise of his coming" which had been made a year or two ago? The midnight coming of the Lord to the harassed disciples on the sea of Galilee / nations may well be typical of his second coming. In a seemingly hopeless position, lashed by the sea of nations, the disciples will suddenly find themselves in their desired haven. The Lord saw their toil and took pity, as God looked down and saw the toil and affliction of Israel under persecution in Egypt, and then 'came down' to deliver them. Careful analysis of this incident provides us with a two stage model: a midnight coming of Christ to his persecuted, spiritually weak brethren, and then the wind (cp. persecution) ceasing a short while later when the Lord actually came into the ship (Mt.14:32). Jn.6:17 implies that Christ's appearing was later than the disciples thought He had promised; which even more exactly fits our position. As they were tempted to doubt Him, so are we in the last days. "O (we) of little faith!".

10:19,20- see on Ex. 4:12.

10:20- see on Rom. 8:16.

10:22 It is only by having *hupomone* that we can be saved (Mt. 24:13 cp. Lk. 21:19). And yet Mt. 10:22 would suggest that it will be difficult to have *hupomone* in our last days; many will fall away. Our present world is ever changing; stability in work, residence, relationships etc. seems impossible. *People give up so easily*. The generation brought up on telly and Snickers bars and deregulated Capitalism seeks only immediate resolution and satisfaction; and their short-termism fuels yet further their endless quest for the new and novel. And yet *we* must endure to the end in our work for the Lord and our relationship with Him, believing the same One Faith, living the same spiritual life which those doctrines demand. He amongst us who has *hupomone* to the end of the last generation, right up to the day when the Lord comes, the same will be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Lord Jesus had *hupomone*, it lead Him to the cross and beyond; and we must share His spirit of *hupomone* if we would ultimately share in His salvation (2 Thess. 3:5; Rev. 1:9; 3:10).

10:26 In encouraging His preachers to courageous witness, the Lord reminded them that there is nothing hid that will not be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26). Then, it will be openly apparent to all. And so in who we are there must be the unhideable, inextinguishable flame of testimony.

10:27 There are many allusions to Job in the New Testament; far more than may be apparent on the surface. Mt. 10:27 is one of them: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops". The idea of God telling us things in the ear which we must then openly declare is surely looking back to Job's words in Job 42:5. "Darkness" is also a Job idea; the word occurs at least 30 times in the book. The final appearance of Yahweh in the darkness of the thundercloud was His reproof of Job's repeated suggestion that the darkness of sin somehow separated God from involvement with man. What Job was told out of darkness, he had to speak forth in the light. It seems that Job's spiritual growth is being picked up by the Lord and presented as our pattern. He does the same in Lk. 18:30, another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament, when He speaks of how each of us must give up house, wife, brethren and children for the Kingdom's sake, and then afterwards receive "manifold more in this time, and in the world to come...". This is exactly the position of Job (Job 42:10), and yet the Lord applies it to each of us.

The personal relationship which we have had with Christ will be very evident at the judgment. What we say to Christ in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud. But there is a related statement from the Lord: What we hear from Him in the ear, we must speak openly (Mt. 10:26,27; after the pattern of Isaiah in 22:14). Putting these passages together, we get the picture of us speaking to God through Christ, talking in His ear, as one might whisper something very personal into a friend's ear, in the darkness of our bedroom. And then the Lord whispers back in our ear, i.e. His revelation to us (through the word) is very personal and not perceived by others; but we must openly, publicly act upon it. And this private relationship we have with the Lord in our prayer life will then be revealed openly at the judgment. God told Samuel "in his ear" about Saul's future, and although the message must have been hard to relay to Saul, Samuel did so, on the housetop (1 Sam. 9:15,25). The similarities with the Lord's words are too close to be accidental. Surely He saw each of us as passing through the essential experience of Samuel. As we witness our relationship with Christ to an unspiritual world now, so He will speak openly of us to God (Mt. 10:32; Rev. 3:5), Angels (Lk. 12:8) and to the world (Lk. 12:2,3). He will openly confess our name, i.e. our character and personality. What we have said to Him privately will be revealed in the light, i.e. in the Kingdom (Col. 1:12).

What we hear in the ear we are to teach upon the housetops (Mt. 10:27)- language which surely alludes to how Isaiah and the prophets heard God's word in their ear and then taught it to others (Is. 5:9; 50:4).

The outcome of the judgment seat will be a reflection of our attitude to witnessing to others: "What ye (the twelve disciples) hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops... *whosoever* therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:27,32). The Lord seems to go beyond briefing His men before they set off on their preaching mission; He goes on to say that in a sense, *whoever* follows their example will be confessed before the Father. Notice what He *isn't* saying: He isn't saying that if you're keen about preaching, this is the be-all-and-end-all of spiritual life, and this alone will guarantee your acceptance with God. He says that what we hear (i.e. believe) in the ear, our own very personal understanding and belief of the Gospel, must be spread abroad openly to others. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves.

What we hear in the ear, that we must preach on the housetops (Mt. 10:27). This is built on the language of 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

10:28 Trinitarians please note that Phil. 2 was written by Paul with his mind on the death not birth of Christ, as their false theology requires (Phil. 2:7 = Mt. 10:28; and note the connections with Is. 53).

He assures us that if we come to Him, we will find "rest" (Mt. 10:28); but the same word is only used elsewhere about the rest / comfort which our brethren give us (1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; Philemon 7,20).

It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be (Mt. 10:28). I take this to mean that who they essentially are is forever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

10:29 One sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without (the knowledge of) your Father" (Mt. 10:29). God is aware of the death of each bird- He does not allow animals to die due to their natural decay (the clockwork mechanism) without Him being actively involved in and conscious of their death. Again, Jesus shows how God's knowledge and participation in the things of the natural creation must imply an even greater awareness of us. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered... ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:30,31). God hasn't wound up this world and left it ticking by clockwork, dispassionately looking on as Israel and all His people make such a mess of things. He sends the rain, consciously; not a sparrow falls from the air [i.e., as the result of a man's sling stone- for birds die in their nests usually, not in mid-flight] without Him being aware, and, by implication, grieving for it. He even knows how much sparrows are sold for (Mt. 10:29). See on Mt. 6:26.

The Matthew record has the Lord saying that two sparrows are sold for one farthing; Luke 12:6 records that He said that five sparrows were sold for two farthings. So what did the Lord really say? I suggest something like this: 'As you know, two sparrows are sold for one farthing, they cost half a farthing each; but often, as you know, *five* sparrows are sold for *two* farthings, they'll throw one extra in for free, they're worth so little'.

Another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis is in His comment that God's care even embraces sparrow (Mt. 10:29). For the Rabbis explicitly forbade prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. See on Mk. 3:28.

10:30 The closeness in Jonathan's relationship with Saul shows the emotional tangle which Jonathan was in on account of his relationship with David. If we truly love Christ, and if we are honest enough to come to terms with the pull of our own natures, we will be going through exactly the same. Our Lord seems to have seen in Jonathan a type of ourselves. In the context of warning us that loyalty to him would mean confessing him before men and conflict between fathers and sons, he encourages us that not a hair of our head will perish (Mt. 10:30 cp. Lk. 21:18). This is picking up the application of this phrase to Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:45.

10:32- see on Mt. 10:27; Rev. 2:17.

Confessing Christ before men applies to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10).

The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us (Mt. 10:32). This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. See on Eph. 6:15.

The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called.

The judgment seat which there will be is in fact only a bringing to earth of the judgment seat which even now is going on in Heaven. Consider Mt. 10:32: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven". What does this speak about? Surely of the Lord's speaking to the Father in Heaven right now, in this life. But compare the parallel Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God". Of what does this speak? Surely of the last judgment [note the reference to the "Son of man", a term usually used about judgment to come; and denial before the angels surely equates with the "I never knew you" of the final judgment]. The events of the last day, with the Lord confessing or denying us before the Father and the Angels, are actually going on this very day.

10:33 If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

10:36 Mt.10:35,36: "A man's foes shall be they of his own household" in the holocaust of AD70 and that to come; i.e. brother betrayed brother (spiritually and naturally) within the household ecclesias.

10:38- see on Lk. 14:27.

Speaking of the time in the tribulation when "a man's foes shall be they of his own household", Jesus comments: "he that taketh not his cross (then), and followeth after me, is not worthy" (Mt.10:38). Our response to our trials then will effectively be our judgment seat. See on Mk. 13:13.

The Lord taught that taking the cross was to be paralleled with loving family members less than Him (Mt. 10:36-38). In the incidents where the Lord Himself showed a relative lack of love for His natural family (Mk. 3:21,22,31-35) He was therefore living out the essence of the cross.

We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours. He remembers how it was, and sees the commonality of feeling which we have attained.

Consider the contexts in which Christ spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Mt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ - but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with Christ. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ.

10:39 He asked His men whether they were really able to drink of His cup, referring to the crucifixion. 'Yes!' they immediately replied. If we were Jesus, we would likely have indignantly replied: 'Oh no you won't! You'll run away!'. Considering the pain of His cross, both physically and mentally, the sheer trauma of it all, it was an essay in gracious positivism that the Lord replied: 'OK, you will share my cross...'. It is so gracious of Him to be willing to consider our light afflictions as a genuine participation in His cross, which thereby warrants our resurrection with Him.

As we go up the spiral of spiritual growth, we will find the true life- perceive, see, realize (Mt. 10:39 Gk.) the real, spiritual life, as the wayward son "came to himself", he found himself, when he repented.

10:42 Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones had nothing to do with necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for Oxfam. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context in the Gospels says the same.

11:4,5 The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:4,5. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the

conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life.

11:6 When John the Baptist had his crisis of faith, and sent his men to ask Jesus whether He was really Messiah, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion.

11:9 The Lord commented on the various types who heard John's preaching. Finally He addressed Himself to those few who had truly perceived His message: "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you... verily I say unto you..." (Mt. 11:9,11); it was to those who perceived that John was speaking God's words, who were impressed by that more than anything else, to whom Christ gave a fuller exposition of John's purpose. Thus He concluded: "If ye will receive it... he that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 11:14,15), stressing the same principle that if any had that initial disposition towards the real spirit of the word, then they should take careful note of the additional help He was therefore offering them. It would seem that the Lord taught the crowds with parables, and then those who came to hear Him early in the morning, or in a private house, or high in the mountains- these were the ones whom He took further up the spiral of knowing Him.

11:11- see on Mt. 20:11.

"He that *is* least in the Kingdom of Heaven *is* greater than" John the Baptist (Mt.11:11). The following verse speaks of preaching the Gospel of that Kingdom (Mt.11:12 cp. Lk.16:16), perhaps implying that by responding to Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom we are associated with the Kingdom, and are thereby "greater" than the message which John preached.

11:12- see on Lk. 5:34.

"The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt. 11:12) is constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presseth into it*"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall.

The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going (Mt. 11:12).

The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men" (Mt. 11:12). This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community.

11:14- see on Mt. 21:32; Lk. 4:21.

If Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfilment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them for the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Kingdom *could*

have come in the 1st century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.) says it all. The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfilment. It could be that Mal. 4:6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah messianic Kingdom- for then, their days would be multiplied "as the days of heaven upon the earth / land" (Dt. 11:21). This is surely the essence of the NT idea of the Kingdom of Heaven coming upon earth at the Lord's return. If literal Elijah is to fulfil Malachi's prophecy, then presumably he must be resurrected before the second coming. Whilst one exception to the doctrine of resurrection after Christ's return can be countenanced, it seems likely that an Elijah-like prophet is a more reasonable possibility. John the Baptist was 'Elijah' in some ways (Mt. 11:14), although his was only a primary fulfilment of the prophecy (John 1:21; Mt. 17:11). He was also an initial fulfilment of Malachi 3:1: "I will send my messenger (John/Elijah), and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple". This had an even earlier fulfilment in Malachi as the messenger ('Malachi' = 'messenger'), preparing the way for Nehemiah's coming to the temple. In similar manner, Is. 40:3-5 is applied to the Elijah prophet in the form of John, although it has an initial application to Isaiah speaking words of comfort to Jerusalem in his time. Mk.1:3 implies that the *message* of the Elijah prophet was the coming of Elijah; it does not therefore have to be delivered by Elijah himself. Previous 'Elijah' prophets have had his characteristics but not been him personally. The ultimate fulfilment of the 'Elijah' prophecy may therefore be along similar lines.

The Lord seemed to accept that men would live His Truth on different levels. He told the people concerning John: "If ye will receive it, this is Elias" (Mt. 11:14). It's as if He wasn't sure whether they could rise up to the level of realizing that Malachi's prophecy had a primary fulfilment in John, notwithstanding its evidently future application. And John records that some Jews believed, although they didn't confess Jesus as Lord openly (Jn. 12:42). It took the crisis of the cross to bring them up to a higher level.

11:16 The Lord's patience with the disciples as children, His awareness of their limitations, His gentleness, His changing of His expectations of them according to their weaknesses, all provides powerful comfort to the latter day disciple. So many times He didn't correct their evidently wrong ideas, as one doesn't with children, but patiently worked with them to bring them to truth. His approach to demons is the most common single example. When He had them go with Him unto Lazarus, they mistakenly thought He meant 'let us go and die too' (Jn. 11:12-16)- and yet He graciously didn't correct them, but let events take their course. And we can take a lesson from this, in how we relate to others we may see to be 'in error'. It's not really about direct confrontation, which ends up proving us right and them wrong, without actually bringing them to a personal conviction of the truth in question.

11:17 The Old Testament as well as New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orcheesasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekopsasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never stepped; we dirged for you, and you never wept'".

11:19 The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who

makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return, when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel. To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15).

11:21 God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not (Mt. 11:21).

11:23 The Lord knew that cities like Tyre and Sidon would have responded to the Gospel in the first century; had it been preached to them. But the message was taken to Jewish villages like Chorazin and Bethsaida instead. Such was God's love, His especial and exclusive love for them (Mt. 11:21). Sodom likewise would have repented if the message of Lot had been backed up by miracles; but, that extra proof wasn't given. But such a concession was made to Israel through the ministry and miracles of Jesus (Mt. 11:23).

11:25- see on 1 Cor. 1:19. Paul saw the simplicity of the Corinthian believers as the sort of thing Christ referred to in Mt. 11:25.

You will have noticed how often the Gospels record that Jesus "answered and said...". Yet it's often not clear whether anyone had asked a question, or said anything that needed a response (Mt. 11:25; 22:1; Mk. 10:24, 51; 11:14,22,33; 12:35; 13:2; 14:48; Lk. 5:22; 7:40; 8:50; 13:2; 14:3,5; 17:17; 22:51; Jn. 1:50; 5:19; 6:70; 10:32; 12:23,30; 16:31). If you go through this list, you will see how Jesus 'answered' / responded to peoples' unexpressed fears and questions, their unarticulated concerns, criticisms, feelings and agendas. This little phrase reveals how sensitive Jesus was. He saw people's unspoken, unarticulated needs and responded. He didn't wait to be asked. For Jesus,

everybody He met was a question, a personal direct challenge, that He responded to. And of course this is how we should seek to be too.

11:27 Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).

11:28 The Lord Jesus invites those who follow Him to accept the "rest" which He gives (Mt. 11:28). He uses a Greek word which is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Sabbath rest. Jesus was offering a life of Sabbath, of rest from trust in our own works (cp. Heb. 4:3,10). We shouldn't, therefore, keep a Sabbath one day per week, but rather live our whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

It is significant that Paul takes a passage from one of Isaiah's servant songs and applies it to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ did (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the "servants" who fulfil in principle the work of the singular servant.

11:28-30 David found his sins associated with Bathsheba "as an heavy burden... too heavy for me... I am (thereby) bowed down greatly" (Ps. 32:4,6). Surely our Lord was thinking back to David when he invited all of us: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden (with sins), and I will give you rest... for my... burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

When the Lord speaks of a change of yokes for the weary and a granting of rest in Him (Mt. 11:28-30), He is using terms taken from Isaiah's restoration prophecies. The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon.

11:29 "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Mt. 11:29). To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ.

The Lord Jesus is a yoke- He unites men together, so that the otherwise unbearable burden of the spiritual life is lighter (Mt. 11:29). If we do not let our fellowship with others lighten our load, then we basically have not been brought under Christ. To be in Him, under His yoke, is to put our arms around our brethren and labour together. The Lord paralleled "Come unto *me*" with taking His yoke upon us, in order to have a light burden (Mt. 11:28-30). A yoke is what binds animals together, so

that they can between them carry a burden which otherwise would be too great for them individually. The invitation to come unto Jesus personally is therefore an invitation into a community- to be lined up alongside another, and have a yoke placed upon us. Without submitting to this, we can't actually carry the heavy burden laid upon us. This heavy burden laid upon the believer must surely have some reference to the cross we are asked to share in and carry. We can't do this alone; and perhaps it happened that the Lord Himself couldn't even bear His own cross without the help of another, in order to show us the point. We can't claim to have come personally unto Jesus, somehow liking the idea of the Man Jesus, intellectually accepting His teachings on an abstract level- and yet keep our distance from our brethren. Paul had this in mind when he described his brethren as 'yokefellows' (Phil. 4:3). For Paul, his joy and crown would be to see his brethren accepted into God's Kingdom at judgment day. David had the same spirit when he wrote of how he longed to "see the prosperity of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance" (Ps. 106:5). His personal vision of God's Kingdom involved seeing others there; there's no hint of spiritual selfishness in David. And he goes straight on to comment: "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity... our fathers understood not..." (Ps. 106:6). David felt himself very much at one with the community of God's children, both in their failures and in their ultimate hope. Life with God simply can't be lived in isolation from the rest of His people. Our salvation in that sense has a collective aspect to it, and if we want 'out' with the community of believers in this life, then we're really voting ourselves out of their future glory.

11:30- see on Ex. 2:11.

Mic. 2:3 reminded Israel that they will be under the yoke of judgment if they reject Yahweh's yoke. The Lord spoke of His servants having a light yoke (Mt. 11:30). The Bible minded among His hearers would have thought back to the threatened punishment of an iron yoke for the disobedient (Dt. 28:48). 'It's a yoke either way', they would have concluded. But the Lord's yoke *even in this life* is light, and has promise of the life which is to come! The logic of taking it, with the restrictions it inevitably implies (for it is a yoke), is simply overpowering.

The way to the Kingdom is easy relative to the wonder of what is in store for the faithful (Mt. 11:30; 2 Cor. 4:17); and yet from our human perspective it is hard indeed, a life of self-crucifixion (Acts 14:22; Rev.7:14). See on Mt. 20:16.

12:5- see on Mk. 2:25.

The Lord (Mt. 12:5) said that the priests "profaned" the Sabbath; He didn't say that because they kept the spirit of it, that was O.K. By using a word as extreme as "profaned" He seems to be even emphasizing the point of paradox within God's self-revelation.

Having accepted the Bible as the source of authority, we find that the Bible does not categorically list what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Even within the Law of Moses, to obey some commands meant breaking others (Mt. 12:5). And it is a common dilemma of sincere believers that they find themselves having to break one principle to keep another. The Bible is written in such a way as to give clear instruction to those who love and respect it, and yet to confuse those who do not fundamentally accept it into thinking that their faulty understanding is in fact the will of God. This is why it is true, on a surface level, that you can prove what you like from the Bible. Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* all managed to 'prove' the most bizarre things from the Bible- and persuade others to genuinely think that to do evil was in fact doing righteousness. So the fact that someone thinks that they are correctly interpreting the Bible does not thereby justify them, however sincere their conscience may be. And it does not mean that the church must therefore accept them, just because their conscience is clear and they think the Bible justifies their behaviour.

12:12 The Lord's parables set a high standard of commitment, without which, it is implied, the attainment of the Kingdom is impossible. Thus Mt. 12:12 likens the Kingdom to a city which can

only be entered by "the violent (taking) it by force". This is the language of crack storm troopers forcing their way in to a barricaded city. And according to the Lord, every one of us who hopes to enter the Kingdom must have this spirit. We must force our way in.

12:16 It was written of the Lord's preaching that He would not "strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [raised up in this way] in the streets". And for this reason He asked His converts not to "make him known" in this way; He wanted them to witness *as He witnessed* (Mt. 12:16,19). This is quite something, the more we reflect upon it. He rebuked the self-righteous, restored peoples' dignity, alleviated their poverty and sicknesses to give them a foretaste of the future blessings of His Kingdom on earth, opposed legalistic and corrupt religious practices, and ultimately gave His life to show that even His enemies were encompassed in His love. This is the pattern for us, especially in our seeking to do these things in the lives of those who respond to the Gospel.

12:18 The Lord didn't shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18).

The Lord's showing judgment to the Gentiles and not publicly striving or crying in his preaching (Mt.12:18-21) primarily fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is.42:1-3. Note how His gentle, low pressure attitude to preaching will be the same in the Kingdom as it was in the first century. In the same way Is.54:13 concerning the preaching of the Gospel in the Kingdom is quoted about Christ in Jn.6:45.

12:19- see on Phil. 2:15.

Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally* that "he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *his* voice in the streets" (Mt. 12:16,19). In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing.

12:20 The Lord's miracles showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He shewed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

12:27- see on Heb. 11:7.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of a false god called Beelzebub. Jesus said, "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?" (Mt. 12:27). 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

12:28 A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit.

12:29- see on Jud. 14:18.

The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

12:30 Let His words sink in to you personally: "He who is not with me is against me... he that is not against us is for us" (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord's cause, even if we're not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be 'not against' Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively 'not against' Jesus. If we're not whole heartedly with Him, we're against Him. That's how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

12:31 From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

12:33 The idea of dishonest words being like yeast, a source of corruption, takes us to Mt. 12:32-37: "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him... Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh... every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned". The fruit of the tree equals the words (as in Prov. 12:14; 13:2); a corrupt man will speak corrupt words. And these will be the basis of his condemnation. By contrast "the fruit of *our* lips" should be praise (Heb. 13:15). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) refers to this passage- the corrupt fruit is corrupt words. But the idea is that we bear the fruit *now*- our words *now* are our fruit. See on Lk. 6:44.

12:34 The Lord said that the Jews were evil, and therefore good things could not come from them (Mt. 12:34; 7:17-20). And yet He also said, presumably with the same audience in mind, that although they were evil, they potentially knew how to give good things, e.g. to their children; and therefore how much could God give them good things if they repented (Mt. 7:11).

12:36 The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life.

Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will be justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

12:37 From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it" (1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. The specific words which some have spoken will be the reason for their condemnation. "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16)- not so much for their idolatry, their worldliness... but for their uncontrolled and cruel words.

By our words we will be acquitted [Gk.] and by our words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)- but it is God who acquits, and therefore nobody but He can condemn us (Rom. 8:33; Is. 50:8). Yet how does and how will He do this? Surely on the basis of our acquittal or condemnation of others. The connection in thought surely shows that through our words, we form our own judgment of ourselves, to acquittal or condemnation.

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, judged by their own words, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear. See on Mt. 21:43.

12:38-40 It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that " the judge standeth before the door" . What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

12:39 The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

12:40 As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

12:41- see on Heb. 11:7; Rev. 16:15.

12:43

Unclean Spirits

Comments

1. Neither Satan nor the Devil are mentioned as controlling the unclean spirit.
2. Sin comes from within and nothing from outside a man can enter him and defile him (Mk. 7:15).
3. Verse 45 concludes: “Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation”, showing that this passage is meant to be understood as a parable. “Unclean spirit” is a phrase often synonymous with “demons” in the Gospels. We showed in chapter 4 that Jesus was using the language of the day when talking about demons, and so He was here. Jesus was effectively saying, “In the same way as you believe unclean spirits can go out of a man and re-enter him, so this generation was once cleansed, but is soon going to become even worse than it was initially”.
4. This passage is in the context of Matthew 12:22–28, where Jesus uses the common ideas of the Pharisees to disprove their own argument: “Every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and *if* Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself... and *if* I by Beelzebub cast out devils (demons), by whom do your children cast them out?”. So Jesus was not saying He believed in Satan or Beelzebub – indeed, Beelzebub is clearly defined as a pagan idol in 2 Kings 1:2 – but He was using the language of the day to confound the Jews. So it is not surprising that a few verses later He is talking in parabolic language again about unclean spirits. In the same way as He did not believe in Beelzebub, so He did not believe in unclean spirits.
5. That this passage is parabolic is indicated by Matthew 13:10, where “the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why do you speak unto them in parables?”. Jesus spoke the parables about Beelzebub and unclean spirits on the same day as He told that of the sower (Mt. 12:46; 13:1). The large amount of parabolic language used that day therefore prompted their question.
6. Careful reading indicates that “the unclean spirit” is synonymous with the man, as a deaf demon refers to a deaf man in v. 22 of the same chapter. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places...”. Walking through a wilderness and deciding to return to one’s house is clearly language applicable to a man. This is all confirmed by the fact that Jesus is almost certainly alluding to a verse in the Septuagint version (which was the Bible in common use in Christ’s time) at Proverbs 9:12, although it is omitted for some reason in the A.V. This verse clearly speaks of a man, not a spirit, “(the scorner of instruction) walks through a waterless waste, through a land that is desert, and with his hands garners barrenness”.
7. The “spirit” often refers to the attitude of mind (e.g. Dt. 2:30; Prov. 25:28; Is. 54:6; 61:3; Ez. 18:31; Mk. 14:38; Lk. 2:40; 2 Cor. 2:13; 12:18; Eph. 4:23). an “unclean spirit” may possibly refer to an unclean state of mind, which would fit the context in vv. 34–36. Because “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7), the spirit would be synonymous with the man. Thus the parable would describe a man’s attitude of mind being cleansed and then his going into an even more degenerate state as happened when Saul’s ‘unclean spirit’ was cured by David playing the harp, and then it returned even worse. Notice that we read of “an evil spirit *from the Lord*” affecting Saul (1 Sam. 16:14); this attitude of mind was sent by God, not a super-human evil being.

Suggested Explanations

1. John the Baptist cleansed the Jewish nation to a certain extent; he tried to change the evil heart (spirit) of the Jews (Mal. 4:1,6 cp. Mt. 11:10,14). The man walking in the wilderness (“dry places”) is like the Jews going out to hear John preach in the wilderness. The whole discourse was sparked off by Jesus curing “one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb” (Mt. 12:22). The cured man was probably standing by, and it would have been a powerful way of reasoning: “You know what this man used to be like. It’s so wonderful that he is now whole. How tragic it would be if he became seven times worse than he was before. But that’s how tragic it will be for you, seeing you do not want to continue in the spiritual healing which John brought you”.
2. We have seen that Jesus was alluding to a passages in Proverbs 9:12, linking the man who rejects wisdom with the Jews, who were now rejecting “Christ... The wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), Christ

“who... is made unto us... wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:30). Other details in Proverbs 9 accord with this approach:

– “Wisdom... has killed her beasts... furnished her table. She has sent forth her maidens: she cries upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither” (Prov. 9:1–4). This is the basis of the parable of the marriage supper, where the Jews refuse to accept the call to learn the wisdom of Christ (Luke 14). Wisdom crying upon the high place of the city recalls Jesus crying out in the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Jn. 7:37).

– “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Prov. 9:9) would refer to those who learnt from John and went on to learn more from Christ.

– “Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Prov. 9:5) recalls Christ’s invitation to eat His flesh and drink His blood, in symbol, at the communion service (Mt. 26:26–28).

– “Wisdom has builded her house” (Prov. 9:1) would perhaps refer to Christ’s sweeping of His house in Matthew 12:44. Thus the two women of Proverbs, the whore and wisdom, would represent the teaching of the Jewish system and Christ respectively. Apostate Israel are likened to a whore in Ezekiel (16:28,29,31) and Hosea (chapters 1,2); see also Jeremiah 3:1,6, 8.

3. We are now in a position to trace some of the symbology in this passage a little deeper. The man, representing the Jews, who would not heed the teaching of Christ, walked through “dry places”. This may recall apostate Israel in the wilderness, who also “tempted Christ” (1 Cor. 10:9), refusing to obey the teaching of Moses, who represented Christ (Dt. 18:18). God led Israel “through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt” (Jer. 2:6). This exactly recalls the language of Proverbs 9:12 in the Septuagint – “through a waterless waste, through a land that is desert... barrenness”. Notice that Israel in the wilderness sought for the “rest” of the kingdom, but never found it (Heb. 3:11). Similarly, the man in Matthew 12:43 went through the dry wilderness “seeking rest, and finding none”.

4. The man decided to return to his house. This must have reference to v. 29, spoken shortly before, which says that the strong man of a house must be bound before the contents of his house can be taken away. Luke 11:22 adds that this can only be done by a stronger man than he. This strong man is Satan, sin, which only Jesus was strong enough to overcome. Because Jesus bound Satan – sin – He was able to do miracles and thus share with us the spoils of the house. There is a hint in the Gospels that the people Jesus cured were also forgiven their sins and sometimes their illnesses were a direct result of their sins (Lk. 5:20; Jn. 5:14). The infirm woman was described as being bound by Satan (Lk. 13:16) until Jesus cured her. Jesus could reason that it was just as effective to say “Your sins be forgiven you”

as to say “Rise up and walk” (Lk. 5:23). The Devil – sin – kept us as bond-slaves in his house until Jesus destroyed him (Heb.2:14–18). Jesus began to bind the strong man of sin in His life, and therefore could share the spoils with us to some extent then, although He did so more fully through His death. Thus the house to which the man returned was empty – all the goods of the strong man (v. 29) had been taken away. This may have been symbolized by Jesus cleansing the temple (Mk. 11:15–17). He described the temple to the Jews as “*your* house” (Mt. 23:38). The man, representing apostate Israel, would call the temple “my house”. Christ’s cleansing of the temple at Passover time would have mirrored the Jewish custom, based on Exodus 12:19, of the firstborn sweeping the leaven from the house. Jesus cleansed the temple, His “Father’s house” (Jn. 2:16).

In prospect, the spiritual house of Israel was swept and emptied of the bad things sin had put in it. The house was “garnished”. Literally this is “kosmos–ed” (Gk. *kosmeo*). The word *kosmos* describes an order of things. Jesus set up a new *kosmos* in the house of Israel by doing away with the Law, which brought awareness of sin, the strong man, Satan (Rom. 7:7–11; 4:15).

The seven other spirits entering the man therefore represent the intense rejection of the Gospel by the Jews after having heard it. Peter seems to allude to “the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Mt. 12:45); talking primarily of the Jewish Christians who had now turned away from Christ, Peter reasons that “If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world (cp. “swept and garnished”) through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20). Thus it may be that Peter interprets the seven spirits entering the man, i.e. entering his house, as a prophecy of the many Jewish Christians who turned away from the faith due to the work of the Judaizers, who encouraged them to return to the Law. Verse 21 and 22 are on the same theme: “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”.

12:45 There was a common theme in ancient demonology that there were seven senior demons, who were responsible for plague and calamity. Christ alluded to this, without correcting it, in his parable of the *seven* evil spirits who re-entered the healed man (Mt. 12:45). Deuteronomy 28:22 may also allude to it when it describes the *seven* calamities which would befall Israel if they turned away from Yahweh.

12:46- see on Mk. 3:21.

12:48-50 The Lord implied that those who did God’s will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that “in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family”. And so it is in many parts of the world today.

12:50 The very fact Christ calls us brethren in Mt. 12:50 the Hebrew writer saw as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

13:2 The Gospel records give more information about the day on which Christ told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in his ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt.12:22-13:23; Lk.11:27; Mk.4:10). Various types of people heard his words; the immediate context in Mt.13:2 is that "great multitudes were gathered together unto him". The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to Christ's sowing when he first "went forth to sow" in his ministry.

13:3 Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read “*a* sower” (followed by the AV), others “*the* sower” (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: ‘A sower, the sower, went out...’. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why “the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come”; ours is a united witness with Him.

13:4 The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt.13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catcheth away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catcheth" the sheep (Mt.13:19; Jn.10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/

devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

13:6 "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

13:11 The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

13:12 "Whosoever hath (of spiritual knowledge and blessing) to him shall be *given*" (Mt.13:12) shows that the faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort, but through the gift of God.

Mt. 13:12 speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adopts a more human perspective.

13:13- see on Lk. 2:50.

13:14 Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt.13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk.4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown..."

13:15 True conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). True understanding is a seeking for God, a doing good; hence those who sin have no true knowledge as they ought to have, whatever their theoretical understanding (Ps. 14:2-4). But we can nominally believe the Gospel, 'understand' it in an intellectual sense, and bring forth no fruit to perfection (Mt. 13:15 cp. 23)- not perceiving the power of the Gospel.

13:15,16 The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). There are levels of conversion.

13:16- see on Lk. 4:21; 22:32.

The disciples were so slow to perceive. And yet the Lord could (perhaps gently and smilingly) tell them: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" (Mt. 13:16). Yet He later reprimanded them for being so slow of heart to perceive... Surely He was speaking of the potential which He recognized in them; a potential which He rejoiced to see.

Of course we are blind and spiritually obtuse. And yet the New Testament speaks of us as if our blindness has been lifted. In the same way as our Lord sees us as if we are perfect, without blemish, as if we are already in the Kingdom, so he sees us as if we are without blindness. This is how he treated the disciples. He spoke of them as "seeing", i.e. understanding (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). But frequently he despaired at their lack of spiritual perception, i.e. their blindness. Yahweh describes His servant Israel, both natural and spiritual, as a blind servant: "Who is blind but my servant?... who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! |See on Rom. 2:19.

13:19- see on Mt. 13:38.

In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

"Some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up...when any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Mt.13:4,19). This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn.5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one". Mere knowledge of the word will not necessarily stop the spiritual temptations; the word must be hid in the heart to stop sin (Ps.119:11); not just left on the surface of the soil. Those on the good ground both hear *and* understand it (Mt.13:23), corresponding in the first instance to those who heard the parables and understood them. There is no doubt that a degree of intellectual effort is required to understand the word, not least the parables. The Jews generally did not "hear with their ears" - they did not respond or recognize the basic message of the word, let alone go on to understand it.

Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, Jesus twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and anon with joy receiveth it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). "The care of this world" (Mt. 13:22) must primarily refer to the Jewish world.

"The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11-15) and "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the "word of the Kingdom" means the word which *is about* the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom.

13:21 The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or

persecution! (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day.

Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). Perhaps he was alluding to the Lord's parable of the sower, where He taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

13:22- see on 1 Tim. 6:9.

One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

"Some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them...the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Mt. 13:7,22). Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do I have thorn elements to me...?'

There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place.

The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

13:23 His parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that His general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

The good soil is characterized by understanding (Mt.), receiving (Mk.) and keeping the word (Lk.). We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions.

13:25 Jesus so understands human weakness. But let's try to enter into the sense of shame and hurt which He must feel at our apathy; the shame is similar to the shame of the farmer who has tares growing in his field. Everyone sees it's the result of his workers sleeping instead of keeping the night watch as they should have done (Mt. 13:25). The Lord foresaw this; He saw that the ultimate harvest wouldn't be a good one. Even some that looked like "good seed" would be rejected (Mt. 8:12 cp. 13:38). Yet in this same context, Christ speaks of how the believer starts off as a tiny mustard seed, but in the Kingdom grows into a tree which will shelter others (Mt. 13:32). He saw *how* small are our spiritual beginnings compared to our position in the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom will be spiritually greater than John the Baptist was in his mortal life (Mt. 11:11). See on Lk. 14:18.

The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4). The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4-6).

In the parable of the sower, “the Devil” is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel – and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the “tares” sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, “things that offend” – and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt.13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15:12–13 describing the Pharisees as plants “which My Heavenly Father hath not planted” which were to be rooted up at the judgment.

13:27 The Angels are often described as questioning God or being uncertain as to why He acts as He does- e. g. in the parable of the wheat and tares the "servants of the householder (interpreted by Jesus as the Angels, v. 39) came and said unto Him, Sir, didst not Thou sow good seed in Thy field? from whence then hath it tares?... wilt Thou that we go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:27). We have here an example of the Angels in the presence of God trying to understand His ways and eagerly offering their help in bringing about His purpose as they perceive it.

13:28- see on Mt. 15:14.

“Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?” (Mt. 13:28) shows Christ's knowledge that this would be the desire of His servants throughout the generations. If we take His teaching seriously, we must come to the conclusion that all of us have a desire to "help" our brethren by 'sorting out' the weaknesses which we see in them, but that there is the real possibility that often this desire is spiritually grotesque in God's eyes. According to the parable of the tares, we are very sure that we know who are the tares and who are the wheat. But we can't be as sure as we feel, is the Lord's message. Some we feel are obviously tares are actually wheat. And the sensitivity of Jesus foresaw this so accurately. There's a fascinating twist in this story that is exactly descriptive of our experience. The servants slept first of all, after the word was first sown, and only once the wheat and tares came to bear fruit did they pester the Master to let them root up the tares. This reference to bearing fruit must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the sower, which describes how the good ground bears fruit (Mt. 13: 26, 8). The implication is that the servants shouldn't have been sleeping first of all, thinking there wasn't really much to do in the field. And so it is a familiar pattern: conversion is followed by a period of feeling there isn't much to do, and then the realization dawns that due to our own negligence in those early days there are some tares in the ecclesia. The desire to sort out the tares therefore comes some time *after* conversion. And on the overall level, there is another truism: the servants of Christ are keener to eradicate error than stop it in the first place. It's sad to see that there is almost a despising today of the warnings against 'the thin end of the wedge'; awareness of the possibility of apostasy is seen as somehow negative- exactly as the parable predicts. The parable implies that *if* a greater level of watchfulness was maintained by the servants, there wouldn't be the tares. But, as the Lord foresaw, we seem to lack this watchfulness, often under the guise of feeling that we must sort ourselves out rather than guard against apostasy being introduced. The sensitivity of Jesus constructed that parable with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right *therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really

insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'. See on Mt. 7:4.

13:29 The parable of the wheat and weeds features another unlikely happening. Someone sows weed seeds on top of the wheat seeds. The farm workers who were sleeping aren't upbraided as we might expect. The weeds can't be uprooted because the roots are intertwined; and anyone walking into the field to remove them would trample the wheat. So how, therefore, can they be rooted up at the time of the harvest? It can only be by some super-human reapers- i.e. the Angels. It is totally and utterly beyond *us* to do the uprooting. And yet this obvious meaning has still not been perceived by many of us.

13:30- see on Lk. 17:31.

The sheep will feel worthy of condemnation. By a fascinating trick of the tail, the Lord's right hand is our left hand, and vice versa, if we imagine ourselves standing before Him. Those who put themselves to *their* right hand, i.e. justify themselves, are putting themselves at His left hand; and vice versa. There is another way of looking at 'first' and 'last'. Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will also be destroyed together: "Gather ye together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying wilful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into his barn (Mt. 13:30).

13:32 There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

13:33 The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. See on Mk. 4:32.

13:38 It is our attitude to God's word which is the fundamental indicator of our spirituality. The sower parable teaches this by its equation of the seed/ word and the types of ground. In the next (but related) parable of the tares, "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38)- i.e. the seed/ word is people. In the sower parable, we read of "He which received seed by the way side" (Mt. 13:19), connecting the believer with a type of ground which receives the seed, whilst Lk.8:12,13 speak of the people as the seeds rather than the types of ground: "Those (seeds) by the way side are they... they on the rock are they...". Mt.13:19 speaks of people receiving seed by the way side, but Mk. 4:15 likens their *heart* to the way side, where the seed was sown. In God's sight, a

person *is* his heart or way of thinking (Prov. 23:7); and to God, a person's attitude to the word *is* his mind.

We shouldn't seek to over-interpret every element of a parable- although such approaches often yield very fruitful lessons. Indeed, here is the difference between parables and allegories- an allegory requires every symbol to be interpreted, but parables aren't like this. It's a different genre. The focus is often on the end stress, not the details of the parable itself. And so I submit that rather do we need to seek to perceive the main issues which the Lord is seeking to get over to us, through these special features of His stories. Indeed, when the Lord *does* give interpretations of His parables, He doesn't give interpretations of every feature which formed the furniture of the parable. When He gives quite a detailed interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He doesn't comment on the significance of the servants sleeping, the barn, the *bundling* of the weeds, etc.

13:39- see on Lk. 17:31.

The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the convert: "he that was sown..." (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom". Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?).... This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that "the man clothed with linen"- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- "returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't. See on Acts 12:24.

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return" immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

13:39

PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

This parable describes how the true believers, living in the Jewish world of the first century, had to contend with the "tares" of false brethren who were sown by the "enemy" of Christ (the good sower, Mt. 13:24-28). "The enemy that sowed them is the devil" (Mt. 13:39) must be seen in the context of many other passages which speak of the Jewish system as the devil or satan.

The devil's clandestine sowing of tares among the good seed of the ecclesia must primarily refer to the "false (Judaist) brethren unawares brought in", which the New Testament frequently warns against (Gal. 2:4). By "the end of the (Jewish) world", in A.D. 70, this problem appears to have been ended (Mt. 13:39). The burning of the tares along with the "world" connects with other prophecies concerning the end of the Jewish age in figurative fire (e.g. 2 Peter 3). Seeing that false

doctrine and teachers continued to spread within the ecclesia after A.D. 70, this parable must be understood as having a highly specific application to the concentrated Jewish campaign of infiltrating the ecclesias.

Latter-day application

However, there is much language in this parable which shouts for reference to the events of the second coming and judgment:-

- "The harvest" (Mt. 13:39) - a figure used concerning the Lord's return in Isa. 18:4,5; Joel 3:13; Mark 4:29; Rev. 14:15.
- "The end of the world" (Mt. 13:39).
- The Angels gathering the responsible (Mt. 13:39,40) - an idea repeated in Mt. 25:31-33 concerning the second coming.
- "A furnace of fire" (Mt. 13:42) - 'Gehenna'.
- "Wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:42) - used elsewhere concerning the rejected at the judgment seat (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).
- "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father" (Mt. 13:43) is hard to apply to A.D. 70; it more sensibly fits the second coming.

Whilst there have always been weak elements within the true ecclesia, one of the parable's main purposes is to highlight the problem of the 'devil' consciously infiltrating the ecclesia. The parable appears to teach that there was nothing that the "wheat" could do about the Judaist infiltration of the ecclesias, until that problem was taken out of the way in A.D. 70. This does not mean that the commands to separate from false teachers can be quietly forgotten - after A.D. 70 the main threat to the ecclesias was (and is) the influence of Greek and Roman philosophy, expressed albeit indirectly. From those who openly teach this, there was and is a clear command to separate. Why our Lord counselled against positive action to expel the Judaizers before A.D. 70 was for several reasons:-

- He knew that this particular problem would be solved in A.D. 70 anyway.
- Seeing that many of the early Christians were Jews, pushing out the Judaizers would have meant certain damage to the "wheat", seeing that they were too immature to judge between true Christianity based on "the hope of Israel" and the specious doctrines of the Judaizers.
- The Law did not come to a complete end until A.D. 70. Expelling those who advocated a return to the Law before A.D. 70 was therefore difficult.
- By the deliberate hypocrisy of the Judaizers it was impossible for human judgment to accurately discern who should be 'gathered up'.

Pseudadelphians

We have shown that this parable, along with most other prophecies of A.D. 70, must have a latter-day application too. Since the first century there has never been such a systematic infiltration of the true ecclesias as that practiced then by the Judaizers. The extent of their campaign is chronicled elsewhere. Since that time, the loss of true doctrine has been due to persecution, materialism, individual false teachers, over-familiarity over an extended period etc., but never due to a large scale, organized infiltration of the ecclesias with men who consciously pretended to hold true doctrine, whilst subtly spreading their false ideas at the same time. If this parable has a latter-day application - and our earlier analysis of the language used makes this hard to deny - then we have to expect a similar organized infiltration in the last days. Whilst it would appear that we have not yet reached this crisis, the stage is well set for it. Previous heresies that arose were publicly stated, and therefore relatively easy to deal with. Yet now the complaint is often made that there appear to be people within the community who, when cornered, claim to agree with our basic doctrines, yet vigorously spread fundamentally false teaching when the spotlight is taken off them. Judas, with his apparent spirituality, is the prototype false teacher, and exemplifies the attitude (1 John 2:19 cp.

John 13:30; 2 Thess. 2:3); as does the description of wolves "in sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15). Any foolhardy attempt to "gather them up" (Mt. 13:28) must result in some "wheat" being pulled up too; i.e. those who cannot perceive the 'tares' for what they are, whilst holding true doctrine themselves, will be damaged. Our only hope is the second coming.

The Devil

The system which sowed the tares is called "the enemy... the devil" (Mt. 13:39), primarily referring to the Jewish system. The Jews are consistently portrayed as "enemies": Mt. 22:44; Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 69:4; Luke 19:14 cp. 27; 10:19. The latter-day beast is "the devil" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), and we have suggested that this refers to the confederacy of largely Arab nations which will oppress Israel in the last days. Time and again the Arab powers are called the "enemies" of God's true people: Jud. 2:14; Ez. 36:2; Lev. 26:25; Deut. 28:57; Ex. 15:6,9; Ps. 78:42 (= Egypt). Ps. 110:1,2, primarily based on Abraham's victory over his Arab enemies, connects these peoples with the enemies of Christ who will become his footstool at the second coming (this is not to deny the Psalm's many other applications). Most especially is Babylon called "the enemy": Ps. 78:61; Jer. 6:25; 15:11; 18:17; 31:16 and an impressive 11 times in Lamentations. We have shown 'Babylon' to have a latter-day application to the Arab enemies of Israel.

Church in Crisis

"The devil" in the sense of sin's political manifestation has previously referred to the Jewish and Roman systems. Both of these were connected with the 'devil' of false teachers within the ecclesia. There is ample extra-Biblical proof that false Roman and Jewish philosophy was the ammunition of the early false teachers within the ecclesias.

The man of sin who will be in the temple (ecclesia?) of the last days is a Judas-like character (2 Thess. 2:3 cp. Jn. 17:12)- hidden away in the ecclesia, appearing to be righteous. The latter-day beast/devil will also be associated in some way with the infiltration of the ecclesias which the parable of wheat and tares prophesies. How exactly this will occur can only be speculation - the Arabs may hold the world to ransom with the threat of cutting oil supplies, and insist that Jewish-based religions be eliminated. False teaching might then arise concerning the Jewish basis of our faith. The present de-emphasis of the promises in our preaching and the lack of appreciation of them by many of our younger members will ease the way for this. It is significant that one of the pictures of the beast is of it having horns like a lamb but speaking like a dragon (Rev. 13:11). This is alluding to Mt. 7:15 describing false teachers as wolves which appear like sheep - showing the association between the beast's political manifestation and false teachers within the ecclesia.

Watch!

This organized infiltration of the ecclesias will probably occur in earnest during the tribulation period of natural Israel. As the presence of the first century tares provoked confusion, turmoil and a landslide of true spirituality in the early church, so this prophesied programme of infiltration helps explain the frequent indications that the latter-day ecclesias will be in a desperately disjointed state at the time of the second coming. The sowing of the tares was "while men slept" (Mt. 13:25), perhaps connecting with the slumbering virgins / ecclesial shepherds of Mt. 25:5, also the sleepy latter-day saints of 1 Thess. 5:6 and the disciples who failed to watch as they should have done (Mk. 13:36; 14:37). These four connections surely suggest that the havoc caused by the tares will be proportionate to the lack of spiritual watchfulness among the individual ecclesias and believers. Again, the command to "Watch" in the last days is shown to have reference not only to observing the political 'signs of the times', but watching for the spiritual safety of the ecclesia.

13:41- see on 1 Cor. 4:9; Dt. 29:21.

Causing others to stumble from the path to the Kingdom is the leading characteristic of the condemned, according to the Lord's words in Mt. 13:41. Compare His words: "It is inevitable that

offences come; but woe to that man by whom they come” with “The son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man (Judas) by whom the son of man is betrayed!”. The Lord sees those who cause offence as being as bad as Judas. It’s serious. We are the body of Christ. It has been truly said that Jesus has no face, no hands, no legs on this earth apart from us. Positively, this means that we beseech men and women “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 2:10 RV).

It seems that when Christ first comes, He sends *His* Angels to gather us (Mt. 13:41), and it is also His Angels which punish the wicked (Mt. 13:41); however it is God’s Angels which reward the righteous (there seems a distinction between the Angels of God and of Christ). The Angels of Christ bring us to Him with their report on us, and He then makes the decision- those same Angels are told to arrange the destruction of their charge if unworthy, whilst the worthy are confessed to the Angels of God for glorification.

The Kingdom was once described by the Lord as a time when all those in the ecclesia who cause others to stumble will have been thrown away into condemnation (Mt. 13:41). Yet in some things we all offend others (James 3:2). Our places in the Kingdom will therefore be by pure grace alone; but we must respond to this wonder by *trying* as earnestly as possible to only upbuild and not to stumble our brethren. A personally ‘righteous’ believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others. Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having ‘driven out’ Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors’ sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken.

13:42 Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. “The reapers” of the harvest “are the angels”; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). “Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment.

13:43 Even in the future Kingdom, the basis of our witness to the world will be that we are in Christ. Thus Micah’s description of how “the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass” (Mic. 5:7) is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: “*He* shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth”. The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord’s face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

13:44 Many of the Lord’s parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

If we really want to make encounters and conversations work, we need to consider who we’re talking with. The Lord’s parables of Mt. 13:44-49 make it clear that people have different motivations when they first encounter our preaching. Some are merely fish caught in the Gospel net and compelled to come in; others are as the merchant man who is searching for good pearls, who sells all he has to get that pearl and just have it, gazing at it with admiration and appreciation each day; others are as the man who finds something of value in a field, maybe he sees there’s some precious raw material he can exploit there, and so he buys the field in order to get some benefit for

himself. The strange (to my ears) comment in Mt. 13:44 that the man 'hides' his discovery appears to contradict the reality that we should joyfully share our discovery of Christ with others. Perhaps the picture is being painted of a man with all the wrong motivations, who comes to the treasure from the viewpoint of 'What can I selfishly get out of this' (it may be in our age... a desire for welfare support, a partner, a social club...). And yet all the same he has come to the treasure, been called to it, allowed to find it... that is perhaps the point. All these types of people have differing motivations, and need to be treated differently by us.

The man who finds treasure [or, perhaps, a deposit of precious metal in a field which could be mined] *hides the fact* (Mt. 13:44), and sells all he has to buy that field. The hiding of the discovery speaks to me of the utterly personal knowledge between a man and his Lord which we enter into when we 'find' the treasure of the Kingdom, the pearl of great price. For any man or woman who hears the Lord's words, He and His Father will enter in and make their abode with them (Jn. 14:23). Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He had made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there unto thee [you singular]" (Ex. 29:42).

The man who sells all to buy the field containing the treasure (Mt. 13:44)- what does he *do* with his newly found wealth? The question, of course, buds us reflect what we have done with the wealth of the Gospel which we have found. These open-ended parables with unanswered questions are left hanging because the point is, it all depends upon our response as to how they end in our cases! The parables are thus not just cosy stories. They challenge our response. Our tidy images of reality are shattered by the open endings and elements of unreality in the parables. Our minds are arrested and teased by them, as they lead us to self-realization, self-knowledge, at times even healthy self-condemnation. See on Lk. 10:34.

There was a Rabbinic interpretation current amongst the Jews of Christ's day that He appears to allude to: "R. Charinah saith: After four hundred years are passed from the destruction of the temple, if any one shall say to you, Take to thyself for one penny a field worth a thousand pence, do not take it. And again, After four thousand two hundred thirty and one years from the creation of the world, if any shall say to you, Take for a penny a field worth a thousand pence, take it not. The gloss is, For that is the time of redemption, and you shall be brought back to the holy mountain, to the inheritance of your fathers; why, therefore, should you misspend your penny?". Yet the Lord teaches that we should indeed buy such a field... implying, surely, that He did not expect the imminent setting up of the Messianic Kingdom. Rather is today a time for spiritual investment and seeking the treasure of the future Kingdom.

13:45- see on Phil. 3:7.

13:46 As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the

world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden' in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

The Lord told a telling, terrifying parable. A rich man so loved a pearl which he saw that he became a pauper by selling absolutely *all* he had- his business, his transport, his expensive clothes- in order to buy a pearl. And, finishing off the story, we are to surely imagine him living the rest of his life in some humble dwelling amongst the poor of this world, daily admiring the beauty of his pearl, totally unrealized by the world around him, caring for it as the most important thing in his whole existence, realizing that in it was the epitome of absolutely all his being: his love, his wealth, his future, his joy of life day by day. And this is how we should be with the Gospel; nothing less.

13:47- see on 1 Cor. 12:21.

It's so easy to have a negative spirit. Are people sincere? Do they just get baptized in the hope of material help? Can we cope with so many converts? Won't many of them leave? What does this person really believe about doctrine? Can you believe them? Isn't this or that the thin end of the wedge? This isn't the spirit of the Lord's parable about the drag net fishermen (note, not fishing with a line for a special, prize catch- but concentrating on saving as many as possible, of whatever quality, Mt. 13:47).

We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also *gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. See on Lk. 12:58; 19:15.

13:48- see on Lk. 14:23.

13:52- see on Mt. 9:9.

Every one who is taught the Gospel will naturally *bring forth out of his treasure* (his innermost heart- Lk. 6:45) things new and old- his new knowledge, plus his old things of the old covenant (Mt. 13:52 cp. Song 7:13). The Lord said that a scribe (one who knows well the Old Testament

scriptures) who also knows the Gospel of the Kingdom is like a man who brings out of “his treasure” things new and old (Mt. 13:52). But Jesus had just defined the “treasure” as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44). If we make that ‘treasure’ *our* personal treasure, the most valuable thing in our whole being, then out of the basic Gospel that is in our hearts we will bring forth things “new and old”. Our treasure is where our heart is (Mt. 6:21). Yet the treasure is the basic Gospel, i.e., that Gospel lodged in our deepest hearts. The old things of basic certainties; and the new things relating to our increasing appreciation of what they really mean, these will come out of us in our lives and feeling and being.

13:55- see on Rev. 14:4.

14:15 Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they “forbad” John’s disciples just as they wrongly “forbad” the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50).

14:20 Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or *abounded* His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that *abounded* (AV “that remained”) that it filled twelve baskets (Mt. 14:20). Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn’t just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated “remained” in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is ‘to abound’. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul’s use of the very same word to describe how God’s grace has “abounded” to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

14:24 The Lord Jesus, who spoke and acted the words of God, was clearly willing to change His position depending on human response. Remember how He initially declined to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman because, as He clearly stated, He had been sent *only* unto “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”; and it was not appropriate, He said, to take the food from those children and feed it to Gentile dogs (Mt. 14:24,26). He may well have had in mind the Divine principle of not throwing pearls before swine [Gk. ‘wild dogs’]. But... He changed. He healed the woman’s daughter. He was so deeply impressed with her perception and faith that He changed the operation of His principles.

14:27 So how exactly was Peter motivated to walk on water? We want to know, because it’s the motivation that we so urgently need. We read that the Lord “passed by”. This is the very language used in the Old Testament concerning theophanies, i.e. those times when God ‘passed by’ before His people, accompanied by earthquake, rain, wind, fire etc. These ideas all recur here in the account of Jesus ‘passing by’ before the fearful disciples. In Mt. 14:27 the Lord tells them: “It is I”. This was a reference to the “I am” of the Yahweh Name. Peter knew that it was Yahweh who walks upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and so he asks that if Jesus is really “I am”, God manifest in flesh, then He will bid Peter also walk on the water. It was Yahweh whose way was *upon* the sea (Ps. 77:19 Heb.; Ps. 29:3). Indeed, the whole incident on the lake is almost prophesied in Ps. 107. The people are hungry in desolate places (:4,5), they are filled by Yahweh with good things, as the Lord Jesus fed the multitude (:9); some go down to the sea in ships (:23); a storm arises, sent from God (:25); they are troubled and cry out (:27,28); and then Yahweh delivers them, bringing them to their desired haven (:28-30). Peter, I think, perceived all this. He saw that this Man from Nazareth was indeed manifesting Yahweh, and he is asking that he too will be a part of God’s manifestation; he perceived that what was true of Jesus really could be true for us. If Jesus, manifesting Yahweh, walked upon the sea, then so could Peter. When Peter asks Jesus to “bid me come unto thee”, the Greek word translated “come” is also translated “to accompany”. He wanted to walk with Jesus on

the water. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. This of itself explains how the fact Jesus did what God did [e.g. walk on waves] doesn't mean He is "very God of very gods"- for Peter realized that he too could have a part in that manifestation. If Jesus was a man of our nature and yet God manifest, then, Peter reasoned, I too can manifest the Father. And the same is true for us, today. The reality of God's manifestation in the human Jesus should inspire us too to leave our comfort zones and enter the adventure of living Godly- living like God- in this present world. Peter "came down" out of the ship to go walking on water (Mt. 14:29). He is described as "coming down" [s.w.] in Acts 10:21, where he came down from the roof top and said: "Behold I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?". "I am he" uses the same two Greek words as in Mt. 14:27, when the Lord says "It is I". Three Greek words occurring together like this is surely not incidental. Peter recalls when he 'came down' out of the ship- and now, he really is Christ-manifest. He speaks as Jesus did; and further, "I am he whom ye seek" and "wherefore [are ye] come" are the very phrases of Jesus in Gethsemane. The record is showing us that consciously or subconsciously, Peter is Christ-manifest now. The words and person of Jesus have all had such impact upon him that now for him, "to live is Christ". To 'come down' and manifest Him is what life is all about; Peter's coming down out of the ship is a cameo of a life lived like this, time and again manifesting Him, overcoming the fear, the cowardice of our brethren, the distractions of the life and world which surrounds us...to walk out unto Him.

14:28 In the account of Peter walking on water, we have a cameo of what it means to walk out of our comfort zone. Peter asked the man on the water to invite him to walk on the water; for Peter knew that only Jesus would be that demanding. He's a demanding Lord for us too. Peter didn't have to get out of the boat. But He realized that following the Lord Jesus involves this stepping out of our comfort zone. For us, it may be making a radical donation of our money, our time, a donation that really hurts, that is significant, not a giving that is well within our comfort zone. Or it may be a radical forgiveness, a radical refusal to answer slander, to not fight back, to day after day after day live amidst provocation. This may be our walking out on the water. Picture Peter as he stood by the side of the boat, wind blowing his hair back and forth, rain driving into his forehead, his brethren muttering "You're absolutely *crazy*, there's no need for this...we're only going to have to save you ourselves". He must have felt so alone. There was no human encouragement. Probably his thoughts went back to the wife and kids he had left behind on the other side of the lake, in that humble home in that quaint fishing village. But his focus was upon one Man, the same Lord and Master whom we look out to from the sides of our ships. The sheer bravery of Peter's walking on water stands out. Was he afraid to walk on water? Of course he was. But he focused all his faith into the word of Jesus: "Come!". He overcame his fear to the point that he climbed over the sides of the boat. Picture him there, with one leg over the side and on the water, and the other still in the boat. He couldn't stay like that. He had to go only forward. The only thing that kept him back was fear. And it is basically *fear* which holds us within our comfort zones. Fear, fear, fear...that's all it is. To know 'truth' in its experiential sense should free us from fear; for fear is related to the unknown. God appeals to Israel: "Of whom has thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied?" (Is. 57:11). Fear leads to our abdicating from the responsibility of making choices; and this is why humanity has such a dearth of truly creative imagination, and why genuinely new ideas are so rare. But the true life in Christ is a life of repeatedly overcoming that fear, the fear which paralyzes, which holds you back. Let the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:13 be our heroine; she had totally nothing, just some flour; and she was hunting around in a parched land for two sticks with which to make a fire to bake it and eat her last meal, then to lie down in the dust of death. She must have been literally on her last legs. But then god through Elijah asked her to give Him even what terribly little she had. And Elijah encourages the frightened, wide-eyed woman: "Fear not!". And she went forward in faith and gave him her very last hope of life. Living at such an animal level would have made her very self-centred; but she stepped out of it in response to the Lord's challenge. Fear is, to my mind, the greatest single barrier to faith and true spirituality. It is fear alone which stops us from keeping

commitments, from not entering into covenant relationship as deeply as we are bidden. This is why people shy away from covenant relationships, be they with the Father through baptism, or to another person through marriage or having children. Fear holds us back. We fear even ourselves, our own spiritual capacity, our standing before the Father. Our inner anxieties, our unconscious inner conflicts as we stand with Peter on the edge of the boat, contemplating what walking on water concretely meant, often lead us to criticize others or to speak and act with a hypocritical bravado. Yet true faith asks us to risk. As a psychotherapist friend of mine once jotted to me: "We are asked to risk all we believe ourselves to be, we may find we're not what we thought ourselves to be, our constructs of the self will be pushed to the limit and we're afraid of what we may find of ourselves, that we may not be what we imagine ourselves to be in the construct upon which we have built our theories of the self. Obeying rules, staying within the construct, is much easier, much safer. We may have never tested ourselves in the real world. To launch off into the unknown, into a future that contains or may contain unknown risk, where our worst fears are realised, the greatest fear may be that we are failures....most of us, it would seem, don't have enough faith in there even being a God to risk even getting out of the boat let alone walking on the water". Don't underestimate the power of fear when it comes to walking on water. Nor let us fail to appreciate that the fearful are listed alongside the unrepentant whores and idolators who shall remain outside the city of God (Rev. 21:8). Our thirst for love, our fear of death and spiritual failure before a perfect God, the fear of displeasing or misunderstanding the infinite God...these fears should all be taken away for the man or woman who is truly clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet they have a way of persisting in our weakness of faith. And so there develops a conflict between our true conscience and the false suggestions of our faithless fears. All this can lead to neurotic behaviour and a repression of conscience. The only way out of this is to boldly step forward as Peter did, albeit bricking ourselves as we do so.

Peter's unswerving respect for his Lord's word is seen as he looked out of that sinking ship on Galilee, battling with his own humanity as he weighed up in his own mind whether to be spiritually ambitious enough to get down into that raging water. He only felt able to take such a leap of faith if he had Christ's word behind him. So he yelled out above the noise of the wind: "If it be thou, *bid me come* unto thee" (Mt. 14:28). In other words: 'With your word behind me, I'll have a go; without it, I won't'. How much spiritual ambition is there within us? Or do we huddle in the sides of the ship, or desperately expend our own strength to bring about our salvation, without even seeking the word of Christ?

Peter's request to be bidden walk on the water was (typically) both full of faith and yet also tinged by an element of unspirituality. His words as recorded in Mt. 14:28 ("If it is you, bid me come unto you on the water") appear strikingly similar to the LXX of 2 Kings 5:13, where a spiritually limited Naaman is rebuked for expecting to be asked to do something "demanding" - also connected with going into water!

14:29 At Peter's initial conversion, he had also been in his ship on the sea of Galilee, and had seen Jesus walking [s.w.] near the sea shore (Mt. 4:18). He left his boat, and responded to the call to follow Jesus. Now it's the same basic scene, but this time Jesus is walking not "by" the sea but "on" the sea. The similarity is perhaps to teach Peter that the Lord's real call may be repeated throughout our lives; the initial response may be relatively painless, but through the storms of life, the Lord teaches us as He did Peter how radical is the response required. To follow Him meant not merely walking away from the cares of this life, the boat, the nets, the fishing... but if Jesus walks on water, then those who follow Him must do likewise. And Peter, to his immense credit, perceived this; he saw his Lord walking on water as an imperative that demanded he do likewise. For him, Jesus wasn't just a Saviour on whose back he could ride to salvation in God's Kingdom. Yes, He is of course our saviour wherein we sink and drown in our weaknesses. But He is more than that; He is an inspiring example. His offer to walk on water wasn't motivated, therefore, by any form of inquisitiveness or daredevilism; the offer to walk on the water was rooted in his grasp that if this is

where the Lord walks, then axiomatically, we must do likewise. When the Lord walked “by” the sea, Peter had come out of the boat and followed Him; now the Lord walks “on” the sea, Peter perceives that he must follow Him even there. For “he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, as he walked” (1 Jn. 2:6- the same word is used as in the record of Peter’s walking on water with Jesus, making it possible that John is upholding Peter’s example for us all). For many, our conversions were relatively painless; indeed, for those raised in the faith, it may have been easier to get baptized than to walk away from it. But the essentially radical invitation to follow Jesus is repeated in later life; and the validity of our earlier choice to follow is put to the test by our later response to the same invitation.

14:30 When about to drown, Peter our example called out: “Lord, save me” (Mt. 14:30); and He was saved. When he later preached to the crowds, he encouraged them to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don’t stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him ‘Come unto me’ (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: ‘Come unto me...’. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord “caught” hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: “He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord’s ‘catching’ of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

Peter cried out “Lord, save me!” when most men in that situation would have simply cried out “Save me!”. But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. “Lord, save me!” was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His “sinking” (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are “scarcely saved” (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren (Acts 15:11).

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. Mt. 14:30 says that he began to “sink” into the sea of Galilee. This is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question ‘Who will be the greatest?’, that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. “sink”] in the midst of the sea- and his audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don’t swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were “tossed” or ‘tormented’ (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be “tormented” in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter’s salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he

drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: "Save me!". Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to "save [themselves]" by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

14:31 Mt. 14:31 records the Lord rebuking Peter as he sunk into the water. He rebukes Peter for his "doubt", using a Greek word meaning 'to duplicate' [Strong's]. Peter's lack of faith is thus made equal to having a double heart. James alludes here in saying that "A double minded man is unstable...ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6,8). James is clearly telling his readers not to be like Peter. It is easy for our reaction against Catholic extremism to lead us to under-estimate the high status of Peter in the early church. Here was James, also a respected elder, telling the flock to take a snapshot of their great leader Peter in his moment of weakness on the lake- and not be like him! Leaders of worldly organizations have a way of telling the flock that all their fellow leaders are as spotless as they are. But this wasn't the case in the early church. It was Peter's very humanity which was and is his inspiration.

The Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

14:33 After their failure of faith on the lake, they describe themselves as the men who were in the ship- as if they felt unworthy to call themselves disciples of the Lord (Mt. 14:33). Yet remember that these records were written or spoken *by them* in their preaching of the Gospel, and recounting their own experiences.

15:2 Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15).

Although the Lord was very hard in some ways upon the twelve, accusing them of "no faith" etc, whenever He spoke about them to others or to His Father, He was so positive about them. This is a valuable window onto His current mediation for us. The disciples were ordinary Jews who weren't such righteous men; they didn't wash before a meal, and the Pharisees criticized them. The Lord explained why this wasn't so important; but the disciples still didn't understand. And yet He justifies them to the Pharisees as if they *did* understand, and as if their non-observance of ritual washing was because of their great spiritual perception (Mt. 15:2,15,16). Surely the Lord imputed a righteousness to them which was not their own.

15:6 His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" (Mt 15:6) by our traditions or our lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.

To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6).

We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual

ego, rather than as a fast which he recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

15:7 “This people...” were not to be understood as only Isaiah’s hearers, but all who read this living word (Mt. 15:7,8). And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you*.

15:9- see on Mt. 15:2.

Mt. 15:3-9 records how the Lord perceived that “Your tradition... the commandments of men... your doctrines” resulted in the hearts of Israel being “far from [God]”. Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how “every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up” (Mt. 15:9). The Greek for “planted” is defined by Strong as meaning “Figuratively, to instil doctrine”. The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: “Thus have ye made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men”. And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a ‘first principle doctrine’ or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

15:12- see on Mt. 17:10.

15:13 One final feature of the parables of judgment calls for attention. They often speak of the Lord Jesus as if He is the role of God. This shows the intensity of God manifestation there will be in Christ at the day of judgment; and yet the way Christ manifests God so closely is seen in other parables too. Thus Mt. 15:13 speaks of the Father as the sower, whilst Mt. 13:24,37 applies this figure to the Lord Jesus. Likewise in the parables of Lk. 15, God the Father lost the Son, but Christ, the seed of the woman, lost the coin, and He was the shepherd who lost the sheep. In constructing these parables as He did, surely the Lord was emphasizing that the Father and Son are absolutely united in their attitude to us; it is on account of this that the Father can really know our feelings as Christ does, even though He has never been human. See on Mt. 23:37.

15:14 The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be ‘rooted up’ in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvelous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now ‘rooted up’, i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are “wandering” as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the “damnation of hell” in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work.

15:16 “Are you also *yet* without understanding?” (Mt. 15:16), the Lord asked the disciples; as if to say that He was surprised the disciples still hadn’t come to the understanding which He hoped the Pharisees soon would.

15:22- see on Mt. 18:11.

15:23- see on Mt. 14:15.

15:25 The Canaanite woman simply prayed: “Lord, help me”. The Lord’s response was to heal her daughter, with the comment: “Great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Mt. 15:25,28). She didn’t specifically ask for anything, but the Lord understood her few words as expressing her hidden will, and treated this as her prayer.

15:27 Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

15:28- see on Lk. 1:38.

The Lord commended the Canaanite woman for her understanding of the Hope of Israel and the Gentile's place in it: "Great is thy faith" (Mt. 15:28); great was her understanding, and therefore her faith.

15:30- see on Lk. 14:13-21.

15:36 Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

16:3 The "sign[s] of the times" which they wanted but couldn't discern can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the resurrection of Christ [cp. that of Jonah], because it portends the return of Christ in judgment.

16:4- see on Acts 17:31.

16:6- see on Mt. 15:2.

16:7- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

16:9 One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had wrought (Mt. 16:9). His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone.

16:11 The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it (Mt. 16:11,12).

16:14 The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

16:16 Peter had declared that Jesus of Nazareth was son of the living God (Mt. 16:16), even though before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!". Peter's

confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. The titles we apply to God and Jesus come to have more meaning to us over time. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord's death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: "Thou savourest not the things of God", straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus' Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn't yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: "This *is* my beloved Son... hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son's words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

16:17- see on Mt. 13:11.

16:18 Remember that 'Peter's real name was Simon. 'Peter' was a name given to him by Jesus- 'Simon the rock' was how Jesus surnamed him. And the name stuck. He became known simply as 'Peter', the rock-man. "The fact that the word *Kepha* was translated into Greek is significant. It confirms that the word is not a proper name; proper names are usually not translated" (Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (London: S.C.M., 1962) p. 21). There are many examples of names being changed or added to, in reflection of the Divine perspective upon the individuals (Gen. 17:5,15; 32:28; Is. 62:2; 65:15). It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their disciples such new names. The Lord likewise surnamed the sons of Zebedee *Boanerges*. Although Peter seemed so unstable, he 'dissembled' due to fear even in Gal. 2:11, he had the potential to be a rock; the basic stability of the man's tenacious basic faith was perceived by the Lord. We too will be given a new name, and it is for us to live up even now to the name of Jesus by which we have been surnamed in Christ. Even though it seems too good for us- we are to live up to the potential which the Lord sees in us. I even wonder whether it was the Lord's renaming of Peter which inspired him to the spiritual ambition of Pentecost- to stand up in front of the Jerusalem crowd, with all the gossip about his own denial of Jesus staring him in the face, and so preach that he achieved the greatest mass conversions of all time. Perhaps ringing in his ears were the Lord's words: 'You, Simon, are the rock, and upon you, Simon-rock, I will build my church'. The Lord entrusts us with the Gospel, and we respond to this trust and belief which He shows in us. It's like the schoolteacher telling the most disruptive child: 'I'm going out of the classroom for 5 minutes. You're in charge. And when I return I want there to be deathly silence'. And there likely will be. After the shock of the high calling wears off, the pupil often rises up to the unexpected trust given him [or her].

We can construct a parallel:

Upon this rock (of Peter fully and truly
believing in Christ as Son of God, with all it
implies)

I will build my church

When thou art converted

Strengthen thy brethren (Lk. 22:32)

[As Peter with hung head says] " thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee"	Feed my sheep / lambs Follow me to the cross, die my death with me
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Building up the church, strengthening the brethren, feeding the sheep- this is the life of the cross. Self-giving to others, all the way. Peter often shows that he is the pattern of every true convert; all must strengthen their brethren, feed the sheep, and thereby the ecclesia will be built up upon them too. Thus the Lord's words "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" can be read as meaning 'on this *type of rock and confession* as you exhibit and will more fully show, I will build up the ecclesia'. This is why Peter can tell *all* his readers to build up the house (ecclesia) of God (1 Pet. 2:5 Gk.), just as it had been promised he would after his conversion. Having promised that the ecclesia would be built up upon the rock of Peter's faith, the Lord promised him the keys of the Kingdom to enable this to happen. But He repeated this promise to the others, as if to confirm that what He meant was that all who follow Peter's pattern would quite naturally have the same abilities and achieve the same end, without consciously trying to do so.

Peter The Rock

Peter is presented to us in the Gospels as a believer who several times failed, who was unstable, and whose spirituality soared up and down. Yet the Lord nicknamed him "Peter". Because 'Peter' is a common name now, it is hard to appreciate that before the Lord coined this nickname, 'Peter' didn't exist as a name. "Neither *Petros* in Greek nor *Kepha* in Aramaic is a normal proper name"⁽¹⁾. Likewise C.T. Grant: "*Petros* was not used as a name at that time"⁽²⁾. Simon / Shimon obviously existed- but not 'Peter'. The Lord Jesus was nicknaming Simon 'the rock', or, 'Rocky'. The American 'Rocky' is rather similar- it wasn't a proper name in the English language, then it began being used as a nickname, and now it is becoming accepted as a personal name. Why, then, did the Lord nickname the most apparently *unstable* of the disciples 'Rocky'? Surely because He perceived, in His generous and gracious way, that beneath all the surface instability, the ups and downs of loyalty to Him, there was a wonderful base stability and rock-like faith and commitment to Him in this man. May we learn likewise to discern our brethren, and also discern the rock-likeness of the man Simon. And we may also take some comfort that for all our mess ups, we are seen by our Lord for who we basically are. And of course, it is Jesus Himself who is "the rock", just as He is the shepherd, and yet He calls Simon the shepherd (Jn. 10:11,14 cp. 21:15-17). He wished for Peter the rock to perceive that He truly was willing and eager to manifest Himself through him. Perhaps this is why John records Peter's name change as occurring at the beginning of the ministry, whereas Matthew places it over halfway through- as if the Lord needed to encourage Peter, as Jacob needed to be encouraged, to believe that his name really *had* changed in God's perception of things. It has been pointed out that the name 'Simon' was "the commonest male name by far in 1st century Palestine"; and that Peter was "originally not a name in its own right but simply the Greek word used to translate the Apostle Simon's Aramaic nickname, *Kepha*, meaning 'rock'"⁽³⁾. What this means is that the most mundane name was taken, and the owner of it given a totally unique and new name. And yet each of us are granted a new and totally personal name by the Lord, reflecting our essential personality; and this name will be confirmed at judgment day. The same researcher, who extensively surveyed all Palestinian personal names in the first century through study of inscriptions etc, came to observe that many of the new names given to Jewish converts were names which she never found given to anyone else- they were freak names. There is the case of John Mark- 'Mark' was "a name not otherwise known among Palestinian Jews", and yet he was given it. This suggests to me that it was a practice to give a convert a new name, either a made up name like 'Peter' ['Rocky'] which nobody had used before, or a name quite ethnically inappropriate to them as a Jew or Gentile. This would have paraded before the world their unity and the radical transformation that had overtaken them through their personality-changing encounter with the living Jesus. The great paradox that Peter was named 'rock' and yet was in some ways so un-rock like is carried over by

him being called a 'pillar' in the new temple of God which the Lord Jesus built (Gal. 2:9). And yet he, the pillar, collapsed under pressure from the Judaizer brethren. Yet ultimately, he was the rock and pillar. And we need to see each others temporary failings in the same way. Significantly, Rev. 3:12 promises to each believer that they will be made a pillar in God's temple; Peter is being set up, by this allusion to Gal. 2:9, as a pattern for us all.

Notes

- (1) R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* [New York: Doubleday, 1981 ed., p. 76].
- (2) C.T. Grant, 'The nature of the Universal church', *Emmaus Journal* Vol. 7 No. 1, Summer 1998.
- (3) Margaret Williams, *Palestinian Personal Names in Acts* in Richard Bauckham, ed. *The Book of Acts* Vol. 4 pp. 93, 104 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).

Peter And The Stone Of Daniel 2

Simon Peter, Simon-the-rock, emphasized in his first epistle that Jesus was the real rock / stone. But he clearly saw himself as manifesting Jesus in his work of founding the church of Jesus- as we are all manifestations of Jesus in our witness. It could be that Simon-rock was the man through whom the church was founded- for the mass conversions on Pentecost and straight afterwards were not repeated it seems. From those conversions the world-wide church came into being. Those converts, who were from "every nation under heaven", took the message back home with them. And later, through his preaching to Cornelius, it was Peter who "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles". Before Peter and the apostles, the gates of the grave would open (Mt. 16:18); and yet as Jesus makes clear, it is He personally who has the keys of the grave and of death. The Pharisees had shut the door to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), but Peter and the apostles had the keys to open it again. It was perhaps Peter's putting together of these two sayings of Jesus that gave him the courage to stand up and preach as he did to the Jews- the door had been shut, but the Lord had given him the keys to open it. For all his sense of personal inadequacy, he couldn't just sit and toy with the keys in his hand. Thus the work of Jesus was manifested through that of His zealous apostles and Peter. Through the Pentecost conversions, the reign of Jesus in the lives of men and women, the power of the Kingdom life, spread world-wide due to the witness of that man who was so, so aware of his failure, and who likely considered that he ought to be left on the back-burner for a while after his shameful denials. This all leads to the inevitable connection with the vision of Daniel 2. A stone hits the kingdoms of men and spreads to form a world-wide Kingdom. Lk. 20:17 describes Jesus as the stone who became the headstone, in His impact upon men and women here and now. It could be that the feet part of iron and part of clay refers to the Roman empire rather than a system of affairs that arose after the Roman empire ended. The 10 toes of the image correspond to the 10 horns of the beast in Revelation- and the horns were part of the beast / fourth empire, just as the toes had the iron element in them. Note that the legs are described as representing "the fourth empire" (Dan. 2:40), but the feet are not called "the fifth empire". Indeed the toes are spoken of as representing how "the Kingdom shall be divided..." (Dan. 2:41), implying they are part of the fourth kingdom (Rome) spoken of in the preceding verse. The heralding of Christ's ministry with the words "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" and His talk of it 'coming upon' people, being entered, received, unexpectedly found, and 'coming' (Mk. 1:15; Lk. 11:20; Mk. 10:23-25; Mk. 10:15; Mt. 13:44-46; Lk. 11:2) would likely all have been understood as a reference to Dan. 2:44 and maybe 7:27. Likewise Mt. 12:28: "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom has already come to you". In the person of Jesus, the Kingdom of God was amongst the people of Palestine. The Kaddish, an old Jewish prayer, was much recited by Jesus' contemporaries: "May God establish his Kingdom in your lifetime and in your days, speedily and at a near time". Jesus was surely alluding to this in declaring that in a sense, the Kingdom had now come nigh. He described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshiping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life.

John Baptist had described the Lord's work as a fan that would sweep the chaff away- replete with reference to Daniel's words about the sweeping away of the Kingdoms of men. The future political Kingdom of God will of course only be established at the Lord's return. The vision can only have its total fulfilment then. But the essence of that Kingdom, the reigning of God in the lives of Christ's people, those who lived out the spirit of all the parables which described what "the Kingdom of God" was to be like in the lives of mortal men and women...this began with the founding of the church of Christ. And this momentous act began in the conversions at Pentecost, made by Simon-rock. In the work of the disciples it would be true for Israel that "the Kingdom of Heaven has come near" (Mt. 11:4; 10:7). Peter as the leading and representative disciple likewise brought the Kingdom near and real to men and women in his preaching. Dan. 2:35 RVmg. speaks of how "the stone became a great rock". Unstable, nervous, mixed up Peter became the great rock of Christ, insofar as Simon manifested Him to the world in his preaching. Peter was the epitome of what would happen in the lives of countless others who would become "in Christ".

Whether or not one fully accepts the interpretation of Daniel 2 offered above, the essence of the lesson and the encouragement remains. That a man whose tremendous sense of unworthiness, awkwardness and embarrassment would have held back many a man in Christ, rose up to the challenge of witness. And he did it through gripping on firmly, even desperately, to his Lord's promise to him- that he was really Simon-rock, the one with the keys that could open the Kingdom's gates to people. And so he rose up and witnessed, and in doing so he manifested Jesus... and his Lord blessed mightily the witness he made. And each of us are in Christ, the true and mighty rock / stone. We each can manifest him as Peter did. For it is on each of us that He builds His church.

16:19 The keys of knowledge were given to Peter, and through his preaching they opened up the closed door of salvation to many who would not otherwise have entered (Mt. 16:19). Losing bonds is the language of bringing salvation and forgiveness (Is. 51:14; 58:6; Mt. 13:30; 18:27; 22:13; Lk. 13:16). And those keys are likewise in our hands too. If we introduce the Gospel of salvation to a man, the door is opened to him; if we don't, it remains closed for him. In this sense what we bind and loose is automatically confirmed by God, in that He has delegated to us the preaching of entrance into His Kingdom. Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]... if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

Peter was given the authority to bind and loose on earth, with Heaven's assent (Mt. 16:19); and binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. See on Mk. 3:17.

16:22 " Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee". Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from

fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out.

16:22-25. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*... if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

16:23 When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

16:24 There is a powerful practical result of the connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "*For* (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now

16:26- see on Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25.

17:1 An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have

preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

17:2 Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us (Rom. 12:20 = Mt. 17:2 Gk.).

17:3 The Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with his face shining as the sun (Mt. 17:3).

17:4- see on 2 Pet. 1:13.

17:5- see on Mt. 16:16.

Peter had heard the Heavenly voice bidding: "Hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). This was intended to take his mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

17:6 *When the disciples heard*- The same Greek word for "hear" in 17:5. When they heard the Son, they fell as if they were dead from fear; the fear that paralyzes active, responsive 'hearing' of God's Son as the Father intends. This would explain why the subsequent comment that Peter knew not what to say has a very negative connection with the situation when he denied Jesus (see on Mk. 9:6). Likewise "Arise and be not afraid" (17:7) is some rebuke of the fact they were "sore afraid" (17:6).

17:9- see on Mk. 9:11.

17:10 The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12).

17:11 There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord...lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not fulfilled by John the baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11). Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Isa. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. See on Jn. 1:31.

17:12 Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32-35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this

that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves.

17:17 An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

17:20- see on Mk. 9:23.

"Your unbelief" (Mt. 17:20). "Ye of little faith" (Lk. 12:22,28); they had "no faith" (Mk. 4:40). "Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25). They asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). Luke records that the Centurion had more faith than the disciples (Lk. 7:9).

The disciples didn't have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was "because of your little faith...if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove..." (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn't have the faith to cure the boy. But Jesus says they did have "little faith". He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him*, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*.

Just a very small amount of real faith during this life will enable us to move "this mountain", surely referring to Mount Zion in the immediate context (Mt. 17:20). The idea of Mount Zion being moved sends the mind to Zech. 14:4,5, describing how Mount Zion will be moved at the Lord's return; and also to Ps. 125:1, which speaks of how they who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; and yet Christ said we *will* remove it by prayer. The point of these allusions is surely to show that real faith will bring about the coming of the Kingdom, which is a totally super-human achievement; the unshakeableness of Mount Zion is likened to the solidity of true faith. The Lord's point seems to be that if we truly believe, then the coming of the Kingdom will be brought about by our faith; the outcome of our faith in this life will be seen in the Kingdom. But what our faith will achieve in the Kingdom will be hugely out of proportion to what it really is now. But there is another way to read Mt. 17:20: "If ye have (now) faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall (in the Kingdom) say to this mountain (of Zion), Remove hence..."; as if in the Kingdom we will be control of the physical world as the Lord was even in His mortality. In this case, His commanding of the sea and waves will be shared by us in the Kingdom; not just sea and waves, but mountains too (Mt. 8:27).

17:21 Give yourselves to prayer and fasting with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle (Mt. 17:21 = 1 Cor. 7:5).

Angels are of course active in answering our prayer, obeying the commanding voice of God Himself in Heaven- answers to prayer "go... out" by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The answer to prayer is therefore likened to a 'going out'- of the Angel and command from the throne of grace? This language of 'going out' is frequently used in the Old Testament about the going forth of the cherubim Angels. See on Is. 37:36.

17:24- see on Mk. 8:29.

17:25-27- see on - see on Mt. 16:16; 1 Pet. 2:13-17.

17:26 As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have.

17:27- see on Mk. 10:28.

The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith... a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. In those last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin...but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. See on Mt. 8:4.

Acting as He would act is really the whole key to not giving offence / causing others to stumble. He above all valued the human person to an extent no other human being has ever reached. When asked to pay the temple tax, which apparently few people paid in Galilee at that time, the Lord did so "lest we should offend them"- even though, as He explained to Peter, He was exempted from it, as the Son in His Father's house (Mt. 17:27). He could have appealed to higher principle. But the Lord was worried that somehow He might make these apparently mercenary, conscience-less legalists to stumble in their potential faith. We would likely have given up with them as not worth it. But the Lord saw the potential for faith within them. And only a few verses later we are reading Him warning that those who offend the little ones who believe in Him will be hurled to destruction (Mt. 18:6). Could it not be that the Lord saw in those hard hearted, hateful legalists in the ecclesia of His day...little ones who potentially would believe in Him? And His positive, hopeful view of them paid off. For a year or so later those types were being baptized, along with a great company of priests. People change. Remember this, and given that fact, try to hope for the best, as your Lord

does with you. People *can* change, and they *do* change, even those whom at present you just can't abide in the brotherhood.

The Lord seems to make a concession to the inability of the surrounding world to understand Him, when He tells Peter that as God's people, they are free from the requirement to pay taxes to the present world. But "lest we should offend them", we should pay them (Mt. 17:27). As the Lord spoke to men according to their level of ability to comprehend Him (Mk. 4:33; and consider how He used the language of demons), so should we.

18:1 The Lord had repeatedly implied that He would be the greatest in the Kingdom, because He humbled Himself the most. When the disciples asked Him "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?" (Mt. 18:1), they therefore reflected a complete lack of appreciation of His greatness. The disciples' immaturity and squabbling amongst themselves had led them to forget the superlative greatness of the One who stood and sat and walked amongst them. And conversely, they had failed to allow His surpassing greatness to make all discussion about which of them was the greatest absolutely irrelevant. Thus their perception of His greatness, the extent of it, and the nature of it, only grew *after* His death.

18:2 The Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

18:3- see on Mt. 13:15,16.

18:3,4 Solomon's words: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in", i.e. to rule God's Kingdom (1 Kings 3:9) are alluded to in Mt. 18:3,4; become a child so you can rule the Kingdom; Christ was the greatest child as he will be the greatest ruler. This sets Solomon up as our example in this respect.

18:4 On at least four separate occasions, the Lord taught that he who *exalts* himself will be *abased*, and he who *humbles* [s.w. abases] himself will be exalted (Mt. 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). This was clearly a major theme in His exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom; this is what will happen when that Kingdom is established at His return. He paralleled conversion with humbling oneself (Mt. 18:3,4). The humble will be exalted, and the exalted humbled. Because this will happen, we must *now* humble ourselves, so that then we might be exalted. The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled him* (Acts 8:33). If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. It was the logic Israel failed to comprehend... "When Israel was a child..." It is prophesied of those who will be condemned: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty [as Moses did in this life]. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Is. 2:10-12). "And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment" (Is. 5:15,16).

There are many similar passages; the theme of 'bringing down' pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). They pave the way for the announcement that in man's response to the Gospel of Christ, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a levelling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, "we make the answer now" by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God's grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9-10). See on Lk. 14:11.

It seems to me that so often in His teaching, the Lord was speaking to and about Himself. We understand from Phil. 2:8 that on the cross, the Lord "humbled himself". He used just those words in speaking of how the greatest in the Kingdom, the one who would be the most highly exalted (and He surely had Himself in view) was the one who would be the most servile in this life. His references to *becoming* as a servant He therefore spoke partly as exhortation to Himself (Mt. 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). The Mt. 18:4 reference speaks of humbling oneself in terms of being converted and becoming like a little child. This was lived out by the Lord in His life and ultimately in His acceptance of the death of the cross. Yet this is what "conversion" is essentially about. In the same way as the Lord Jesus Himself had to be "converted" even at the very end of His life, to accept the awfulness of the crucifixion with an almost child-like simplicity (in some ways- e.g. His silence when surrounded by evil accusers, just like "the child in the midst"), so we too will pass through stages of 'conversion'. Note in passing that the same idea of the humble being exalted is used by the Lord in Lk. 18:14 with reference to how the humble man recognizes His own sinfulness. Whilst the Lord was sinless, perhaps part of His humiliation and taking on a servant-form involved His acceptance of the full horror of sin, and His willingness to bear it for our sakes.

The Lord Jesus took a child and placed him in a circle of rough fishermen. Whilst humility isn't a natural characteristic of children, we are asked to take as it were a snapshot of that child in that situation, looking at the ground, pining away inside himself. The Lord said that the child had "humbled himself" (Mt. 18:4)- showing that He didn't see children as naturally humble. But as he stood (or sat, Mt. 18:2 Gk.) in the middle of the circle, the impishness and immature self-assertion was driven out, and in a moment the child was humbled. That child in that situation, the Lord said, represented the true disciple; and it represented Himself, the Lord of glory. It seems to me that the Lord was standing next to the child, identifying Himself with it, in the middle of the circle of disciples. *In the very same context, a few verses later* the Lord spoke of how He was *in the midst* of the disciples (Mt. 18:20). There is no doubt He saw that humbled child as the symbol of Himself, possibly implying that He Himself had been progressively humbled, from one level to another. Yet in Lk. 9:48, the Lord goes further: the child represents not only the believers and their Lord, but also *the Father* (Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48). The humble surroundings of the Lord's birth, the way the exalted Lord of life and glory appeared from the tomb dressed like a working man (whilst the Angels, far inferior, had shining white garments), the way during His life He spoke in such a way that reflected His lack of formal education (Jn. 7:15)- all this shows a humble, super-human Father. And His Son was and is the same. Indeed, Lk. 2:12 RV (cp. Is. 7:11,14) says that *the* sign would be that the Son of God would be laid in a cattle trough; this was to be the extraordinary indication that God Himself was involved in this wonderful birth.

18:6 A nice picture of the Lord's perception of the disciples is found in the way He said that the little boy who came to Him, responding to His call (Mt. 18:2) represented the "little ones" who believed in Him (Mt. 18:6). 'Little ones' is a title of the disciples in Zech. 13:7; Mt. 18:3; Jn. 21:5; and it is disciples not literal children who have Angels in Heaven (Mt. 18:10). The context in Mt.

18:11,12 speaks of the spiritually weak, implying the 'little ones' were spiritually little as well. Christ's talking to them while he knew they were asleep in Gethsemane and the gentle "sleep on now", spoken to them whilst they were asleep (Mk. 14:41,42), sounds as if He was consciously treating them as children- especially fitting, given their spiritually low state then. His father-like care for them is seen also in His promise in Jn. 14:18 RVmg. that He would not leave them "orphans", but He would come to them. The disciples were not orphans- because they had a true and real Father-figure, in the Lord Jesus. But the disciples were the Lord's children. John records in his Gospel only once how Jesus described His disciples at the Passover meal as "My little children" (Jn. 13:33). The Lord Jesus was acting as the father of the family, instructing his children as to meaning of the Passover. But the same phrase occurs seven times in 1 John. He had dwelt upon that phrase of the Lord's, and it clearly came to mean so much to him. Our child-father relationship with the Lord Jesus likewise needs sustained meditation. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was manifesting the Father, and thus leading the disciples to the Father through Him.

We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6. If we offend one of His little ones, "it is profitable for [us] that a great millstone should be hanged around [our] neck, and that [we] should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (RV). This is the language of Babylon's future condemnation at the last day (Rev. 18:21). But how can such a condemnation be "profitable" for us? Remember that James teaches that in some things, we all offend someone (James 3:2). Maybe the Lord is saying: 'When you offend others, as you all do at times, then you're deserving of condemnation at the last day. But condemn yourselves for it, now, in this life; that will be profitable for you, and then you need not be condemned at the last day'. It's a sober thought, that deserves introspection. We all offend others- let's give James' words their full weight. And instead of going down the road of 'Yeah but it was after all *their* fault they allowed themselves to be offended...', let's just allow these Bible passages their obvious meaning. Our poor attitude to others at times shouts for our condemnation. And we need to recognize that, resolving to live life ever more sensitive to our colossal impact upon others.

18:7 The Lord continues His theme of giving offence to others when He says: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! [The Lord must have said this after such careful introspection, knowing that He was the rock of offence to many, and that Jewry were to be 'offended' by Him]. *Wherefore* if thy hand or thy foot *makes you a cause of stumbling* [i.e. to others], cut them off..." or else you will be condemned (Mt. 18:7 Gk.). This is how important it is to search our lives and see what may cause others offence. And, in His relentless way, the Lord continues: "See that ye despise not one of these little ones" (Mt. 18:10), the little ones He has Himself just been so careful not to offend, by paying up His taxes. We offend people by 'despising' them. And, on and on and on, Jesus incisively takes His teaching further- in the parable of the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. To *not* seek others' salvation is to despise them. We may not think we are spiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are...if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation. And the shepherd seeking the lost sheep matches the man who plucks out his eye and cuts off his hand lest they offend others. So you see the parallels throughout Matthew 18:

Lest we offend them

Pay the temple tax, go fishing, make the effort

Lest we offend others and are cast into condemnation

Pluck out our eye, cut off our hands and feet

Lest we offend the little ones and are cast into the sea

Receive the little ones as if they are Christ, see the Christ in them

Don't despise others

Go out looking for the lost sheep with unlimited effort

Lest we are cast "to the tormentors"

Give unlimited forgiveness to your brother, try to "gain your brother"

The self-willed effort we must make to not offend our brother is quite something. Just imagine looking at yourself in the mirror, wedging your finger nails under your eye socket, and pulling out your eye. This is the conscious effort we must make not to offend, and thereby to save. It's really quite something. Note that the parallels tabled above show that to not offend is to save. If we seek above all the salvation of others, then we will not offend them. We will, quite simply, *care for them* as the Lord cares for us.

18:8 Mt. 18:8 says that it's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model.

18:8,9 The Lord bid us cut off the hand or foot that offends, and thus enter into life halt...blind, rather than be condemned in Gehenna (Mt. 18:8,9). It sounds as if 'entering into life' means entering into the Kingdom; and so it can do, for this clause is set as the antithesis for being condemned at the last day. Yet it is hard to imagine us entering the Kingdom somehow maimed, and in any case then we will not need to be without what causes temptation. The figure rings more true to our lives today; if we cut off our flesh *now*, we will live the rest of our mortal days somehow lacking what we could have had. In this case, we enter into life right now, insofar as we cut off the opportunities of the flesh. Jesus told another man that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments (Mt. 19:17). Insofar as he kept those commands, he would right now enter into life. We are entering into life, eternal life, right now!

18:10 The Lord had warned His followers to "despise not" the 'little ones' (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase in 1 Tim. 6:2 in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as 'little ones', with all the patience this would require.

The guardian Angels of Christ's "little ones", "do always behold the face of My Father in Heaven" (Mt. 18:10). There seem two options here:

- The Angels may be physically present with us on earth but also maintain a presence in the 'court of Heaven', perhaps by means of another Angel there.

- A more likely explanation lies in the meaning of the word "behold" - 'to look to, be aware of, perceive, take heed'. Although physically present with us, the Angels are intensely aware of the face of God which they behold when assembled in the court of Heaven awaiting God's words of command. The "little ones" in the context are the spiritually weak- does this have something to do with their Angels being physically absent from them in Heaven?

18:11 The Lord's parables describe those He will save as the son who refused to go to work, but later went, sheepishly aware of his failure; the sheep that went away, i.e. those Christ came to save (Mt. 18:11) (a symbol of us all, Mt. 18:12 cp. Is. 53:6); the lost coin; the son who went away and sowed his wild oats, and then returned with his tail between his legs. Christ expects that we will fail,

as grievously as those parables indicate. Yet we have somehow come to think that they refer either to our follies before baptism, or to those within our community who publicly disgrace themselves. Yet they describe *all* the faithful. But is there that sense of contrition in us, really? Aren't we more like the elder brother, or the son who said "I go, Sir, but went not" (Mt. 21:30)?

The Lord Himself was evidently very conscious of the inclusiveness of both male and female in His redemptive work. He came to save that [both male and female] which was lost (Mt. 18:11). He asked His people to follow Him in His cross carrying, and then told them to follow a *man* bearing a pitcher of water (doing woman's work)- probably a slave bearing water for the purification rites of Passover. In asking this He was requesting us to see in that man a symbol of Himself in His time of self-sacrifice. Yet the Lord saw Himself as a slave, a man doing woman's work, as the seed of the woman...surely the Lord had worked out in advance this wonderful blend of the genders in the figure He chose to represent Him. He spoke of leaving one's sister for His sake as being a sacrifice, whereas the contemporary culture would rarely have felt that way about a female relative. Jesus not only spoke to women publically, but is even recorded as allowing a Gentile woman to change His mind (Mt. 15:22). This was unthinkable and shocking to contemporary society.

18:12 The Lord's parables all feature an element of unreality, which flags attention to His essential point. The shepherd who left the 99 and went after the lost one was an unusual shepherd. Common sense tells us that one should think of the good of the majority, not max out on the minority. We invest effort and resources in ways which will benefit the maximum number of people. But the Lord turned all that on its head. The heart that bleeds cannot disregard the minority, however small or stupid or irritating it or they may be. For people matter, and the heart that bleeds will bleed for every single one.

To keep the faith to ourselves without reaching out into the world of others was therefore foreseen by the Lord as a very major problem for us. And indeed it is. Disinterest in ecclesial meetings and overseas brethren, unwillingness to really enter into the struggles of others, apathy towards preaching, all often as a result of an obsession with ones' own family... this is surely the sort of thing the Lord foresaw. We all have the desire to keep our faith to ourselves, to hold onto it personally on our own little island... and it was this attitude which the Lord so repeatedly and trenchantly criticized. And in his demanding way, he implied that a failure in this would cost us the Kingdom. He more than any other must have known the desire for a desert island spiritual life; but instead he left the 99 righteous and went up into the mountains (i.e. he prayed intensely, after the pattern of Moses for Israel?), in order to find the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12).

The lost sheep who leaves the fold and goes off (Mt. 18:12) is based on Ps. 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments". The lost sheep that is found therefore has the attitude of recognizing it is lost, that it is still the servant of the shepherd although isolated from him, and still has not forgotten the things of God's word. The picture in Ps. 119:176 is strange indeed: a lost sheep asking the shepherd to come and find him. It's as if the sheep talks to himself, feeling the shepherd can't and won't hear, feeling that he's just too far away. And this is *exactly, exactly* the position of all those who leave the faith and return: they don't forget the doctrines of the Truth, in their hearts they feel too far away, but they wish somehow something could happen to get them back. This explains the type of sheep one is dealing with in the parable, and why the parable isn't true of all who go astray.

18:14 RVmg.: "It is not a thing willed before your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" seems to refer to the guardian Angels who represent the "little ones" before the court of Heaven.

18:15- see on Lk. 17:3.

The purpose of it is *not just* for the sake of the brother who has erred, it isn't just a polite protocol to follow; it is for *our sake too*, who have seen the weakness of our brother. *Unless* we talk frankly to him about it, between us *alone*, then we will end up hating him in our heart (even though it may not feel like that) and we will gossip about him. The frank raising of the issue with our brother is associated with loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is actually the opposite to what we would think; we would imagine that it would be more 'loving' to say nothing to our brother. But in this case, we will inevitably gossip about him and be bitter against him. The practice of true love will result in an open community in which we can frankly discuss with each other the issues which concern us, with love and not hatred in our hearts. This is the teaching of Lev. 19:16-18. No wonder the Proverbs expand upon it so much. And no wonder the Lord appropriated it as a ground rule for His ecclesia- there must be no gossip in the church. See on Mt. 5:22.

The Lord's offer of different levels is possibly seen in Mt. 19:12: "Him that is able to receive it, let him receive it". But in terms of the parables, consider how the parable of the lost sheep shows Christ never giving up; but then there is the teaching of v. 15-18 concerning us trying to gain the brother that has offended us (Mt. 18:15 = Prov. 18:19), resulting in finally throwing him out of the church if we fail to reach an understanding with him. The teaching here seems to be that it is legitimate in such a case of personal offence to give up with the brother and separate from him. But the preceding parable shows Christ saying that He never gives up. And then in Mt. 18:22 Christ tells Peter ("I say unto *thee*", singular) never to stop forgiving his brother in a case of personal offence, up to 70 times seven. My summary of all this is that the ideal standard is never to give up in trying to regain our brother; but it is possible to live on the level of 'taking up' every issue with him, and eventually parting from him. 'But', the Lord continued, 'For you Peter, I expect a higher level; constant forgiveness of your brother, all day long!'.

18:16 The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6).

18:17 If your brother sins against you, you can go to him, then get the church involved, and then, the Lord says to the person sinned against, let him be unto *THEE* as a Gentile / publican. About the only advantage from the KJV is the way 'thee' signifies a 'you singular' as opposed to 'ye / you' which in KJV English meant 'you plural'. Modern English no longer makes a distinction. So, let such a person be unto *thee*- you singular, not your ecclesia- as a Gentile and Publican. And what was Jesus' attitude to them? To mix with them, eat with them in table fellowship, and try to win them. Clearly this is talking about personal relationships, not ecclesial disfellowship.

How we treat each other should be a reflection of how God treats us. We can make concessions for each other's weaknesses, accepting that some will live on higher levels than others; or we can demand a rigid standard of spirituality from them. I would venture to say that neither of these attitudes are *morally* wrong in themselves; it's just that as we judge, so we will be judged. For some time I have struggled with Matthew 18. It's a chapter all about forgiveness, of forgiving until 70 times 7, of never giving up our search for the lost sheep; *of being soft as shy children in dealing with each other* (a matchless, powerful analogy if ever there was one). But wedged in the middle of the chapter is the passage which says that if your brother personally offends you, go to him and ensure that he sorts it out; and if he doesn't, take someone else with you, then tell the other believers about him, and throw him out of the church. This always seemed to me rather out of context in that chapter. But there must be a point behind the paradox presented here. Perhaps it's something along these lines: 'If your brother offends you, you are quite justified in 'taking it up' with him, demanding he acknowledge his wrong, and eventually expelling him from the church. But- why not just forgive him, without demanding an apology from him?'.

18:18 The idea of binding and loosing occurs in Mt. 18:18, in the context of warning us not to be too hasty to cast a brother out of the ecclesia. It doesn't mean that any ecclesial decision has God's automatic sanction. But because salvation is related to remaining in the Christ body, the Lord may

be saying: 'By unnecessarily expelling someone from association with My people, you are endangering their salvation. I won't necessarily come to their rescue; I have delegated the keeping of that brother to you. You are your brother's keeper. If you throw them out, they will probably lose their salvation. What you do on earth in these decisions is not necessarily overridden by Heaven. The eternal saving of a man is delegated to His brethren, and therefore you also have the possibility of causing him to stumble from salvation'. The implication of this is surely that we should only cast out of the ecclesia those who openly and beyond doubt have placed themselves outside of God's salvation. And the Lord surely meant us to compare this against His command not to judge. He is surely saying in this passage: 'You can argue it out with your brother, and eventually get the ecclesia to disfellowship him. But by this you'll be saying that he is out of the way of salvation, and what you do may well drive him to condemnation; for it's a hard and unlikely way to the Kingdom without your brethren. And you know that you mustn't condemn him. So better just forgive him, 490 times / day, unconditionally'. Paul takes this idea seriously when he says that if he forgives anybody, he does it "in the person of Christ", and so, by extension, the church at Corinth did too, seeing they were partakers in that same one body of His (2 Cor. 2:10).

18:19 Some of the assurances that prayer will surely be answered are in the context of praying for others. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them" is in the context of concerned brethren trying to win back a weak brother (Mt. 18:19). Likewise "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us... if any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 Jn. 5:14-16). Again in a forgiveness context, Solomon asked that God would hear Israel "in all that they call unto thee for" (1 Kings 8:52).

18:20- see on Mt. 18:4.

This evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be.

It is where two or three are gathered together in His Name, that the Lord Jesus is somehow there in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). Perhaps this means that He is especially manifested / revealed in the gathered together groups of believers, in a special and far different way to which an isolated believer reading a Bible may know the presence of Jesus. All this must especially be true of the breaking of bread- the only other time in the New Testament we meet the three Greek words translated "I am in the midst" is in Lk. 22:27, where the Lord comments how He is in the midst of the disciples at the first breaking of bread. Of course, mere church attendance doesn't mean we perceive Christ there, in the midst of us; we perceive Him there insofar as we perceive the spirit of Christ in our brethren.

Consider the context of the Lord's comment that where two or three are gathered together, He is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20). It's about two or three being gathered together in united prayer and receiving the answer (Mt. 18:19). Receiving the gift of answered prayer is paralleled with the personal presence of Jesus in their midst. Answered prayer is part of His presence with us.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20) surely promises a special closeness of Christ when we are physically gathered together. All those who have made real effort to gather together for the memorial meeting will know the truth of this. Our community increasingly features many in semi-isolation; this promise of special spiritual blessing in meeting together is something which they can and surely *do* know the truth of. The close fellowship which was engendered by the Passover feast, as Israel huddled together in family units around the slain lamb, the focus of their love and gratitude to God, explains why Israel were repeatedly warned not to share that meal with those not in covenant with God.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20) cannot mean that the presence of Christ is only available if two or three physically gather together, and that He does not tabernacle in the individual. I would suggest that it means rather that if two or three gather in His Name, this is because of Him being in their midst; i.e. unity, gathering together, is only possible around the person and presence of Christ.

18:21 He asked: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?". Jesus responds with a parable in which a man who calls his king "Lord" is himself forgiven, but refuses to forgive another man. Surely that parable was specifically for Peter, the one who delighted to know Jesus as Lord. He was warned through the parable that calling Him 'Lord' wasn't enough. An appreciation of Him as Lord of his life would mean quite naturally that he had a spirit of frank forgiveness for his brother, not carefully measuring it out, but rather reflecting his Lord's forgiveness of him. If Jesus is really Lord, then everything which He does and all that He shows becomes an imperative for us to follow.

Peter asks "And how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?". Jesus replies, 70 x 7. i.e. to an unlimited extent, even when the repentance is obviously insincere. It's as if He's saying that yes you can go through the procedure of sorting it out with your brother and rejecting him from your personal company. But, the higher level, is to simply forgive him. It's like adultery under the Law. There were several options for the husband. Do a trial of jealousy and make her infertile. Stone her. Divorce her. Or, just forgive her. We surely all ought to be aiming for the higher level. Those who quote Matthew 18 as a reason for withdrawal are in my view living on a lower spiritual level than those who forgive 70 x 7. But the gracious Lord doubtless shall accept them too in the last day.

The Lord's comment that "If thy brother shall trespass against thee" (Mt. 18:15) then one could take the matter to the church was immediately picked up by Peter when he asked: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" (Mt. 18:21). The Lord's reply was that Peter should forgive his brother to an unlimited extent, each and every day. It seems to me that the Lord was saying that the 'one-two-out' attitude which He had just described was very much the lower level of response; He wished His followers to take the higher level, of unconditional forgiveness. Indeed, the whole passage where He speaks about going to see your brother and then telling the church is wedged in between His teachings about grace and forgiveness. It's so out of place that one wonders whether He wasn't saying it very tongue in cheek, perhaps in ironic allusion to the synagogue discipline methods. At the very least, He seems to intend the contrast between His surrounding words and those about 'one-two-out' to sink in, to the point that we realize, as He told Peter, that there is indeed a higher way.

18:22- see on Mt. 18:15.

The Lord's command to forgive 490 times per day (Mt. 18:22) is surely teaching that we have no ability to judge the sincerity of repentance; all we can do is forgive.

18:23 The king (Jesus) makes a reckoning with His servants right now, and it is for us to be influenced by the gracious accounting He shows towards us, and then in this life reflect an appropriate grace to our brother (Mt. 18:23 RV). The reckoning is going on right now, indeed in a sense it occurred on the cross.

The wicked servant owes 10,000 talents- one hundred million denarii (Mt. 18:23). This was a monstrous, unimaginable sum- in 4BC, the whole of Galilee and Peraea paid only 200 talents per year in taxes, one fiftieth of the amount. The annual income of Herod the Great is estimated at only 900 talents (New Jerome Bible Commentary). The Lord was using shock tactics to show how great is man's debt to God... and to throw into strong relief the sharp contrast with the way the fellow servant has such a trivial debt. The story is plain. The sins we perceive others have committed against us should be as nothing compared to the huge debt we feel personally before God. This

explains why the acceptable man prays with his hands on his breast- when every Palestinian Jew would have expected a story about a man praying to feature him with uplifted hands, as was the custom. The unusual element to the story brought out the extent of the man's contrition. Indeed, the total acquittal of the indebted man, with no further penalty at all, would have caught the early hearers by surprise. The man, they imagined, would have walked off surprised by joy, ecstatic, thankful, relieved. And yet he goes and does something totally unexpected and illogical- he grabs another man and demands he pay up his debts. The unexpected twist of the story of course brings out the madness of any unforgiveness on our part, and the awful nature of human ingratitude for forgiveness- just as in the two carpenters parable. See on Lk. 6:41; 16:8.

18:24 The Lord spoke of how when we sin, He 'takes account' of us and forgives us- and we are to respond by being frankly forgiving to those in our debt (Mt. 18:23,24). But the Lord uses the very same words and imagery in speaking of how at His return, He will "take account" of His servants and utter an unchangeable verdict upon them (Mt. 25:19). The connection of thought is surely to indicate that in our repeated experience of sin, coming before the throne of grace, receiving the judgment of condemnation, seeing it changed and responding by showing grace, we are living out the essence of the meeting with God which is yet to come. This is how God uses our experience of sin, repentance and forgiveness. The whole process is in order to give us an insight into the future judgment. The reality is that in those experiences of today, we can change the verdict. But in the last day it will be too late.

In a sense the judgment process has already begun; Mt. 18:24 says that the Lord has "begun to reckon" now, and so now we must urgently forgive one another. He is watching our attitude to each other here and now. Mt. 18:33,35 teach that the attitude we have towards our brother deep in our heart will be revealed and discussed with us at the judgment.

18:25 The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25).

The servant hopelessly, desperately in debt to his Lord is a picture of the believer's debt to God (Mt. 18:25). The Lord didn't say 'Well, don't worry about it, I've got plenty, just forget it'. He reckoned up the exact debt, calculated it with the servant progressively panic stricken as the full figure registered: and "his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made". Only *then*- and this is a crucial feature of the story- "the servant therefore fell down, and besought him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". This was of course a nonsense; he had no way of paying it. But in his desperation, at the very and utter limits of human feeling, he fain would pay it all. And only then, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him". This is not to say that the Lord is a hard man. But His frank forgiveness is not lightly given. Remember that God is elsewhere described as the magistrate who is to be feared, "lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite" (Lk. 12:58). And yet again, the Lord is not a hard man. In the context of our spiritual bankruptcy, "He constantly lendeth to thee" (Job 11:6 Heb.); and yet He demands our deep recognition that He deserves and in a sense should be given it all back. This will be our attitude, if we appreciate that indeed sin is serious.

18:26 The man truly wanted to pay the debt, but was unable. This should be our feelings about our sins. The man of Mt. 18:26 was forgiven his debt due to his *desire* to repay it, even though in fact he couldn't repay it. Sin can, in a sense, never be put right, it can only be covered over. And the man was expected to reflect his experience of forgiveness in how he dealt with his brother. Our fellowship of failure should be bound close together by our common experience of God's forgiveness. What we owe to God can never be repaid. Realizing this affects how we define what is repentance. Just one sin brings eternal death; after sinning, we cannot go back and re-live those minutes, hours, days or years when it was committed. All we can do is trust in God's grace and

believe that God will negate the just results of that sin. Because we are forgiven debts which we can never repay, we are asked to liberally forgive our brethren for their far smaller debts. It appeared that the man who owed a small amount was better able to repay it than he who owed much. But the *ability* of our brethren to repay the debt of their sin is not something we should consider. Surely this is what the parable teaches. The *ability* of people to repent is something we should not *consider*. God does not consider *our* ability to repay Him- for we are utterly unable to do so.

18:28- see on Mt. 20:15; Mk. 14:68.

We are to forgive the person who 'repents' 490 times / day for the same sin. Clearly enough, their repentance wasn't sincere. Yet we are still to show forgiveness without waiting for repentance. The parable of Mt. 18:28-30 implies that forgiveness involves us not requiring of our brother that which we could legitimately demand of him. That surely is saying that we are to forgive our brother without demanding full repentance in terms of 'putting things right'. We are to follow God's example of frankly writing off the debt.

The parable of the debtors splits the responsible into two categories; those who forgive their brother, and those who demand that their erring brother pays up what he owes, even though he can't possibly do so (Mt. 18:28). All of us who walk away from our annoying, spiritually weak brethren (as we perceive them) are playing with our salvation. The day of judgment will be a day of surprises for all of us.

18:31 What are we to do when brethren... refuse to speak to us, divide our families, cause others to stumble; and all the other long list, the endless sentence, which we could now write or come out with? How are we to feel, how are we to cope with it? When the fellow believers saw the unreasonable attitude of a brother against another, they were "vehemently distressed" (AV "very sorry" doesn't do justice to the Greek; Mt. 18:31). Matthew uses the same Greek words to describe how distressed the disciples were to learn that there was a betrayer amongst them (Mt. 26:22). That extent of distress can destroy men and women. So "they came and told their Lord all that was done". They didn't just "tell Him". They went and told Him. We are invited to imagine the process of coming before the Lord's Heavenly presence in prayer, like Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the Lord. The parable suggests there was no response from the Lord to the grieving servants. He called the offender to Him, asked for an account, and punished him. This speaks of how we shall be called to account at the Lord's return. But until then, there's silence from the Lord. But that silence is to develop our faith and perspective in the day of judgment. If there were bolts of fire from Heaven in response to our prayers, there would be no faith required, no longing for the Lord's return, no trust in His ultimate justice. The Greek translated "told" means 'to declare thoroughly'. Tell the Lord every detail of what happened, how you feel; what colour shirt he was wearing, exactly how she looked at you. Just as children artlessly retell every detail of a hurtful event. When they saw "what was done", they came and declared thoroughly to their Lord "what was done" (Mt. 18:31). The double repetition of the phrase suggests we should indeed tell all the details to Him; but not more, and stripped of our interpretation of them. Prayer isn't to be merely a list of requests; it's a pouring out of ourselves and our situation before God, as David taught us in his Psalms. And in this sense one rises from their knees healed and able to cope.

The believers of the parable told their Lord of the ungrateful behaviour of their brother (Mt. 18:31)- they brought the situation before Him, without asking specifically for something to be done.

18:32 The Lord was absolutely sure that He would be victorious on the cross; His parables speak of our responsibilities and blessings on account of what He knew He would achieve for us. Thus the Master in the parable is able to remonstrate with the unforgiving servant: "I forgave thee all that debt" (Mt. 18:32). The Lord's assumption was that He would attain our forgiveness on account of successfully enduring the cross. Yet He triumphed through His faith; although He was all too aware of the human possibility of failure, He believed He wouldn't fail, He made use of the constant

encouragement of the word to this end. He described Himself as the Lord of the servants, and also as the King (e.g. Mt. 18:23 cp. 31- there are other similar parables)- even before His cross. He had such confidence that He would be crowned as a result of His future cross. The tenses in Greek can be used very exactly (unlike Hebrew); it was quite within the ability of the Lord to build into His parables the concept of future Kingship. He could have implied 'When I'm King, I'll judge like this'. But instead He saw Himself as already having overcome. "Be of good cheer, I have (already) overcome the world... now I go my way to him that sent me (bypassing the cross in His words)... I have glorified thee... I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 16:33,5; 17:4); these are only a few samples of the Lord's remarkable confidence that He would overcome. This confidence is reflected in the parables. He was practising His own preaching concerning believing that we have already received what we ask for. No doubt His words recorded in Jn. 15-17 and the parables which reflected this confidence came back to Him as He struggled to quell His crisis of doubt in Gethsemane.

18:32-35 In the parable of Mt. 18:32-35, the Lord frankly forgave the heavily indebted man. There was no mention of any conditions. But when that same man refused to forgive his debtor, he was brought back into court, the debt was re-instated and he was eternally imprisoned until he paid every bit of it. The frank forgiveness of the debt, the 'release' from it, was actually conditional on him being forgiving to others subsequently. But that condition wasn't mentioned.

18:33 Yet the Lord's compassion is clearly intended to be ours, who are to live and move and feel "in Him". The Lord of the servant "*was moved with compassion* and forgave him"- the very words used about the Lord being "moved with compassion" for the spiritual and human needs of the Galilean Jews He lived amongst in His life. But the point of the parable was: "...shouldest not thou also have had compassion...?" (Mt. 18:27,33). If we have seen and known His compassion, ought we not also to show that compassion in the same way as He did and does? His compassion must be ours. The Samaritan of Lk. 10:33 was clearly intended to be interpreted as the Lord Jesus. He "had compassion" on the dying man of humanity, not counting the personal cost and risk; and then the Lord bids us each to go and do likewise. Our 'doing likewise' will issue in us too sensing the tragedy of those who have not heard, of those without a shepherd, of those who have fallen out of the way. We will be like the Father who was likewise moved with compassion for his wayward son (Lk. 15:20). The crowds of unknowing people who stream before us each day, the sad fact that we are so outnumbered in this world, that those you live and work with are dying in ignorance of the wonderful eternity that *could be* for them... that they live their lives in the darkness of selfishness, as existence rather than real life, without the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is in the face of Jesus Christ... all these things will powerfully *move us* to witness after the pattern of our Lord.

18:36 The big debtor was rejected because he wouldn't forgive his brother. The Lord says that He will make such a person pay all the debt (Mt. 18:36). There is a connection here with an earlier parable, where He spoke of how unless a man agrees with his adversary quickly, the adversary will drag him to court and jail until he pays all that is due (Mt. 5:26). The adversary of the parable, therefore, is the Lord Himself. He is the aggressive invader marching against us with an invincible army (Lk. 14:31), with whom we must make peace by total surrender. Putting the Lord's teaching in context, He is showing Himself to be very harsh and demanding on the unforgiving believer, but very soft and almost unacceptably gracious to those who show forgiveness.

19:6 As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together (Mt. 19:6); as *they* cleave to each other in the process of married life, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one has already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day

(Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

19:8 Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts (Mt. 19:8) and yet he himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See on Dt. 20:14.

19:9 Mt. 19:9.10 records how they thought that the Lord's policy of no divorce except for "fornication" meant that marriage was "not good". And yet the Genesis record clearly states that it was "not good" for a man to be unmarried. Matthew in his own [over-ruled] word choice seems to be commenting how they were out of step with the spirit of Genesis.

The New Testament is full of examples of concessions to human weakness. 1 Cor. 7 is a chapter full of this kind of thing. You could paraphrase it something like this: 'Basically, consider the option of not marrying. *But and if* you do, it's no sin. Once married, don't separate; *but and if* you do, this is allowable. If you are an elderly widow, it's best not to re-marry; *but and if* you do, OK go ahead'. The Lord Jesus recognized that these sorts of concessions to failures in married life had been made earlier; He spoke of how God through Moses had "for the hardness of your hearts" allowed divorce under the Law, although this was hardly God's original ideal in Eden (Mt. 19:8). The Lord Jesus spoke the word to His listeners "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), following the same pattern. The exceptive clause, allowing divorce for adultery, is a prime example of this kind of concession. And yet the Lord speaks in Mark 10 as if there is no allowance for divorce even in this case; whilst in Matthew's record He clearly allows it. The point is, God doesn't advertise His concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. Likewise Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn't want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

19:10-12- see on Mt. 5:43.

19:12 Did the Lord have the men of Hezekiah and Nehemiah's time in mind in Mt. 19:12?

19:14 The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mt. 19:14; Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it.

19:16 In Mt. 19:16 the disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "have eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally,

and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

19:17 *He* is the Kingdom of God (Lk. 17:21); *he* is the salvation of God rather than anything physical (Lk. 3:6). The Lord paralleled entering into the Kingdom with entering into "life" (Mt. 19:17 cp. Mt. 19:23; Mt. 18:3 cp. Mt. 18:8). He saw being in the Kingdom as essentially being about a *life* that would be enjoyed.

19:18,19- see on Rom. 13:9.

19:20 The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up". He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

19:21 The rich fool was not read by Paul as referring to some Hollywood millionaire; he saw that character as being in the ecclesia (Mt. 19:21 = 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

He treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them.

19:23- see on 1 Tim. 6:9.

The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt.19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt.19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in Mt.18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

19:23-26 There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Mt. 19:23-26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that Thou canst do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

19:24 In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom*. He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate (Mt. 19:24). This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expository gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts

19:27- see on Lk. 18:28.

19:27 Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit: "We have left all and followed thee... what shall we have therefore?" (Mt. 19:27). He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; sheerly for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshiping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:27-29- see on 1 Cor. 9:5.

19:27-29 We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

19:27-30 Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the Truth of this definition of priesthood. See on Rom. 15:16.

19:28- see on Jud. 16:13.

They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

The collapsing of time would explain difficulties such as how we can come before the judgment throne of glory when we ourselves are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

19:29- see on Acts 8:12.

The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfillment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members (Mt. 19:29). But the condition of the fulfillment was not explicitly stated.

20:1 The Lord likens us all to labourers sent out [cp. The great commission to us all] to work in the vineyard in harvest time, gathering the plentiful harvest (Mt. 20:1). Elsewhere the Lord likens labourers to the preachers. He clearly saw a primary reason for our calling as to preach and help others to the harvest of the Kingdom. He called us in different ways to labour for and with Him in this work; not to merely passively hold various doctrinal truths in intellectual purity, or to dumbly attend church meetings of whatever sort.

Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries... This figure of rising up early is surely the basis for the Lord's parable in Mt. 20:1- where God is likened to a man going out early in the morning to hire labourers. It is through the ministry of His word that God does this- each morning that word calls us to labour for Him in His vineyard. Israel didn't notice the huge effort God puts into His word- that every day He rose early and taught them. We can also misunderstand Biblical inspiration to mean that God effortlessly inspired "the original autographs" long ago, and moved on; but actually the whole process is an ongoing and incredible outgiving of God's energy in appealing to us. And... in our mismanaged, weakly disciplined lives, is it so that we don't even make time to read His word daily? If Job could value God's word *more* than His regular daily food... then for us too, regular contact with His word should be part of the atmosphere of life within which we live.

20:2 There is the suggestion in the parable of the labourers that the Lord makes some big concessions to human weakness. The Spirit in Paul points the contrast between realizing that salvation is by pure grace, and the wrong perception of salvation as a wage paid for works (e.g. Rom. 6). Indeed, the whole spirit of the Bible is that we should be willing to serve for nothing. The parable of the slave preparing his Master's meal after working hard for him a whole day makes this point. And yet in the parable of the labourers, Christ *agrees* with the labourers for a penny (note his humility, cp. God reasoning with men to accept His forgiveness, Is. 1:18); He asks them to go to work, and then He will give them the wages (cp. salvation). He even describes their salvation as "that which is right", so much did He present the Gospel to them from the selfish level they were then on. The Lord was not ignorant of the line of argument Paul would later present regarding

salvation by pure grace. Surely the parable is teaching that the Lord recognizes that in our spiritual immaturity at the time of our conversion, we do need the Kingdom as a carrot, as a motivator. He treats us on this low level initially, hoping we will rise up the higher level of grace. It is possible to witness this spiritual growth in converts, and also in the community of true believers over time; initially we are motivated by the reward of the political Kingdom, but as spiritual perception increases, we grasp Paul's gospel of pure grace. The concept of working and being rewarded decreases, and the recognition of salvation by grace increases, with the resultant zeal for a truer spirituality.

20:4 Preaching is a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the preacher. The labourers were called to go out into the vineyard because the Lord felt sorry for them, standing idle with no work or livelihood- rather than because He needed them. If this was his motivation, he wouldn't have called anyone at the 11th hour, neither would he have paid them all the same wages if he was only using them for his benefit (Mt. 20:4,5). God will call His people unto Himself without us doing a thing; and yet we have a responsibility and even a commission to take Christ to the world. The fact God will call His people to Himself anyway does not exempt us from the duty of witnessing; and the process of this witnessing is so often for *our* benefit.

20:6- see on Mt. 22:8.

The labourers parable indicates that the Lord's desire for response to the Gospel will increase as the coming of the Kingdom advances. Apparently He increasingly is the Jesus who understands human weakness. There is an element of unreality in the parable; the servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. The parable of the marriage supper explains why this is. We need to enter into the sense of urgency and tragedy which there was; the marriage of the King's son was going to be delayed because the guests didn't want to come. The shame, even anger, of the King (cp. God) and the bridegroom (cp. Christ) need to be imagined; and this really is the feeling of the Father and Son whenever the Gospel is rejected. And time and again it happens, from Sunday School kids to those hundreds who every year complete Bible study courses and turn away from the call.

The servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. And they get paid the very same wage as those who had worked all day. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. He will take on anyone who is willing to work, no matter how feebly, no matter for how short a time; the fact they are standing there ready and willing to do their little bit is what is important to Him. A man does not usually go out between 4 and 5 p.m. looking for more labourers, with sunset approaching. He must have had an unusually great need for workers, racing against time to get the harvest in. And this is the very urgency of the Gospel, and the passion of the Lord's desire to get the harvest reaped. God could reap the harvest of the earth, requiring not help from man. But He has chosen to work through men in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore the number of workers and their zeal reflects the amount of harvest of souls that can be reaped. The eternal destiny of others is therefore seen to depend on our extent of labour in preaching. It's also apparent that the amount of harvest was unreally huge- hence the unusual running backwards and forwards to get more workers. One expects the manager to know the size of the harvest and hire the right number of labourers at the start of the day. But in this parable, he doesn't. The awesome size of the potential harvest out there in this world means that *never* should we conclude that 'nobody's interested'. There is a *huge* harvest out there. And in passing, it can be noted that grapes have to be harvested at just the right time. If they're left even a day too long on the vine, the sugar content becomes too high and they are no use. We can perhaps infer that the parable describes a scene on a Friday, with the Sabbath coming on when nobody can

work- and yet it is *just* the right day for reaping the harvest. This makes the obvious connection in our minds- that just before the Sabbath day of the Millennium, in the last days, there is an abnormally huge harvest to be reaped. And this would connect with other Biblical teaching about a great appeal being made to all nations, just prior to the Lord's return. The parable also yields the lesson that those men would not normally work for one hour. We are to imagine those men with families at home who needed feeding. No pay that day, no food. But they were willing to do at least something. And their generous Lord simply pitied their poverty, so he gave them a day's wage- even to the 11th hour workers. And this is the Lord who has graciously hired us. Likewise, no rich King who finds that the wedding of his son will be poorly attended would go out and invite beggars. The element of unreality is that he so wants every place filled. No human King, nor his son, would want riff raff at the wedding, just because his own class of people turned down the invitations. But the King of Heaven is unlike any human king. He wants others to share in the joy of His Son, and absolutely nobody is too low to share; and moreover, He has a compelling desire to fill those places. The implication is that the net is being spread wider and more compulsively as the days shorten unto the supper.

20:8 At the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the judgment is of works in order to teach us self-knowledge. And this is why there will be a 'going through' of our deeds. In this life, we see ourselves in a dark mirror; but only when the Lord appears will we clearly see ourselves face to face. This coming to true self-knowledge will only be possible through the judgment process.

20:9- see on Mt. 25:23.

No employer really pays all workers the same amount as the 11th hour worker; no creditor would really cancel debts simply because the debtors can't afford to pay, and take nothing at all from them; no father would really give preferential treatment to a wayward son over a son who had never disobeyed him. But the point is, God acts in the very opposite way to how we do or would do. His grace to sinners makes no human sense. And He asks us through these parables of His Son to walk out against the wind and follow His example in our treatment of sinners. Our own natural sense cries out that he who works most should have the most pay; but the unreality of the parable teaches us that this principle is set aside in the way God deals with us. *Any* gift from the Father and Son is by grace alone. The elements of unreality in the parables often bring out the extent of God's grace. The fruit farmer [=God] asked His worker [= the Lord Jesus] to cut down a barren fig tree. But this worker had such fondness for the tree, he was so unusually concerned for it, that he pleaded that it be given some more time. This reflected the Lord's love for Israel, a love beyond all reason. Likewise, which wealthy person would ever arrange a banquet and invite the very dregs of society to it? Here is the Father's amazing grace. Sometimes we have to fill in the details [another feature of the Lord's amazing stories] in order to perceive this grace. The younger son, for example, demanded his share of the inheritance; and thus he lost his name, forfeited any claim to family membership, and openly showed that he did not wish to be part of his father's family. And yet he was received back with such grace and longing by the Father.

20:10 The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24). This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the

quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following.

We will be like the weak old labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment day clutching their 'penny' [of salvation], thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this... this coin... this is a day's pay". But we will be there. You and me. For all our doubts and fears, our chronic lack of self worth, for all the inward, unspoken struggles to believe and understand, that nobody knows nor even notices. We will be there. This is grace, and this will be grace. Truly there is all joy and peace through believing these things, "that ye may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13).

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

Before the Lord of the harvest, *having received* the 'penny' of salvation and Divine nature, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Robert Roberts wrote that he was certain that the only response of the saints once they are given Divine nature will be to break down in tears. And I agree with him. And the passion of Jesus may mean He does likewise. Being Divine doesn't mean you don't cry- in whatever way Divine beings cry. Which is why, in some ways, there are tears in Heaven as we pass through our vales of tears down here. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God even then (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?)- i.e. self-imposed shame and embarrassment; some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25). This all suggests that even after our acceptance at the judgment, we may be more 'human' (or whatever word I should use) than we may now imagine. More emotional, more seeking towards understanding, with a greater potential for eternal growth, than perhaps we have thought. Divine nature doesn't mean being passionless. Whichever hymn writer called the Kingdom "passionless renown" just, quite frankly, got it wrong [or was trying too hard to rhyme his words]. Because God *is* passionate; and we will share *His* nature.

20:12 Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:25).

Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the

Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

Perhaps the hard working labourers were sent packing by the Lord because of their complaint at the others getting the same payment for what they considered to be inferior work to theirs. If the parable is meant to be read in this way, then it seems so sad that those hard working men (cp. brethren) were *almost* saved, but for their attitude to their brethren.

20:15- see on 1 Cor. 6:19.

Those hired into the vineyard first "supposed (on judgment day) that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house... but he answered one of them (what's the significance of this?) and said, Friend (a description of the faithful, Jn. 15:15; James 2:23), I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is... I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Mt. 20:10-15). If the penny represents salvation, the harder workers only started questioning once they saw, to their amazement, the weaker and shorter workers receiving a penny. They received the promised reward of salvation, but couldn't understand the principles on which the Lord rewarded the weaker servants. If the hard working faithful will have a problem with this even at the judgment, how much more now?

The pureness of the grace of the Lord Jesus is hard to plumb. He knew that the extent of His grace would cause others to stumble. The element of unreality in the parable of the labourers shows this. He hired the labourers no-one else wanted, the old and weak workers, some of them only for an hour, and still gave them a day's pay. They must have walked away from the pay table with their heads spinning, scarcely daring to believe what they held in their hands- a matchless picture of the response of the faithful after learning of their acceptance at the day of judgment. But the outlook of those who felt their salvation (the penny) was less by grace than the others became bitter: "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Mt. 20:15). In saying this, the Lord was referring back to Dt. 15:9, which warned Israel not to have an evil eye towards their poverty stricken brother (cp. the unwanted labourer) who asked for a loan near the time of the year of release, when all debts were cancelled. In the year of release, Israel were "to remit every private debt... and not *demand* it of thy brother" (Dt. 15:2 LXX). This is behind Mt. 18:28, where Christ speaks of the man who demands repayment from his brother. The Lord is implying: You should live in the spirit of the year of release all the time, giving without expecting. Lk. 6:35 has the year of release in mind, in the idea of lending without expecting anything back. This only happened in the year of release. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good" is therefore saying that the Lord's grace towards the poverty-stricken labourer had provoked an "evil eye" in the others, they somehow felt that they were having to give to him, that they were standing to lose by his acceptance. Yet, as the Lord implies, this is a nonsense attitude. Of course we don't stand to lose anything by another's acceptance! And it's possible to reason that it was those 11th hour labourers represent the accepted, whilst the complainers are rejected ("Go thy way" has been read by some as meaning they were fired whilst the others were taken on permanently). But with what superb accuracy does He get right inside the future mentality of many in His ecclesia! How very very true this parable has been time and again in the history of our community. Discussion of and practice of the idea of grace has provoked untold bitterness amongst those who feel they live less by grace.

He foresaw that the hardest working brethren would be bitter at His acceptance of the weaker ones. His comment to them, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good" (Mt. 20:15) was quarried from Jonah 4:2-4, where Jonah is also asked a similar question after his bitterness that God had allowed Nineveh to repent. We must be aware that such self righteousness and uncomfortableness at the repentance of others is a feature of our very essential nature. The Lord Jesus overcame this aspect of His nature superbly.

20:16 God uses language in a relative sense in order to emphasize something. Thus we read of many being saved (Gen. 22:17), yet in another sense few will be saved (Mt. 7:14; 20:16; Lk. 13:23). Relative to the wonder of salvation, many will be saved; but numerically, the figure will be small, from the perspective of this world. See on Mt. 11:30; 25:19.

20:21 The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting *others* to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

20:22- see on Rom. 8:26.

He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... *I am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of "the cup that *I shall* drink of, and.. . the baptism that *I am* baptized with" (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions in John's gospel when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense "I am" there already.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out in Mt. 20:22: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said, We are able". Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

20:23 When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship,

He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is “shaping evil against you and devising a plan” against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, “to give you a future” (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23). See on Lk. 1:76.

20:25 The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations, e.g. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full of words containing the compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and “for their work's sake”. And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte*, *synodos*, *koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

20:26 One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

20:27 When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The “servant of all” would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking

to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by another writer: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church".

20:28 Is humility almost impossible for us, lifted up as we may be by our own sense of worth and achievement? Is a true service of *all* our brethren almost impossible for us to contemplate? Consider Mt. 20:26-28: "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister... your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". This is our pattern- to give out, with no expectation of appreciation or response. And the cross of Christ alone can inspire us in this.

20:32 He had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

20:33 One of the blind men Jesus cured summed up the feelings of all the others when he said that *the one thing* he wanted was to see (Mt. 20:33). Those healed blind men are types of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7).

20:45- see on Mk. 9:11.

21:9- see on Lk. 19:38.

21:13 The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at

least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

21:19 Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside (Mt. 21:19), whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

21:20 The disciples asked how the fig tree [cp. Israel] withered away so quickly. The answer, of course, was in that Jesus had faith that it would. He goes on to tell them that if *they* had faith, the mountain of Zion, the hope of Israel, would be cast into the sea of nations (Mt. 21:20,21). The Lord Jesus is surely saying that *His* faith should not be seen as separate from *our* faith. According to the faith of the disciples, the Hope of Israel, rejected by the withered fig tree of Israel, could be spread to the Gentiles. But the spread of the Gospel world-wide was and is conditional upon our faith, modelled as it must be upon His example.

21:21 Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

21:28 "The vineyard" must refer to the means of bringing forth spiritual fruit, according to the Lord's use of the vine figure in Jn.15. Being in the vineyard is therefore all about bringing forth the fruits of spirituality, glorying in showing forth the moral likeness of God.

21:28-32

For those Palestinian peasants, politeness and respect to your father was paramount. Even if you didn't obey your father, you had to be polite to him. Rudeness to your father or public disobedience to him was the worst thing you could do, and you shamed yourself. The Lord turned that understanding on its head in His parable of the two sons in Mt. 21:28-32. He taught that the *better* son was the one who rudely refused to do what his father asked, but later relented and did it. The Lord saw this son as better than the one who politely agreed, and yet never fulfilled his promise. Perhaps that parable needs reflection upon today, where 'nicespeak' has become paramount- so long as you say something nicely, what you actually are saying and what you *do* isn't so important. *How* we speak *is* of course important; but it can be exalted to the point where words rather than real action become paramount. But that aside, the point is that both the sons were *extremely* rude to their Father. And he was the most loving, self-sacrificial dad that two kids ever could've had. We feel hurt for the lovely old boy. One element of unreality is that he only had two sons- a small family for those days. How tragic that both his sons went so wrong and rebelled against him. And we sense something of his hurt, our heart starts to bleed for him, and we think of *our* Heavenly Father's hurt. And then the penny drops- those two boys are us.

There is a highly repeated theme in the Lord's parables. It is that he saw his people as falling into one of two categories: the sinners / spiritually weak, and the self-righteous. This isn't just the possible implication of one or two parables:

The sinners / weak

The self-righteous

The prodigal son (each of us) who genuinely thought he had lost his relationship with his father (cp. God) for ever (Lk. 15:11-32).

The elder son who said he'd never disobeyed his father (cp. God), and who in the end walks away from his father.

The sinner who hasn't got the faith to lift up his eyes to God, weighed down with the weight of his seemingly irreversible sins (Lk. 18:1-8).

The man who looks up to God with what he thinks is a good conscience and thanks Him that he is better than others, feeling that the sinful

The weak labourer (no employer wanted to hire him) who works one hour but is given a day's pay for it. We are left to imagine him walking away in disbelief clutching his penny (cp. the faithful with salvation at the judgment) (Mt. 20:1-16).

The builder whose progress appeared slow, building on a rock, symbolising the difficulty he has in really hearing the word of the Lord Jesus.

The (spiritually) sick who need a doctor, represented by the stray animal who falls down a well and desperately bleats for pity (Lk. 14:5 RSV).

Those with a splinter in their eye, from God's viewpoint, who are seen as in need of spiritual correction by other believers (Mt. 7:3-5).

Those who guard the house and give food to the other servants (Mt. 24:45-51).

The man who owed 100 pence to his brother (Mt. 18:23-35), but nothing to his Lord (because the Lord counts him as justified).

The man who takes the lowest, most obscure seat at a feast is (at the judgment) told to go up to the best seat. We are left to imagine that the kind of humble man who takes the lowest seat would be embarrassed to go up to the highest seat, and would probably need encouragement to do so. This will be exactly the position of all those who enter the Kingdom. Those who are moved out of the highest seats are characterised by "shame", which is the hallmark of the rejected. Therefore all the righteous are

brother praying next to him is somehow too far gone.

The strong labourer who works all day and complains at the end that the weak labourer has been given a penny. "Go thy way..." (Mt. 20:14) could imply he is fired from the Master's service because of this attitude. This would fit in with the way the other parables describe the second man as the rejected one.

The builder who appeared to make fast progress (Mt. 7:24-27), who apparently finds response to the word very easy.

Those who don't think they need a doctor aren't helped by Christ (Mt. 9:12)

Those with a plank of wood in their eye, from God's perspective, but who think they have unimpaired vision to see the faults in their brethren.

Those who are materialistic and beat their fellow servants.

The man who owed 10,000 talents to his Lord, but would not be patient with his brother who owed him 100 pence. He had the opportunity to show much love in return for his Lord's forgiveness, on the principle that he who is forgiven much loves much (Lk. 7:41-43).

The man who assumes he should have a respectable seat at the feast (Lk. 14:8-11). Remember that the taking of places at the feast represents the attitude we adopt within the ecclesia now. It is *directly* proportionate to Christ's judgment of us.

symbolised by the humble man who has to be encouraged (at the judgment) to go up higher.

The spiritually despised Samaritan who helped the (spiritually) wounded man.

The men who traded and developed what they had (Lk. 19:15-27).

The son who rudely refuses to do the father's work, but then does it with his tail between his legs (Mt. 21:28-32).

The king who realises he cannot defeat the approaching army (cp. Christ and his Angels coming in judgment) because he is too weak, and surrenders.

Those who think their oil (cp. our spirituality) will probably run out before the second coming (Mt. 25:1-10).

The apparently righteous Levite and Priest who did nothing to help (Lk. 10:25-37).

The man who did nothing with what he had, not even lending his talent to Gentiles on usury; and then thought Christ's rejection of him unreasonable.

The son who immediately and publicly agrees to do his father's work but actually does nothing. The Father's work is saving men. Note how in this and the above two cases, the self-righteous are rejected for their lack of interest in saving others (both in and out of the ecclesia).

The king who refuses to realize his own weakness and is therefore, by implication, destroyed by the oncoming army (Lk. 14:31,32).

Those who think their oil (spirituality) will never fail them and will keep burning until the Lord's return.

It makes a good exercise to read down just the left hand column. These are the characteristics of the acceptable, in God's eyes. Reading just the right hand column above (go on, do it) reveals all too many similarities with established Christianity.

21:30 Went not. In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

The Lord's parables describe those He will save as the son who refused to go to work, but later went, sheepishly aware of his failure; the sheep that went away, i.e. those Christ came to save (Mt. 18:11) (a symbol of us all, Mt. 18:12 cp. Is. 53:6); the lost coin; the son who went away and sowed his wild oats, and then returned with his tail between his legs. Christ expects that we will fail, as grievously as those parables indicate. Yet we have somehow come to think that they refer either to our follies before baptism, or to those within our community who publicly disgrace themselves. Yet they describe *all* the faithful. But is there that sense of contrition in us, really? Aren't we more like the elder brother, or the son who said "I go, Sir, but went not" (Mt. 21:30)?

21:32 Mt. 21:29,32 parallel 'repent and work' with 'repent and believe'. As the Lord said in Jn. 6, the work of God is to believe- in the forgiveness of sins. The experience of repentance and forgiveness will result in an ever deeper faith, and the works of gratitude which are inseparable part of faith. The parable speaks of repenting and going to work in the Father's vineyard; as if care for our brethren,

seeking their fruitfulness and that of this world [after the pattern of the vineyard of Isaiah 5] is the obvious work of repentance.

The Lord castigated the audiences of John the Baptist, that they did not “repent, that ye might believe” (Mt. 21:32). Repentance would lead to faith... and yet it is faith which leads to repentance. The two things work together to form an upward spiral of growth.

The good example of others contributes to our experience of the upward spiral. And yet if we don't respond to them, we can be held accountable for it and slip into the downward spiral. Thus the Lord held the elders of Israel guilty because when they saw the whores and tax collectors repenting at John's preaching, “you, when you had seen it, repented not” (Mt. 21:32). They should have been influenced by the repentance of those people; they should've allowed repentance to be contagious. But they didn't, and so they were held guilty for that. In Mt. 21:32 the Lord told the Jews that they were even more culpable for not repenting at the preaching of John the Baptist because the publicans and sinners had done so; and they hadn't. They should've changed their minds [‘repented’] after they saw the publicans and sinners repent- so the Lord incisively observed and judged. The implication of that seems to me to be that we are intended to be inspired to faith and repentance by that of others. This is why the Christian life is intended to be lived in community.

John the Baptist was a popular preacher. All Jerusalem went out to hear him. Even the hardline Orthodox were baptized by him. People liked his hard line austerity, his criticism of them. They lined up to hear it, and to confess their sins to him. But Jesus interpreted it differently. He said John's ministry was like children wanting to play at funerals with some other children- so they started weeping, but the others still wouldn't respond. Jesus came, piping; He wanted them to play weddings. But still they didn't respond in true repentance (Lk. 7:32-35). The Lord judged that Israel didn't respond to John; indeed, *if* they had truly received him, he would have been the Elijah prophet for them (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.). What this teaches is that believers can respond to a tough line, to the ra-ra of an uncompromising moralizing message; and yet not *really* repent nor accept the Lordship of Jesus in their hearts. Mt. 21:32 states clearly that the Jews generally didn't believe John the Baptist, nor repent. And yet they flocked to him in apparent repentance and were baptized. As we all know, repentance is one of the hardest things to be thoroughly genuine about.

21:35 When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35).

21:36- see on Mt. 13:19.

21:37 Think of how *eager* the Father and Son have been to find spiritual fruit in us. Through the centuries of His involvement with Israel, God had expected to find the fruit of justice in the vineyard of Israel- but He found only poison berries (Is. 5:4), instead of justice He found abuse and oppression of others (Is. 5:7). And all that despite doing absolutely all He could for that vineyard. But according to Mt. 21:34-38, this didn't stop Him from having a hopeful, fruit-seeking attitude. He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that “*surely* they will reverence my son” (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was ‘cumbering the ground’, taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree. But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, ‘*You* can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job’. This was quite

unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father. See on Lk. 13:8.

21:38 "When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves (i.e. conspired), This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Mt. 21:38). Mt. 21:38 is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. See on Jn. 7:28.

21:41 When the Jews spoke out the judgment they thought should come on those who killed the Master's Son, the Lord cited their words back to them as description of their own forthcoming condemnation (Mt. 21:41,43). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). See on Mt. 12:37.

God's aim is that we the husbandmen bring forth all the required fruits (of the spirit) "in their seasons" (Mt. 21:41). This indicates that over time, the various members of the body between them will bring forth every aspect of God's spirituality. The parable of the talents indicates how we have each individually been given something different by Christ. The parable of the pounds is along the same lines; as is the story of the Master who went away and left his servants looking after the house. *Each* of them was given his own *separate* work to do (Mk. 13:34). This accounts for the way in which each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do.

21:44 "Whosoever shall fall on this stone (Christ) shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Mt. 21:44). There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world. Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on Mt. 3:11.

We have a choice: to fall on the stone of Christ and be broken, or live proudly in this life without breaking our fleshly ways at all, until at the Lord's coming we are ground to powder (Mt. 21:44). This is an obvious allusion to the image of the Kingdoms of men being ground to powder by the Lord's return. The Lord was saying that if we won't be broken now, then we will share the judgments of the world, and be broken by Him then by being "Condemned with the world..."

22:1-13 The parable of the marriage supper (Mt.22:1-13) is what "the Kingdom of heaven is like". As with so many of Christ's parables, this one too is quarried from the book of Proverbs; in this case Prov.9:2-5, which describes how wisdom makes everything ready for her feast. The food and wine which is there represents the wisdom of God. The Kingdom of God is therefore likened to this supreme feast on the knowledge of God. The Kingdom will therefore be a feast of such things. We love God in this life, but surely we cry out for a greater understanding and appreciation of Him? Do we not cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding? If we do have this feeling, then we will be supremely motivated to strive to reach that glorious time of true knowledge.

22:3 God's servants (the Old and New Testament prophets - Rev. 2:20; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Am. 3:7; Zech. 1:6) were sent by God "to call them that were bidden to the wedding: but they would not come" (Mt. 22:3). The Greek word for "call" being the same translated "bidden", we have here an

example of the interplay between predestination and the calling of God through the Gospel - the word of the prophets/apostles 'called them who were (already) called' in God's purpose. This class must primarily refer to the Jews. The refusal to attend the wedding obviously equates with the Jewish rejection of Christ's work. God pleaded, "I have prepared my dinner", i.e. the Kingdom (Mt. 22:2). This corresponds with the Kingdom 'coming nigh' to Israel through the first century preaching of the Gospel (Luke 10:9,11) and the primary fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy in the run up to A.D. 70 (Mark 13:29).

22:4 He spoke of how "my [i.e. God's] oxen and my fatlings" had been killed (Mt. 22:4). Perhaps here we have an intensive plural- God's one great ox and fatted calf had been slaughtered, i.e., Christ had been crucified, all things were now ready- and therefore, on the basis of how wonderful that is, we should bid all men and women to partake in Him. "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready" (Mt. 22:4) relates nicely to our Lord's work ending the animal sacrifices.

There are ample hints that this parable should be given some reference to the burning up of Jerusalem in the last days. The prophetic "servants" of Mt.22:4 who call Israel to repentance are matched by a singular "servant" in the parallel parable in Luke 14:17. There can be no doubt that such differences are designed. We have earlier mentioned that 'Elijah' and his latter-day school of prophets will minister the word to Israel, which would explain the use in the parables of "servant" and "servants" - the group of prophets being led by one particular prophet.

Two Invitations- Matthew 22:4

Most commentators make the point that Middle Eastern banquets feature two invitations. If a person responds to the first one, then animals are killed in accordance with the number of expected guests, and then at banquet time, a servant is sent to collect the guest and bring them to the feast (1). It is this *second* invitation which is rejected in the story. The people have all said 'yes' initially. The meaning is clear. Christ our lamb has been slain- and now, we are invited to actually sit down at the banquet, to partake in the breaking of bread feast, typical as it is of the final 'supper' of God's Kingdom. "*Come*, for all is now ready" is a present imperative implying 'continue coming'. To refuse the second invitation is therefore unreal in its rudeness and in the sense of hurt and shock to the host. What is also unreal is that *all* the guests refuse it. What's also unreal is the evidently untrue and irrelevant nature of the excuses given. Banquets were in the afternoon / evening- which was not when work was done. Lk. 17:8 refers to the meal happening *after* the day's work has been done. One man said he had bought a field and had to go check it out. But purchase of property in the East takes a huge amount of time, every tree and wall is inspected with the utmost care before the field is bought. It would be like saying 'I just bought a house online which I've never seen in another country, tonight I have to go and see it'. Moreover, time constraints in Middle Eastern culture simply aren't what they are elsewhere. All the things people said they just *had* to do there and then could easily have been done another day. After all, they had agreed to come to a banquet. The man who claimed to have bought five yoke of oxen and had to rush to test them was likewise telling an obvious untruth. Kenneth Bailey comments on how teams of oxen are sold in Eastern villages: "The team is taken to the market place. At the edge of the market there will be a small field where prospective buyers may test the oxen... [or] the farmer owning a pair for sale announces to his friends that he has a team available and that he will be plowing with them on a given day... prospective buyers make their way to the seller's field to watch the animals working and... to drive them back and forth across the field to be assured of their strength and evenness of pull. All of this obviously takes place before the buyer even begins to negotiate a price" (2). Further, this farmer claims to have bought five yoke of oxen. This was a huge investment for a peasant farmer. He surely wouldn't buy them without testing them first, particularly given the long drawn out process of buying and negotiating prices which is part of Palestinian culture. Another point to note is that animals were all seen as rather unclean; to make an excuse for absence on the basis of animals is effectively saying that the animals are more important to the invited guest than the host. Likewise

the excuse to have just married a bride holds no water- because weddings were planned well in advance, it was obvious that there would be a conflict between the banquet and the wedding. Why, therefore, accept the initial invitation?

The host's reaction as we've noted earlier is also unusual. Instead of giving up, he allows himself to be even further humiliated in the eyes of the village by inviting yet more people- the beggars, the despised ones. He had invited people from his town- but now he invites people unknown to him, and finally, people from outside his immediate area, living under hedges. This desperate appeal, with all the mocking and shame which it would've brought with it, is surely Luke's preparation for announcing to us at the end of the Gospel our duty to now go out into all the world and invite all to God's Banquet. What we can easily fail to understand is that for those beggars, there would be a huge cultural barrier to refusing the invitation. The beggar would be amazed that he as an unknown person, from out of the host's area, was being invited to this great banquet. He'd have figured that something ain't right here, that this person can't be for real. 'What have I ever done for him? What does he expect of me? I can't pay him back in any form...'. And of course, they wouldn't have received the first invitation. They were being invited to immediately go into a great banquet with no prior invitation. And in all this, in this unreality, we have the strangeness and difficulty of acceptance of pure grace. Hence the host commanded the servants to grab them by the arm and pull them in to the banquet.

"None of those men who were invited shall taste of my banquet" may seem an obvious and even redundant thing to say- until we realize the practice of sending portions of the banquet food to those who were 'unavoidably absent' (3). They thought they could participate at a distance, not be serious about the actual feast. They thought just saying yes to the invitation and making dumb excuses was OK... that the host was so insensitive he wouldn't notice the obvious contradictions. They didn't stop to think of his pain at their rejection. But the point is, they had accepted the initial invitation, they wanted some part in all this, and the implication is that they expected to be sent their share in the banquet. Now all this becomes of biting relevance to us who have accepted the invitation to God's Kingdom. We all have a tendency to think that God somehow doesn't notice, doesn't feel, can put up with our dumb excuses for our lack of serious response. In a sense, 'All you gotta do is say yes'. I read a few sentences of T.W.Manson which just summed up my own conclusions from studying the parables, especially those in Lk. 15 which speak of the 'repentant' person as someone who is 'found' rather than does anything much: "The two essential points in [Christ's] teaching are that no man can enter the Kingdom without the invitation of God, and that no man can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice. Man cannot save himself, but he can damn himself... Jesus sees the deepest tragedy of human life, not in the many wrong and foolish things that men do, or the many good and wise things that they fail to accomplish, but in their rejection of God's greatest gift" (4).

We're not only the invited guests, we're also symbolized by the servants. Notice how the guests address the servant as the master, and ask him directly to be excused. As we've pointed out elsewhere, in our preaching of the Gospel we are the face of Christ to this world. We should be urging those who have accepted the invitation to enter in to the Master's supper, appealing to them, feeling His hurt at their rejection. To reject those who have accepted the invitation *on our initiative*, i.e. to ban this one and that one from the memorial feast because of our personal politics with them, is therefore so awful. The parable ends with the house not yet full- begging the question, will it ever fill up? Will the beggars believe in grace enough? How persuasive will the servants be? All of which questions we have to answer.

Notes

- (1) The many references to this are listed in I.H.Marshall *The Gospel Of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) p. 587.
- (2) Kenneth Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 97.
- (3) J.D.M. Derrett, *Law In The New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 141.

22:5 "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (Mt. 22:5) would imply that there was a period of crazy addiction to materialism among Jewry between the crucifixion and A.D. 70. This is confirmed by the epistles to the Jewish believers, notably James and Peter; it also finds a counterpart in our present 'last days'.

22:6- see on 1 Thess. 2:2.

"The remnant", i.e. 'the others', not involved in this materialism, "took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them" (Mt. 22:6). This found ample fulfilment in the Jewish-led persecution of the Christian preachers in the period A.D. 33-70. Note that it was the religious leaders of Jewry who inspired this, i.e. "the remnant" who rejected the Gospel for religious rather than material reasons.

The persecution of the prophets connects with the same thing happening in Rev. 11, where the two witnesses make a similar last-minute appeal amidst great opposition. We have commented earlier how the true prophets within Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion represented the Elijah ministry - and they too were persecuted. The servants were "entreated spitefully" (Mt. 22:6), as was our Lord on the cross (Luke 18:32). The righteous fellowship Christ's sufferings during the tribulation. The idea of persecuted servants occurs again in Rev. 11:18; 19:2, both of which passages have an application to latter-day persecution.

22:7- see on Mt. 22:11.

After the victory of Jud. 8:17, Gideon "beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city" for their refusal to help him during the pursuit. This is the language of Christ's return in judgment upon the people of Jerusalem, who are elsewhere likened to a tower in Zion (Mt. 22:7). Thus those Jews who survive the Arab holocaust but still refuse to learn the lesson of total commitment to their Messiah, will be destroyed at broadly the same time as their Arab enemies.

The king therefore "sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Mt. 22:7). The Roman burning of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 must inevitably be seen as a fulfilment of this. Stephen used the same word when accusing the Jews of being Christ's "betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). The Romans being described as "his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus.

"When the king heard thereof" (Mt. 22:7) implies that as soon as Israel's rejection of Christ came to God's notice, "he sent forth his armies... and burned up their city". This is similar language to Gen. 6:12; 11:5 and 18:21 concerning God 'noticing' man's wickedness at the time of the flood, Babel and Sodom. The judgments with which He reacted on those occasions were typical of the second coming. As Babylon burnt Jerusalem with fire, so it seems certain from many other prophetic references that literal fire will be used by Israel's enemies to inflict her final punishment. The Arab armies will therefore be those of God and Christ, as were those of Israel's earlier Arab invaders. They are called 'sanctified' in Joel 3:9 (A.V. mg.), i.e. 'separated unto' God's specific purpose in punishing Israel.

The casual rejection of the message of the prophets was likened to the hearers actively beating and killing the prophets (Mt. 22:7). The man who deceives his neighbour and passes it off as 'Just kiddin!' is described as a man is madly throwing around firebrands and arrows (Prov. 26:18,19). This apparently extreme language is surely to highlight the seriousness of sin.

22:8 The parable of the marriage feast highlights the tragedy of Jewish rejection of what could have been theirs. There will be an ever-increasingly vigorous preaching campaign by the "servants", seeing that "they which were bidden were not worthy" (Mt. 22:8) - the Greek implying not enough numerically. As a result of this preaching, "the wedding was furnished ('filled' - numerically) with

guests" (Mt. 22:10). This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Once the required number of converts is made, then the supper can begin. Their appeal being to "the poor... maimed... halt and... blind" suggests that the marginal and desperate within society will be those who respond- and this is happening right now in the triumphant progress of preaching in our day. The servants are sent "into the highways" (Mt. 22:9), the Greek meaning 'a market square'. This must be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). The very short probation of those 11th hour workers will match that of the latter-day converts. And again, it was the old and weak who nobody wanted to hire. See on Mt. 28:20.

We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord (Mt. 22:8).

The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). "The things that shall come upon them, sealed up among my treasures, make haste" (Dt. 32:34,35 Heb.). We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord (Mt. 22:8).

22:8-10 The reader who pays attention to detail will note that there is a difference in the parable between the king, whose armies are "sent forth", and the Son (Jesus) for whom the wedding was prepared. Dan. 9:26 teaches that the armies belong to Christ. This shows how that after Christ's ascension, all power over "the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5) has been delegated to Him by God, although ultimately God still holds that power. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecuted servants were sent out on a new preaching mission (Mt. 22:8-10), which presumably refers to the increased verve and sense of urgency in the believers (or just the apostles?) preaching to the Gentiles.

22:9 Mt. 22:9: "Go ye therefore [cp. "go ye therefore and teach all nations"] unto the partings of the highways" (RV) and invite people to the wedding feast of the Kingdom. The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish.

The Greek word for "lanes" is from a root meaning 'to deliver' -as if these handicapped people are cowering from the Arabs in 'places of deliverance', absolutely helpless, yet eagerly responding to the Gospel preached by the Elijah ministry. It may be that as the original Elijah preached without realizing the existence of a righteous remnant within Israel, so his latter-day ministry may be unaware of the remnant's existence until the very end (1 Kings 19:14,18). The servants are sent "into the highways" (Mt. 22:9), the Greek meaning 'a market square'. This must be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th. hour (Mt. 20:6,7). The very short probation of those 11th.-hour workers will match that of the latter-day Jewish remnant. They were called shortly before the close of work at sunset (the 12th hour), corresponding with banquets beginning at sunset.

It was totally scandalous that the majority of guests refused an invitation by the King (Mt. 22:9; Lk. 14:21-23), and that whilst the dinner was cold on the table, a desperately urgent expedition was sent to get people to come in and eat it. This is the urgency of our Gospel proclamation. And no King or wealthy man would really invite riff-raff off the street into his party; yet this is the wonder of God's grace in calling us through the Gospel. And such is the tragedy of humanity's rejection of the Gospel. To reject a royal invitation was tantamount to rejecting a royal command. It was unheard of in the time of Jesus. Yet people just don't perceive the honour of being invited by the King. Notice too how it is the King Himself who makes all the arrangements- not, as the initial hearers would have expected, a senior steward or his wife. But the King Himself. And this reflects the extraordinary involvement of God Almighty in personally inviting each of us to fellowship with

Him, through the call of the Gospel. Likewise that *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch.

The Lord Jesus is described as “finding” His people- the lost sheep, lost son, the idle workers in the marketplace (Mt. 20:6; Lk. 15:5,6,8,9); and yet He sends us out to “find” [s.w.] those who are to be invited into His Kingdom (Mt. 22:9), just as the disciples ‘found’ fish when they obeyed the Lord’s commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord’s work for Him in this sense. And yet of course people “find” the narrow way themselves, they “find” the treasure and pearl of the Gospel (Mt. 7:14; 13:44,46); but only because we have gone out and ‘found’ them. The Lord’s finding of us leads to us doing His work in finding others for Him and on His behalf. Thus Jesus “finds” Philip, and Philip’s response is to go and ‘find’ Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). And so it must be ours too.

22:10 When the wedding is “furnished with guests” as a result of the final appeal to absolutely all men, ‘all you can see / perceive’, then the wedding starts (Mt. 22:9,10 Gk.). “Furnished” translates *pletho*, which carries the sense of being filled up. When the full number of guests are seated, when a certain number of true converts to the Kingdom feast have been made, *then* the King comes in, and the wedding starts. This is what imbues our latter day witness with such a sense of urgency. Every baptism could be the last.

Good and bad guests come together to the wedding (Mt. 22:10), there are wise and foolish virgins, good and bad fish slopping around all over each other, wheat and tares growing together...this is a real emphasis. An appreciation of this will end the image that if someone's a Christian they must be spiritually OK, that we're all loving aunties and uncles, that somehow Christian = safe. I know this isn't what we want to hear the Lord saying. But whatever else are we supposed to take all this emphasis to mean?

At the time of Jerusalem's burning, there will then be a vigorous preaching campaign by “the servants”, seeing that “they which were bidden were not worthy” (Mt. 22:8) - the Greek implying not enough numerically. As a result of this preaching, “the wedding was furnished (‘filled’ - numerically) with guests” (Mt. 22:10). This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Whilst there may be reference here to an appeal to Gentiles, the implication is that it will be to Jews in particular. The servants go “into the streets and lanes of the city” (Luke 14:21), i.e. Jerusalem. Their appeal being to “the poor... maimed... halt and... blind” is right in line with the idea that the righteous remnant will be left in Jerusalem after her capture and burning (Zech. 14:2), although they will probably be literally maimed and blinded (cp. Zech. 14:12?) as a result of the fighting. It also connects with the righteous remnant being poor at the time of the Lord's first coming.

22:11 That the King Himself invited beggars into His feast also stands out as strange... what kind of king is this? And what fortunate beggars. Immediately, we have the lesson powerfully brought home to us. And why ever would a guest refuse the wedding garment offered to him on entry to the feast (Mt. 22:11)? The element of unreality in the story makes it stand out so clearly. And yet ask people why they are not baptized, why they are refusing the righteous robes of Christ, the call of the Gospel... and it is anything from clear and obvious to them. The scandal of the parable hasn't struck them. And there's another strange element to the story. Whilst the supper is still getting cold, the King sends off a military expedition (Mt. 22:7,8), but this is incidental to his desire to get on with the feast with his guests. Surely the message is that what is all important for the Father and Son is our response to their invitation, our desire to be at that feast, our turning up there- and the punishment of the wicked is not that significant on their agenda, even though it has to be done.

Despite the tremendous encouragement which will be given for the Jews to wholeheartedly respond (Luke 14:23), there will be a category among them who act on the servants' appeal, but ultimately are found lacking the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). This may teach that

some Jews will show interest in the message, but fail to respond in baptism - the only way to have access to the garment. It would seem likely that as John, the Elijah prophet of the first century, baptized with water, so the latter-day Elijah will do the same. Indeed, this being such a hallmark of his work (even during his life he was called "the Baptist", Mark 6:24), it must surely be a major feature of the future Elijah prophet. It is doubtful if God will change His prerequisites for salvation due to the circumstances of the holocaust.

Judgment day is not only for our personal education and humbling. It is for the enlightenment of us all as a community, in that there is fair evidence that in some sense the process of judgment will be public, and all the believers will see the true characteristics of those with whom they fellowshipped in this life. Thus the unworthy will be revealed as being without a wedding garment, and the faithful will see him (for the first time) as walking naked and in shame (Mt. 22:11; Rev. 16:15).

22:12 The Lord foretells the spiritual culture which He will show even to the rejected, when He mentions how He will call the rejected "friend" (Mt. 22:12), using the same word as He used about Judas (Mt. 26:50). Vine describes it as a word meaning "comrade, companion, a term of kindly address expressing comradeship". If this is how the Lord will address those who have crucified Him afresh- surely there is hope, abundant hope, for us. The suggestion is that there are Judases amongst us, although we can't identify them (and shouldn't try), just as the disciples couldn't. The evil servant who (in Christ's eyes) beat his brethren was a hypocrite, he didn't appear to men to be like that (Mt. 24:48-51); he was only cut asunder, revealed for who he was, at the judgment. He appeared to be an ecclesial elder who loved the flock.

22:13 servants- see on Rev. 22:9.

The rejected are described as being cast into outer darkness. This is even an Old Testament concept: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness" (Prov. 20:20 RV). The rejected will be "pursued into darkness" (Nah. 1:8 RV). It is doubtful whether this darkness is literal, unless there will be a specific geographical location into which they are driven which is totally dark. Mt. 22:13 might imply this by saying that "there", in the darkness into which the rejected are cast, there will be weeping (Mt. 22:13). It perhaps more implies a depression so deep that everything loses its colour. There is no point in existence, no meaning to anything. It could be that "darkness" is to be understood as blindness, which is how it is sometimes used in Scripture. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee. And their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit" (Job 11:20 RV). This is all the language of the final judgment. They will seek death and hope for it, because existence in the state of condemnation is simply unbearable. But remember that outside of Christ, mankind is likewise in such an unbearable state, if only he will perceive it. He is even now in a figurative furnace of fire.

22:14- see on Mt. 24:5.

When the Lord said that many are called but few chosen (Mt. 22:14), He was actually alluding to a well known saying from 4 Ezra 8:3: "Many have been created, but few shall be saved". He was as it were raising the bar. It was to be a minority of those called, not just a minority of all creation, who were to be saved.

22:17 The Pharisees resisted paying Roman poll tax because the coin of Tiberius held him up to be God. The Lord's response was that it should be given to Tiberius, but that which bore the image of God- i.e. our body- given completely to God. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this- even though the present writer is more than conservative in his taste in these matters]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body,

fashioned in God's image- and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

22:21- see on 1 Cor. 6:19.

Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The Lord's tolerance is demonstrated by how He handled the issue of the tribute money (Mt. 22:21). The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus ⁽²⁾. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

22:31 "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto *you* by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham..." (Mt. 22:31) quotes the words God spoke to *Moses* as having been spoken personally to *us*. The passage in the scrolls that said "I am the God of Abraham" was "spoken unto *you* by God", Jesus told first century Israel (Mt. 22:31). Note in passing how demanding He was- expecting them to figure from that statement and usage of the present tense that God considered Abraham effectively still alive, although he was dead, and would therefore resurrect him. Although God spoke to Moses alone in the mount, Moses stresses that actually God "spoke unto *you* in the mount out of the midst of the fire". The word of God to His scribes really is, to the same gripping, terrifying degree, His direct word to us (Dt. 4:36; 5:45; 10:4). This explains why David repeatedly refers to the miracle at the Red Sea as if this had affected him personally, to the extent that he could ecstatically rejoice because of it. When Dt. 11:4 speaks of how "the Lord hath destroyed [the Egyptians] unto this day", it sounds as if we are to understand each victory and achievement of God as somehow ongoing right down to our own day and our own lives and experience. Thus Ps. 114:5,6 RV describes the Red Sea as even now fleeing before God's people. And thus because of the records of God's past activities, we should be motivated in our decisions now. Josh. 24:13,14 reminds Israel of the record of their past history with God, and then on this basis exhorts them: "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him...". See on Jn. 6:31; Heb. 11:4.

22:40 That God is one is a command, an imperative to action (Mk. 12:28,29). It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The

Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

23:3 Put together two scriptures in your mind: "You must obey [the Pharisees] and do everything they tell you"; and, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees" (Mt. 23:3; 16:6). Surely the Lord is teaching that we should respect elders but never cease personally analyzing what they teach for ourselves. Once we stop doing this, we start resigning our own personality and will be unable to follow our Lord personally, i.e. with our own persons. And then we will be ripe for being caused to stumble, if those elders we are listening to then offend us. For 'we', with all that we are, will have been dominated by them.

When Jesus spoke, the people were amazed at His authority, which was not as the Scribes. They had 'authority' by reason of their position; He had authority by reason of who He was, and the way He made God's word live in flesh before their eyes. Which is why the Lord Himself taught that we should not follow the words of a spiritual leader, but only the deeds which we see them actually doing (Mt. 23:3). It has been observed that in such systems the leaders often use 'proof texts' in order to almost bully the flock into producing certain works / behaviours. And the flock will tend to follow the leaders in using the same method, rather than more comprehensively dividing the word of truth. Jesus was the word made flesh.

The Pharisees did all the works, but in their hearts they never knew God, and finally went and did His Son to death. The Lord plays on the fact that ultimately, in God's eyes, they did not work at all: "Do not ye after their works; for they say, and *do* not" (Mt. 23:3). We are left to imagine the anger of those zealous men. They *did* do works, as the Lord observed. But to Him, ultimately they did nothing at all. They had no genuine motives.

23:4- see on Ex. 2:11; Mt. 23:25.

Legalism and human religion are a burden laid on men's shoulders. But the cross of Jesus is also a burden laid upon our shoulders (Mt. 23:4). The greatness of the demands of the cross free us from the burdens of man's legalism. But it's still a choice, between a cross and a cross. See on Mt. 3:11.

23:8- see on Mk. 9:11.

Just because we are all brothers, actually something *more than physical brothers and sisters*, we are not to call any of us 'Master', because if we do, it will distract us from our personal looking to Jesus as Lord and Master (Mt. 23:8). This is why anything that even suggests a personality cult built around leading brethren, no matter how wonderful they are or were, really must be avoided. For it takes us away from the one and only Lord and Master. Whatever leaders or organisers we have, we are to call nobody our 'father' in a spiritual sense (Mt. 23:8). The wonder of our relationship with *the* Father ought to mean that we never do this. Above all, we are all brethren in Christ. John refers to himself as the brother of the congregation (Rev. 1:9), and the leading apostles were addressed as 'brother' just as much as anyone else in the ecclesia (Acts 21:20; 2 Pet. 3:15). There may be leaders among brothers (Acts 15:22), but we are still essentially brethren. The intimate inter-connectedness of the family must ever remain; which explains why Paul is called 'Paul' and not a longer form of address. Likewise I'd suggest that the practice of calling each other by our first names, with the prefix 'brother' or 'sister', is healthy; and, indeed, a privilege. Reference to a brother as 'Dr.' or 'Mr.' seems to me to be quite at variance with the family nature of our relationship.

23:8,9 Although the twelve called Jesus 'Rabbi', they didn't respect Him initially as the *only* Rabbi. Because the disciples were too influenced by Judaism. The Lord has to remind the disciples to call no man their rabbi or 'father' on earth, i.e. in the land, of Israel (Mt. 23:8,9). 'Father' was a common

title for the rabbis, who referred to their disciples as their 'sons'. The disciples clearly respected the apostate rabbis far more than He wanted them to.

23:9 We can easily overlook the deep and awesome significance of calling our fellow believers "brother" and "sister". As Paul so strongly stresses, the Lord Jesus created a new sense of family, of "social identity". We can easily miss how radical this was in first century Palestine; just as we can miss it in our own context. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, families were supremely important. The head of the family exercised total control. For the Lord to teach that His followers should call no man on earth their father was extreme; and yet He said it and expected it (Mt. 23:9).

23:12- see on Lk. 1:48.

23:13 The Pharisees had the "key of knowledge" that enabled men to reach the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52); but they took it away from men, and thus stopped them entering (Mt. 23:13). Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53).

If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others.

23:15- see on Mt. 17:12.

23:21 "Him that dwelleth" in the sanctuary / Most Holy (Mt. 23:21,35 RVmg.) could be a reference to an Angel who dwelt there- see on Ps. 78:60.

23:23- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

23:25 Time and again Paul warns his brethren not to behave like the Pharisees did in various incidents in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 23:4 = Acts 15:10; Mt. 23:25 Gk. = 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul is saying 'If you lust inwardly but outwardly appear to have rejected marriage for the sake of the Gospel, you're like those condemned Pharisees'). Let it be noted that the danger of Pharisaism, of spiritual hypocrisy, of adopting a hard line on issues which in essence we too fail in, was a great theme with Paul.

23:28 The Lord Jesus perceptively commented that hypocrisy is something which is *within* (Mt. 23:28)- it's about acting out a role *inside* ourselves, a split personality *within* a person, whereby they kid themselves they are someone whom they are not. Their real self and their shadow self are in conflict deep within their minds, in their own self-perceptions they act one way when their real self is something different. And this all goes on *within* the human mind. Hence Paul speaks of hypocrisy being essentially a lie which is told within the mind, and parallels it with a conscience which no longer functions properly (1 Tim. 4:2). The Lord's definition of hypocrisy therefore concerned an internal state of mind- and He warned that this is a yeast which inevitably spreads to others (Lk. 12:1). Thus Barnabas was carried away into hypocrisy by the hypocrisy of others (Gal. 2:13). Although it's so deeply internal, the dissonance between the real self and the portrayed self that goes on *within* human minds somehow becomes a spirit which influences others. And that's how society has become so desperately hypocritical. James 5:12 gives some good practical advice in all this- our yes should mean yes and our no should be no, or else we will fall into hypocrisy (Gk.- AV "condemnation" is a terribly misleading translation). James seems to be saying that we can guard against falling into the hypocritical life and mindset by ensuring that our words, feeling and intentions are directly and simply stated, with meaning to the words, with congruence between our real self and the words we speak.

23:31- see on Mt. 15:2.

The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29).

Through our unfaithful actions now we will be witnesses against ourselves at the final judgment (Mt. 23:31); indeed, in that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfill the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

23:32- see on Phil. 2:15.

23:37 "How often would I have *gathered* thy children together" (Mt. 23:37), He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world.

Many of the descriptions of Christ in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37) is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! See on Mt. 15:13.

23:38- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

23:39 When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:39). This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say "Blessed is he..." - as if the time of His return depends upon their 'seeing' / perceiving Him beforehand.

When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" - but be rejected (how else to understand Mt. 23:39?). Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

24:4 Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3).

24:5 The reader who pays attention to detail will note a significant use of pronouns in the Olivet prophecy: "ye" seems to refer to the faithful minority, who would (e.g.) understand, be persecuted, perish, lift up their heads, and finally endure to the end. "The many" (Gk. the majority) in the ecclesia would fall away. No fewer than four times does the Lord stress that "the majority" would be deceived by false prophets, be offended, and have their love wax cold (Mt. 24:5,10,11,12). Probably he connected this, at least in his own mind, with his earlier statement that "the many" would be called to his truth, but not chosen (Mt. 22:14). This difference between "the many / majority" in the ecclesia and the minority of suffering faithful is a theme in the parables which are an appendix to the Olivet prophecy.

24:7 It seems likely therefore that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the Arab world. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its' existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, after the example of Saddam Hussein, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

24:8 The sufferings of that time are called "birth pangs" (Mt.24:8); exactly the description given to our Lord's painful death (Acts 2:24). See on Mk. 13:13.

One of the most telling uses of parenthesis (and the most misunderstood) is in the Olivet prophecy. We frequently struggle to understand which verses apply to AD70 and which to the last days. But if Mt. 24:8-22 are read as a parenthesis specifically concerning the events of AD70, all becomes clear: the first seven verses and Mt. 24:23 ff. refer to events of both the last days and AD70. Try doing the same in Lk. 21.

24:11 A comparison of Mt.24:11 and 24 suggests that there will be two particular periods of false prophet activity- at the outbreak of the persecution, and then immediately prior to the Lord's return. This latter group reason that Christ's second coming has already occurred in some non-literal form. Thus v.27 speaks as if the clear return of Christ in the clouds will prove them wrong. These men would equate with Peter's description of some within the ecclesia of the last days saying "Where is the promise of his coming?" .

24:12 Mt. 24:12 specifically states that the love- *agape* – of the majority will be lost in the latter day community of believers, whilst peoples from all nations hear and accept the Gospel. Could this mean that the established groups of believers lose their *agape* whilst the real fire of the Truth spreads to the new converts made during the great tribulation, as spoken of in Rev. 7. The parables of Mt. 25 seem to refer specifically to the state of the latter day believers.

"Because iniquity shall abound (within the ecclesia?), the love of many ("the many", R.V.- the majority) shall wax cold" (Mt.24:12). Bad spiritual standards will spread like cancer in the last days. Thus the ecclesial leaders of the last days must beware of the temptation to be overharsh on the faithful remnant, whilst eating and drinking with "the drunken", i.e. those elements in the ecclesia who will be unprepared for the Lord's coming.

24:13 The idea of enduring to the end and being saved (Mt. 24:13) is the spirit of the Lord's struggle on the cross (Heb. 12:2,3). See on Mk. 13:13.

24:14 Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last days of the first and twentieth centuries as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution).

The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "ye are witnesses... you will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand". This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in

judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. See on Mt. 10:16 22:8; 28:20; Lk. 14:17; Jn. 17:23; Rev. 12:11. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

"Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt.24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt.19:12,29; Mk.10:29; Lk.18:29). Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The word used in Mt. 24:14 for "witness to all nations" occurs in Mt. 10:18 concerning our being brought before judges etc. as a witness. Our behaviour during the final tribulation is the witness- perhaps the implication could be that there will be quiet believers world-wide before the final tribulation begins, and their witness under persecution will be the public proclamation of the Gospel world-wide of which the Lord speaks here? In the spread of the true Gospel recently we perhaps see the way for this being prepared. The word also occurs in the parallel Lk. 21:13- our behaviour during the final tribulation will be the witness we make. The reluctance of the early church to throw their full weight behind obeying the command to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel" was only ended by the cosy ecclesias of Judea being persecuted, resulting in their increased appreciation of their hope, and preaching it to those previously neglected nations into which they were driven (Acts 11:19-22). Are the Christian heartlands of Australia, North America and the U.K. in for something similar? That the mission fields are so white to the harvest but so chronically short of labourers indicates how nicely such a scenario would work to God's glory.

24:15 There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold

(same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

Christ gives a particular sign which will encourage the persecuted that they really are in the last times: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation... stand in the holy place...then shall be great tribulation" (Mt.24:15). This seems to parallel Lk.21:20: "When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh" . The tribulation that is to come upon the land of Israel, with the placing of a particular abomination in Jerusalem, will be the sign that spiritual Israel too must suffer. And at any moment now the oft foretold Arab conquest of Israel in the last days could begin.

The Lord says that when the abomination of desolation appears, then His people should flee Jerusalem; and "let him that readeth understand" (Mt. 24:15-17). Whatever application this had to the events of the three and a half years tribulation of AD67-70 was at best a sketchy and incomplete fulfilment. The tell tale phrase is "let him that readeth understand". This is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "*Let him... understand*" is paralleled with "*let him that is on the housetop [flee immediately]... let him that is in the field not return*". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "*Whoso readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then...do something about it'. "Let him that readeth understand" is yet another Olivet allusion back to Daniel (12:10); yet generations of believers have read those very words and *not* understood. Presumably the latter day remnant *will* clearly understand Daniel's enigmatic words about the abomination. Whilst we should live *as if* we expect the Lord's imminent return, it has to be said that we don't seem to have yet reached this level of understanding. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them. The expansion of understanding may be not only of prophecies like Habakkuk, Daniel and Revelation. Because Revelation especially is so full of reference to other passages throughout the Scriptures, our comprehension of the whole Bible will go into another paradigm. It may be that in the last days, *all* the words of God will in some sense be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17)- we will realize that the whole Bible is especially speaking to us, the last generation. Many of the parables are specifically aimed at the last generation of believers- they have a very secondary application to believers of other ages. They are specifically about the attitudes of those who will be alive when the Lord comes in glory; e.g. the wise and foolish virgins, or the men given talents, or

the servants left watching the household etc. The Lord's letters in Revelation speak of him being about to come, as do many other NT passages. They were written specifically for the last generation of believers! Their full meaning and relevance will therefore only be perceived by us. Take Rev. 3:20 as an example: "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Whatever else this may be taken to mean, according to its connections with other passages, this is clearly relevant to the Lord's second coming; the believer who responds to the Lord's voice in the last days will be rewarded with the Lord's coming. Verses like this and the parables mentioned above are pre-eminently relevant to the last generation. No wonder there will be a growth in understanding in the last days!

24:19 "Woe unto them that are with child" may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor.7.

As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk.23:29=Mt.24:19), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). See on Mk. 13:13.

24:20- see on 1 Cor. 7:29.

24:22 shortened – see on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days.

24:24 There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). It is these false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. In the A.D.70 fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

24:27 In addition to the overwhelming evidence that the Olivet prophecy *does* refer to our last days, the point must be driven home that 'parousia' *always* refers to the physical presence of a person.

There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but 'parousia' means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:-

- "As the lightning cometh out of the east... so shall also the *coming* ('parousia') of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:27).

- "The day that Noe entered into the ark... the flood came... so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:38,39).

24:28 That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled. Our Lord's quotation of Deut. 28:26 in Mt. 24:28 ("thy carcasses shall be meat unto the fowls of the air") is confirmation of this.

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is (Mt. 24:28). It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

When the disciples got carried away wondering where the future judgment would be and how ever they would get there, the Lord replied that where the body is, thither the eagles naturally gather. One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body... realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

24:29- see on Mk. 13:13.

"Immediately after the tribulation... shall all the tribes of the earth (land- of Israel) mourn, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming" (v.29,30). Then follows the fig tree parable. The chronology seems clear- a tribulation, repentance of Israel (note the allusions to the mourning of Zech.12 and 13), and then the second coming, with the fig tree parable about the repentance of Israel added as a footnote to this part of the prophecy.

The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Daniel 11:45)- just as the same individual does in Daniel 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord's return (Daniel 12:1,2). Likewise the Lord predicted that the final tribulation- which He says is that prophesied in Daniel- would be followed "immediately" by His return (Mt. 24:29). So the Lord's own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

24:30 When "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 24:30). Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns.

If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim (Mt.24:30), then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress.

The moment of the second coming ('parousia') is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of 'parousia' to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24: 30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70.

The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. They mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

24:31- see on 1 Thess. 4:17.

Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up..." hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

24:32 The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now

become tender”, i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God’s Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel’s repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that “he is near, even at the doors” (Mt. 24:33 RV). The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel’s repentance.

The Blossoming Of The Fig Tree

The other references to the blossoming of the fig tree build up a strong case for the suggestion that the fig tree parable refers to the beginnings of Jewish repentance in the last days, which will herald the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's return.

- Lk.13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in Lk.21 is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt.24:32). It is tempting to read this as 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

- "Ye shall know them (primarily referring to the Jewish false prophets who dressed up as lambs/Christians) by their fruits. Do men gather... figs of thistles?" (Mt.7:15,16). Thus the fruit of the fig tree is associated with signs of true spiritual development among the Jews.

- The prophecy of Habakkuk is concerning the coming judgment upon Israel unless they repented. In the last few verses the prophet reflects that even though Israel would not repent as a result of his preaching, he personally would rejoice in the Lord and maintain his own spirituality. He describes this in the language of the fig tree: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom (i.e. put forth leaves), neither shall fruit be in the vines (notice the equation of fruit and just blossoming)... yet will I rejoice in the Lord" (3:17,18).

- Jer.24:2-5 describes the Jews who repented during their 70 year captivity in Babylon as "good figs... that are first ripe". In the same way, good figs will start to be developed on the Jewish fig tree as a result of their passing through the tribulation of the last days, which will lead to their repentance. The arrogant Jews who were taken into captivity by Babylon learnt humility and repentance, thanks to the words of the prophets who underwent the same tribulation as they did. This points forward to the Jews of today undergoing a similar captivity and conversion as a result of the preaching campaign during the tribulation. Thus Lk.21:25,26 describes the Jewish sun, moon and stars being shaken, (Jewish) men's hearts failing them for fear because of the tribulation that is breaking over the land (A.V. "earth") of Israel. *Then* there is the fig tree parable; the repentance of Israel comes about as a result of the traumas in the land described in the previous verses.

- Micah laments the lack of spiritual fruit amongst the Jews: "My soul desired the firstripe fruit (fig)... (but) there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood... the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge" (7:1,2,4). This is probably the basis for Christ's parable about the Jews being thorns instead of figs (Mt.7:15,16).

- God recalls how originally the Jews had borne spiritual fruit, especially amongst the generation that entered the land (the most spiritually fruitful of all the generations of Israel?): "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baal-peor" (Hos. 9:10).

- The fig tree was to shoot forth tender branches. Is.30:17 implies that the fig tree being without branches symbolizes Israel under domination by the Gentiles: "One thousand (Jews) shall flee at the rebuke of one (invader)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches" (A.V.mg.). The repentance of

Israel- the tender growth of the branches- will therefore come at a time when they have no branches, i.e. at a time of Gentile domination of Israel.

Both vine and fig trees are used as symbols of Israel. It seems likely that the Lord had in mind the figure of Is. 18:5 in mind when constructing this parable. Here we are told that the vine must be pruned and some branches “cut down” (RV)- exactly the language of trial and tribulation which Jesus uses in Jn. 15. The result of this will be that “the flower becometh a ripening grape” (RV)- i.e. spiritual fruit is brought forth by tribulation (the same figure is found in Is. 17:6-8). And out of all this, “a present shall be brought unto the Lord of Hosts of a people scattered and peeled... whose land the rivers [Babylon, Assyria, in Isaiah’s symbology] have spoiled, to the place of the Name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion” (Is. 18:7). The fruit on the vine corresponds with the repentant latter day remnant of Israel; and the pruning of that vine to their sufferings during the final tribulation.

24:35 The Greek word *Ge* is used often for the ‘land’ of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- “What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?” (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- “That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation” (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used ‘heaven and earth’ for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

24:36 Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn’t enough; for what end will it be, if we don’t *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel “put far away” the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it “far away”? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It’s as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world... and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn’t saying ‘Well, you’ll never properly interpret what I’ve just said’. He meant rather: ‘OK you’ll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless’

24:37 It is a commonly stressed theme throughout Scripture that the days of Noah are a type of the last days of AD70. The clearest is in Mt. 24:37: " As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the son of man be" . It is generally understood among us that the events of AD70 and the " coming" of the Lord then, point forward to that in the last days. Thus it is not surprising that a

number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:

- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at the Lord's return.

- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.

- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.

- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.

- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.

- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

24:39 This latter day witness will be accompanied by some measure of persecution. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29).

Keil translates Daniel 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

24:41- see on Lk. 12:46.

24:42 The blessedness of the 'watching' is not that they have an accurate timeline in place; we must watch exactly because we *don't* and *can't* know the exact time of the Lord's return. We cannot, therefore, have a detailed timeline which tells us *for sure* that Jesus will return after event x or y. We can speculate, of course, but we cannot say for sure. The message is to be ready, to love Him and His return, just because we *don't* know when exactly He is coming (Mt. 24:42; 25:13).

'Watching' means holding to our faith and repenting of our weaknesses in Rev. 3:3- not interpreting latter day prophecies. This of itself won't make us spiritual people. The Greek word translated

“watch” is usually translated “imprison” - the idea is of guarding oneself and one's faith, “vigilantly” watching out against the [Biblical] devil [same word in 1 Pet. 5:8], rather than searching for the understanding of latter day prophecy.

We do not know the exact calendar date of the appearing of Christ; and yet we should be watching for his coming with the same intensity *as if* we did know the day and hour. This seems to be the message behind Mt. 24:42,43, where Jesus reasons that if the manager of a wealthy house knew when the thief was coming, he would have watched carefully; ‘And that’, Jesus continued, ‘Should be the intensity of expectancy *you* should have towards my return, even though you don't know the exact date’. Now this is quite something. If we knew the exact date of the Lord's return, we can imagine how we might behave the day before. It seems Christ is asking us to imagine that scenario; and then He asks us to live like this all the time. This is truly a high challenge. Our attitude to God's word, entertainment, hobbies, money, relationships; all these areas of life would probably be somewhat different to what they are now if we really took on board this idea: that we should live *as if* we expect the imminent return of Christ. This idea makes sense of two apparently contradictory strands in the Lord's teaching: that we do not know the exact time of His return (Mt. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; Acts 1:7), and yet He tells us clearly it will come “soon” (Rev. 1:1,3 and many other passages). Perhaps the implication is that we should read coming ‘soon’ as meaning ‘as *if* you know He is coming soon’. For, we ourselves cannot know the exact time.

24:43 The elders, represented by “the goodman of the house”, have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the ‘house’ of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They “watch for your souls” (Heb. 13:17). In a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk. 12:41-46). The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming “as a thief” will be the lack of awareness by their ecclesial elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. The successful ecclesia of the last days needs capable Arranging Brethren who have consciously avoided the entanglements of challenging careers, and whilst providing for their basic family requirements have energy and vitality left to throw into this work of ‘watching’ the flock.

Mt. 24:42-50 teach that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is “the goodman of the house”, i.e. the senior slave who is responsible for all the others (Mt. 20:11), but here “the goodman of the house” represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

If the caretaker *knows* when the thief will come, he will watch (Mt. 24:43). This parable is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5, where we are told that the faithful will be awake and watching for the Master, his coming will not be a thief-like surprise for them as it will be for the unworthy. See on Lk. 21:31.

24:47- see on Eph. 4:15.

24:48 The Lord Jesus / bridegroom “tarries” (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated ‘delay’ in “my Lord delayeth his coming”. The Lord does delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise “waited”, or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it

delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17).

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. Christ's words of Mt.24:48,50 suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor.10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder" - recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

24:49 The idea of the materialistic steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble.

Mt.24:49 is alluded to in 1 Thess.5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish (Lk. 12:45). This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

24:50 The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When ye shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is nigh... ye *know* that Summer is near... when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is nigh... when ye therefore shall *see* (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation...when ye *see* (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about not them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

24:51 The Olivet prophecy doesn't finish at the end of Mt. 24; the chapter break with chapter 25 is unfortunate. The context runs straight on. The Lord spoke a number of parables at the end of the prophecy, which teach us the need for watchfulness against his coming. Each of them speak of his "coming" and the state of his ecclesia. They refer back to various parts of the Olivet prophecy. *Without any doubt* their main relevance is to the second coming; whatever minor relevance they

may have to AD70, when they speak of the Lord coming and judging us, they speak of his second coming. They are a further elaboration on the things of which he had been speaking in the prophecy: and therefore the prophecy must basically concern his second coming and the state of the ecclesia at the time of the end.

The evil servant will be "cut asunder" (Mt. 24:51), i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

25:1- see on Mt. 13:19.

Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom... will be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1), the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. "*Then* shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Mt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

If the judgment is in real time, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! Christ comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of Christ to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of Christ in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ. Therefore it would be fitting if the whole process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of time as we know it. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract" - the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: "The morning is come and also the night". This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence.

25:2 Dan. 12:3 speaks of "they that be wise... they that turn many to righteousness". This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as "the wise" amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob's trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during "the time of the end... the time appointed" (RV)- of the three and a half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these "wise" in mind in His parable of the "wise virgins" of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

25:3 The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Luke 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents - symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word - are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on the continual study of the word during the delay period. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

25:5- see on Mt. 22:9; 24:48; Lk. 14:18.

Both wise and foolish "all slumbered and slept" (Mt. 25:5). This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Mt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Mt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber.

25:6 Israel both kept Passover and went through the Red Sea at night. Indeed, it is stressed six times in Ex. 12 that it was "night", and hence Deut. 16:1 reminds them to carefully keep the Passover (i.e. at night), "for... thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". Other latter day prophecies speak of the events of the second coming being at "night": Lot left Sodom in the very early hours of the morning; and it was "at midnight (that) there was a cry made" informing the virgins of their Lord's return (Mt. 25:6).

There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt. 25:6). Obviously there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps - which needs continual topping up by our freewill effort. The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Mt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

The same Greek word translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the

call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

25:7 This great cry presumably equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.
- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

25:8 Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" - relative to the foolish, anyway - can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterise the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at his coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyse and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realisation will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period. This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analyzed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ - they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic - "Give us of your oil"! In that moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish. Those who have consistently dashed through their Bible reading, or skipped it completely, will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually strong, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil - what faith they had - ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

25:9- see on Jn. 6:7.

"Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9) may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change. The point has to be made that there appears to be a frightening lack of this kind of oil-gathering amongst a considerable section of our community. "Go... and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected

know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position, but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: 'Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?'

25:10 Let us not think that the collapsing of time here suggested only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus Mt. 25:10 describes the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside the marriage. In real time, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

25:11 The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". Having a laid back attitude to developing a real knowledge of the Lord through the oil of the word is therefore effectively hating knowledge.

The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" (Mt. 25:11) being met with the response "I know you not", connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. Through our correct response to the oil of the Word, our Lord knows us. The rejected will have done many works for Christ without really knowing Him. Having insufficient oil in their lamps, they have but a semi-spirituality rather than a total dearth of oil. Only by a personal knowledge of our Lord, through having the oil of His Spirit and His word in our hearts, can we be accepted.

25:13 "Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the holocaust period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge". Having a

laid back attitude to developing a real knowledge of the Lord through the oil of the word is therefore effectively hating knowledge.

It cannot be accidental that Matthew's Gospel twice records Christ's plea for us to watch (Mt. 24:42; 25:13); and then goes straight on to describe how in Gethsemane, Christ pleaded with the disciples to join Him in watching and praying, lest they fall to temptation (Mt. 26:38-41). He was evidently deeply, deeply disappointed that they could not share this with Him. Surely the reason for this further mention of watching is to suggest that in the pain of our latter day watching, we will be at one with our suffering Lord in Gethsemane, as He too watched- not "signs of the times", but His own relationship with the Father, desperately seeking strength to carry the cross rather than quit the race.

25:14 In the parable of the talents / pounds, the pounds delivered to us are Christ's goods (Mt. 25:14), His very *own* (Lk. 19:23). The goods of Christ are those which He took from the devil (Mt. 12:29), the absolute righteousness which is possible once sin is bound. I would suggest the goods of Christ refer to the ultimate spirituality which He has, the various aspects of His character. The ten pounds are delivered to the ten servants, who are to be compared with the ten virgins of Mt. 25. The ten servants and ten virgins represent the body of Christ, each of whom has been given a part of Christ's "own" to develop; we are called to develop His likeness, and I am suggesting that each of us has been given a certain amount and aspect of His perfectly righteous character to develop. The unworthy calls what he has been given "...thine" (Mt. 25:25)- when it was intended to be *his* personally (cp. Mt. 20:14). He just didn't let himself see the wonderfully personal nature of what God had given him.

The 'delivering' of Christ's goods to us in the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14) is described with the same word as used concerning how the basic doctrines of the Faith were "delivered" to us at our conversion (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:2,23; 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3). We are asked to use that understanding of basics to develop our own character. It doesn't mean we're each given different doctrines; but we all have different characters and areas of spiritual growth, and we must each use the same doctrines we are "delivered" to develop these. This would explain why it's so easy to see others' lack of spiritual development in some areas, whilst being so sure that we have grown spiritually in other areas. Our observation is correct; this *is* the case. But it's nothing to be proud or critical about; we ourselves have our blind spots. This approach to the parables of the pounds and talents may also explain why brethren of past generations seemed so strong in some areas (e.g. defence of the Faith and preaching) but so weak in others (e.g. compassion).

25:15- see on Eph. 4:15.

The parables several times speak of the relationship between our Master and ourselves. They do so in somewhat unreal and arresting terms. It would've made everyone think when the Lord spoke of how a master handed over a total of eight talents to His servants and told them to use them as best they could. This was, humanly speaking, a huge and unreal risk for a master to take. He *so* trusted those servants! And so much has the Lord delegated to each of us, entrusting us with the Gospel. And we can imagine His joy when they lived up to the trust He placed in them. We can also imagine them walking away from their meeting with Him, wondering why ever He had entrusted so much to them, feeling nervous, praying for strength to act responsibly and zealously. Think about how large were the talents given to the workers (Mt. 25:14-30). The talent was worth 6,000 denarii, i.e. 20 years' wages for the workers in the parable of the labourers (Mt. 10:1-16). This is a huge and unrealistic amount to give to a servant to have responsibility for! But this is the huge responsibility which passes to us in having been called to the Gospel. Likewise, what human Owner of a vineyard who give out his vineyard to *other* tenants, after the first lot had proven so wicked, and killed not only His servants but His beloved Son? But this speaks of God's amazing desire to keep on delegating His affairs to frail mortals.

Note how valuable just one talent was- equivalent to 20 years earnings of a working man. This seems to me to be an element of unreality in the story, that flags up a lesson. The point is, we have been entrusted with a *huge* amount. We tend to see it as something ordinary; that we have a faith, a denomination, just like many others do. But the personal, individualized gift which we have been given is simply *huge*. Imagine if you were given say \$1 million to use for the Lord's service. You'd be quite busy working out how to spend it all. But the point is, we have each been given *far more* than this. The parable has specific application to our witness; for it was just prior to the Lord's departure that He gave us the great preaching commission, corresponding to how in the parable, the Master leaves His servants but just beforehand, gives His servants the talents to go and trade with. Hence the one talent man is criticized for not having lent the talent on usury, a practice which Jews could only practice with Gentiles. He should've taken his talent, the riches of the Gospel, to the Gentiles. And yet I'd suggest that 21st century disciples aren't one talent people. We have been given *so much*- not least literacy and having the Bible in our own native languages.

The goods are distributed "to every man according to his several (Gk. *idios*, individual, s.w. "private") ability" (Mt. 25:15). We each have our own private spirituality which we must develop in our own private way. The talents parable is alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:7-12: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man (RV) to profit withal". In the first century, this was seen in the way in which different believers were given different gifts of the Spirit. In our dispensation, each of us is called to manifest a different aspect of the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). But the principle of 1 Cor. 12:7-12 remains true, as indicated by the way Paul reasons that we each have a different aspect of the Spirit to manifest because "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit". In principle, these words are true of our baptisms. At baptism we were given our talents, our different aspects of the Spirit / mind of Christ to manifest. We are all in the Christ body, and manifest His spirit / mind in different aspects. And as the manifestation of different aspects of the Spirit in the first century caused frictions, so too today.

Three times Paul alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

25:16 We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: "The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags" (Mt. 25:16 NCV). The law of the peace offerings was designed so as to encourage the person who decided to make such a freewill offering to execute immediately- they were to eat it the same day they offered it, and the sacrifice would be totally unacceptable if it was killed but left for some days (Lev. 19:5-7). If we have an impulse to respond to the Lord, we should respond to it immediately. This isn't mere impetuosity. It's a spirit of always having an immediacy of response, which empowers us to overcome the procrastination which holds us back so much.

25:17 Not having oil to give light to others in the house [the ecclesia] and to the world is made parallel with not gaining more talents, which matches not ministering to the least [the word often refers to the spiritually least] of Christ's brethren. The word in Mt. 25:17 for "gained" is normally used about gaining others for Christ either within or without the ecclesia- Mt. 18:15; 1 Cor. 9:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:1. This shows the primacy of preaching & pastoral work / effort for others, especially in the last days. Oil burning is giving light to others. Going to sleep / not tending the lamps in the last generation is therefore lacking in love to the household, not keeping ourselves awake to give light to

others. Lack of care for others in the last days results in lamps going out and our generation slumbering. Does this imply that in the last days there will not be the care for the least of Christ's needy brethren which there should be? The last generation will be slumbering when shouldn't be, i.e. not giving light to the world and brotherhood as they should. And could it be that the spiritually "least" whom they despise are the new converts made in the last days tribulation, whom they somehow disregard?

25:19 Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps. 37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time" (Mt. 25:19). See on Mt. 20:16.

25:20 One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquitting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

25:21 A Joseph allusion- "They were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.

25:23 The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25:23). The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things he reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

"Enter into the joy of thy Lord!" sounds like the Lord may have to encourage us to get over this stage of weeping, and enter into the sheer joy which He has, that we've finally made it. "*Come...!!* You blessed of my Father! Enter the Kingdom...!" sounds like something similar. Now all these things are highly emotional. Yet we will have God's nature. He therefore has just the same capabilities as we will have. And, He exercises them right now.

25:24- see on Lk. 11:23.

A Chronology Of Judgment?

Different parables of judgment give different aspects of the judgment. It may be that we can put them all together and build up a time sequence of the process of judgment. Or it may be that the judgment will be different for each of us, and the parables reflect the different cases which the Lord (even in His humanity) foresaw coming before Him at the judgment. For the rejected, the process may be like this:

Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realization of the Lord's verdict.

He points out their failings,

Then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44).

The Lord asks a series of questions, to which there is no answer.

Then there is the speechlessness (Mt. 22:12),

Followed by an ashamed slinking away from the judgment (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.),

A desire to escape but having no place to run (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31).

It surely isn't incidental that this is exactly the pattern of events which the men went through who beheld the Lord's crucifixion. It's this correspondence which makes me lean towards the idea that the descriptions of the judgment are intended to be read as chronological fragments from the rejection of those who crucify the Lord afresh.

The Christ was a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

25:25- see on Mt. 25:14.

Fear of the judgment of others is another and related source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25). Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his talent, but buried it and returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Lo, there You have what is Yours" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. There was a popular rabbinic story at the time of Jesus, preserved for us in the Sohar Chadash, fol. 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house". The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity, 'holding on to the faith' in a passive sense, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it's exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

Perhaps we have never thought of being generous to someone else [even if it's a few pennies from our poverty]; of actively telling an acquaintance about the Gospel; of doing acts of kindness for someone 'out of the blue', thinking up something nice for them which will make them feel 'Wow!'; doing mission work; reconciliation with our enemies; seeing beyond our immediate emotions of hurt, pleasure, anger, passion. When we step out in faith and do these things, we start living a totally new kind of life. We find God setting us up with situations, working with and through us- and we feel it. We will see beyond the steely silence of the skies to know the reality of Angelic existence. One of my favourite Bible stories is that of Elisha and his frightened servant. Elisha asks God to open the man's eyes so that he might see the Angelic armies surrounding them; Elisha [and I so love this] didn't ask for his own eyes to be opened to see them; he was so certain they were there.

25:27- see on 1 Cor. 6:19.

Mt. 25:27 contains the Lord's condemnation of the man who hid his talent- "Thou oughtest" to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should've given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren even against the Law. "Oughtest", *dia*, means you must have, you had to- very possession of the talent meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers. I have often pondered what we are to learn in our generation from the strict statement that males without the ability to procreate were barred from the Lord's congregation during the Old Covenant (Dt. 23:1). Perhaps the point is that all those who are the Lord's people must recognize their ability to procreate for Him, in the bringing forth of yet others in their Lord's image.

Mt. 25:27 says that at the judgment, the Lord will *receive* back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 re. Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. See on Lk. 19:23.

25:28 The faithful will have enough self-knowledge to be able to say: 'You gave me these basic doctrines and these characteristics to develop with them, and I can now present you with this...'. That part of the character and mind of Christ which was given to the unfaithful servant to develop is taken away and given to the faithful (Mt. 25:28). The unfaithful receive the basic doctrines but do nothing with them; they don't let them impact their character.

25:29 Mt. 25:29 presents a paradox: "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath". Does the rejected man have talents, or not? He did, of course, have a talent; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us.

25:30- see on Lk. 17:10.

25:31-46 In Mt. 25:31-46 we have a parable depicting the last judgment, where the Lord sits as judge and we come before Him. Usually, a person comes before a judge regarding things which they have committed wrongly. But our expectations, which are set up by the story of a judge and people coming before him in judgment, are shattered. The issues the people are judged about aren't acts of commission. It's all about what they *omitted* to do. And yet we're all so freaked out about our committed sins, rather than realizing the tremendous importance the Lord attaches to our *omissions* of acts of kindness and thoughtful love, and perceiving the image of Christ in our brethren. It's rather like how Paul starts writing to the Corinthians. He doesn't start as we might have done with their gross immorality, false doctrine, perversion of the Lord's supper into a drunken orgy [although he comes to those things]... rather, he begins with and spends most time discussing their lack of love, their divisiveness etc.

It is worth observing the very simple fact that the New Testament is essentially a missionary document- all the expressions and articulations of doctrine / theology found there are all in the context of the preaching of the Gospel and the immediate problems of men and women in responding to it. This is why we aren't given a cold statement of faith or catechism in the New Testament, but rather the history of the mission of Christ at its first beginning. Even parables like that of Mt. 25:31-46 were relevant in a missionary context- regarding the perils of not supporting the itinerant missionaries in the first century. And this is why the power of the early Christian witness lay in who they were- for this was the real advertisement for the doctrine they preached.

25:32- see on Rev. 20:5.

The way the Lord speaks of dividing the sheep from the goats and not vice versa could suggest that there are far fewer sheep compared to goats (Mt. 25:32). This would imply that the majority of those who are responsible are in the goat category.

25:33- see on Lk. 17:31.

The command to "open thine hand wide" unto the poor brother (Dt. 15:8) is possibly picked up in Mt. 25:35-37, where Jesus tells the unworthy that when He was poor, hungry and naked they did not feed Him. Apart from referring to His manifestation in his poor brethren, it is quite likely that he was referring to a sense of spiritual poverty / need in His life, which apparently needed His followers to help.

Imagine, if you can, the judgment seat of Jesus which is to come. Think carefully about the implications of the parable of the sheep and goats. Before Him are gathered men and women in two groups, His right hand and His left. He will say to those on His right hand, enter the Kingdom. And He will condemn those on His left hand. Think about it. Those who come before Jesus and place themselves on the right hand [i.e. acceptance] are placing themselves on *his* left hand [i.e. condemnation]. And those who condemn themselves, putting themselves to His left hand, are placing themselves on *His* right hand. Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable.

25:34- see on Lk. 12:37.

"Prepared"- see on Lk. 19:17.

The words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

The words of Mt. 25:34 are spoken collectively: "Come, *ye* (not 'thou', singular) blessed... *ye* [plural] gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". Yet we know that there must be an individual judgment. These words sound as if we

are all judged together, at the same time. Again, the reconciliation of this is in appreciating that the meaning of time will be collapsed. In similar vein, the rejected going off to try to get oil and then turning up later at the judgment (Mt. 25:10) probably describes a process that occurs in the minds of the people, rather than something which occurs in real time- although it may *feel* like real time to them. The existence of these two groups at the judgment explains how the men of Nineveh and Sheba will "rise up in the judgment" and condemn the rejected Jews; if they are in the group of sheep facing the group of goats in which the faithless Jews will be. The wicked will walk naked, and the accepted believers will then see their shame (Rev. 16:15). The rejected will experience "shame and everlasting contempt" at the judgment (Dan. 12:2). Shame and contempt must be in the eyes of others- i.e. the group of 'sheep'?

25:34-40 The parables imply the day of judgment will be such a surprise (Mt. 25:34-40). Both righteous and wicked will find that they are criticized and commended for things which surprise them. There are several indications that because of this, the rejected will begin to argue back with Christ (e.g. Mt. 7:22), until eventually they realize their errors, stop speaking (Mt. 22:12) and gnash their teeth in anger against themselves (Mt. 22:13). This should truly be a sobering thought to us all. We must strive, really, to examine ourselves, to know ourselves, to try to see our motives and actions a little more from God's perspective; because it is His perspective, not ours, which is ultimately important; and it is this lesson which the day of judgment will ultimately teach each of us.

25:35 His focus on the positive is shown by the way the Lord quotes Job 22:7 in the parable of the sheep and goats: "Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry". These words are part of Eliphaz's erroneous allegations against Job- for Job was a perfect man, and not guilty on these counts. Yet the Lord extracts elements of truth from those wrong words, rather than just contemptuously ignoring them. Likewise Job 22:25 speaks of God being our "treasure... our precious silver" (RV). Surely the Lord had this in mind when saying that our treasure must be laid up "in heaven", i.e. with God (for He often uses 'Heaven' for 'God'). And James follows suite by approvingly quoting Job 22:29 about the lifting up of the humble (James 4:6).

25:36 *sick*- see on 1 Cor. 8:9.

Then, the rejected will finally see their good works in context. They will realize how little works really meant. The faithful already knew that- for they objected when the Lord told them all the good things they had done. The list of works in Mt. 25:35,36 include the following: giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, a bed to the homeless, help to the sick. Yet these are the very things which Job claims he had done, when he clears himself from all his accusers (Job 31:17-20). But the voice in the whirlwind soon reduced him to realize "I am vile"; all his good works became as filthy rags before the supremacy of salvation by grace alone. The connection with the parable isn't merely incidental. Surely the Lord is saying that the self-righteous in the ecclesia may seem as righteous as Job was before his conversion; but they must either in this life realize the totality of grace, or the whirlwind of judgment condemnation will reduce them to the same realization. Job seems to oscillate between believing and not believing in the resurrection (consider Job 14:7-15). At the end, Job confesses he has not spoken the right things; and Yahweh then says that he has only spoken that which was right. The friends likewise said some true things and some false things; and yet because they did not repent, their bad words were remembered against them. The final revealing of Yahweh in Job was some kind of judgment day for all concerned. Job, the righteous, had only his good deeds and words remembered; whereas the wicked friends had only their bad words remembered. It seems it will take a while for the penny to drop for the rejected- that they're "out", and actually never were "in". This Jesus, in whose presence they had broken bread (although note the difference between this and Jesus breaking bread with us, Lk. 13:26 cp. Mt. 26:29), actually doesn't know them. The Lord has to repeat the very same words twice to the rejected: "I know not whence you are" (Lk.

13:25,27)- as if they are dumbfounded and slow to comprehend the eternal implications of His words.

The righteous gave to the poor, the sick, the hungry- without even realizing they had done it. They will confidently deny it when Jesus points it all out to them. They served with no expectation of reward; so much so that they even forgot what they did. And *every* one who is accepted at the judgment will have been like that (Mt. 25:36). Giving without any thought of getting anything back is a *must* for all of us who seek to truly manifest God: for this is exactly what He does and has done, minute by minute, down through the millennia of indifferent, unresponsive human history (Lk. 6:35,36).

25:37 One major characteristic of the judgment will be *surprise*- for both rejected and accepted (Mt. 25:37,44). Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict.

There is surely an intended contrast between the accepted denying the righteous acts that the Lord reminds them of, and their telling Him how much they have gained (spiritually) by trading (Mt. 25:37-39 cp. 20,22). These quite different attributes of the accepted are recorded within the same speech of the Lord. He frames those parables as if He is getting over global lessons rather than describing the response of different people. Perhaps the point is that first of all, the accepted feel as if they have done no righteous acts, and feel their unworthiness so strongly that they even dare to genuinely disagree with the Lord's praise of them. But then they come to accept themselves as He sees them, and later on in the judgment dialogue, He teases out of them a realistic self-assessment of their spiritual growth. There is a similar intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 4 cp. 25).

25:37-40 The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly, genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

25:39 The parable of the sheep and goats clearly suggests that after the judgment, the worthy and unworthy will be in two distinct groups to the right and left hand side of the Lord. The group of "sheep" then enter the Kingdom all together, at the same moment. This explains how the Lord will address the faithful and unfaithful as groups (note "ye" in Mt. 25:37,39); how the men of Nineveh stand together in a group, as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will (Mt. 12:41; Mk. 6:11). In some way, there will be a collective sense at the day of judgment, as well as an individual one. If there will be a collective sense then, before the presence of His glory... there ought to be now.

At judgment day, the Lord will commend the righteous for feeding Him etc.- and they will reply in genuine surprise, feeling that they truly have *not* done any of those things for which He commends them. The point is, their way of life was an unconscious doing of good; it is the mindset which legalistically remembers every act of righteousness which will be finally rejected. Often, "desire" is seen by God as prayer (Ps. 10:17; 21:2; 27:4; 59:10; 92:11; 140:8; 145:19; Mt. 18:32; Rom. 10:1; 1 Jn. 5:15).

25:40 The parable of Mt. 25:34-38 describes those on whom the righteous expend effort as sick, hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, in prison: *every one of which* is a description used elsewhere in

Scripture concerning our spiritually weak state. Therefore the parable is teaching that one of the grounds upon which we will be rejected or accepted relates to how we have treated spiritually weak brethren. The Lord confirms this when he adds his interpretation: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of *the least* (spiritually) of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mt. 25:40). The wondrous, wondrous thing is that the Lord of glory identifies himself with the spiritually *weakest* of his brethren: and structures his judgment seat around how others have behaved towards them.

The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way he speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth). This indicates that the Lord wishes to put before us the picture of those who have been called to the Kingdom but reject His offer.

The special identity of Jesus with the poor is reflected in His parable of the sheep and goats. We will be judged upon our treatment of "the least" of the Lord's brethren; yet the description of "the least" brethren exactly match the Lord's own experience in His death- one who is imprisoned (Mt. 26:50), sick (Mt. 27:26), naked (Mt. 27:35), thirsty (Mt. 26:29; 27:48), friendless like a stranger (Mt. 26:56). In responding to "the least" of the Lord's brethren, we are responding to His cross. For our brethren, in their poverty, nakedness and imprisonment, are fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord.

The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way He speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King Himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth).

25:41

The Devil and His Angels

Comments

1. The Devil and his angels are to be destroyed. Everlasting fire is symbolic of total destruction (Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). Angels in the sense of supernatural beings cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36).
2. 'Angels' can refer to men (e.g. John the Baptist, Mt. 11:10; John's disciples, Lk. 7:24; the two spies, James 2:25), the original word *aggelos* being translated and implying a messenger or, by extension, a follower.
3. This verse is describing the judgment at Jesus' return (v. 31,32). If the Devil is a personal being, he is destroyed then, but Revelation 20:10 describes the Devil being thrown into a lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ, which will begin at His return. If the Devil is a person, he can only be destroyed once – either at the end or the beginning of the 1,000 years. Seeing that Scripture says the Devil is destroyed at both times, it follows that it is not a specific individual but representative of something or various groups of people.
4. Matthew 25:32 says that the purpose of the judgment is to punish the wicked men of all nations, the "goats". Why then is v. 41 saying that the Devil is going to be punished, seeing that, according to popular belief, he is not an ordinary man?

Suggested Explanations

1. The fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels; those "on the left hand" are thrown into it. It would seem that the Devil's angels are the goats on the left hand, who are ordinary people guilty of vs. 42–45 – not visiting the sick or giving to the poor, etc. People who follow the Devil – their evil desires – are guilty of neglecting such things, therefore they can be described as the Devil's "angels" or followers.

2 We have shown that “everlasting fire” represents everlasting punishment. The Devil and his angles are to be thrown into everlasting fire. Verse 46 says, “these (the unloving men and women of vs. 42–45; the “goats” of the human nations of v. 32) shall go away into everlasting punishment”. Thus the Devil’s angels are equated with fleshly people who are “angels” (messengers, i.e. servants) of their evil desires.

3. Matthew 13:38–42 says that those people who are sinners although apparently still in the kingdom of the Jewish world (vs. 38,41) are “tares” sown by the Devil, and they will be punished by eternal fire (punishment). The tares are plants similar to the wheat – the faithful – but at the day of judgment there is a division made between the good and bad Christians. Bringing together Matthew 13 and Matthew 25, we can see that the Devil’s children or “angels” are the same as wicked men:

The good seed, the Word, wheat	Tares
Sown by Jesus	Sown by the Devil
Children of the Kingdom	Children of the wicked one
Sheep	Goats
The righteous	The wicked
Enter the Kingdom	Go away into everlasting punishment (death)
Loving people	Selfish people
(Mt. 25:35,36)	(Mt. 25:42–44) Them (people) which do iniquity wail and gnash their teeth (a reaction experienced by men).

25:41- see on Lk. 13:27.

He speaks of “the eternal fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels” – clearly alluding to the Gehenna myth. This is a phrase taken straight from Jewish apocalyptic thinking and literature. It was the worst category of punishment conceivable in Judaism. And yet Jesus in the context is talking of the way that religious people who claim to believe in Him will not go unpunished for ignoring the needs of their poor brethren. This all too easy to commit sin... The Lord uses Judaism’s toughest language to condemn. But this doesn’t mean that He actually believed in the literal existence of either “eternal fire” nor a personal Devil. The Devil’s angels are those who ignore their needy brethren. It’s a powerful and telling juxtapositioning of ideas by the Lord Jesus.

The warning that the wicked will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil (Mt. 25:41) was referring to the apocryphal fate of supposedly ‘wicked angels’ as recorded in 1 Enoch 54. The references to Tartarus and sinful angels in 2 Peter and Jude are also clear references to wrong beliefs which were common in Jewish apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings. These wrong ideas- and they *are* wrong- are not corrected directly, but rather a moral lesson is drawn from the stories. This is the point of the allusion to them; but there is no explicit correction of these myths in the first instance.

It is the Angels of Jesus, and not of the Devil, who punish the wicked (Mt. 13:42–50). A wresting of Scripture to make out that the Devil is the tormentor of the wicked simply runs in straight contradiction to these plain statements of the Lord Jesus.

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). Their condemnation, the nature of their punishment, will have been specifically prepared for them (Mt. 25:41). The bitter self-hatred and ineffable regret of the rejected will be their punishment; and in accordance with the specific, personal way they mistreated and neglected God's Truth in this life, so they will mentally torture themselves. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16).

25:44- see on 1 Cor. 12:21.

The figures of judgment can be taken literally to an extent. However, the actual process will be slightly different for each of us. Thus for some, Christ gives his verdict immediately and then discusses it with them (Mt. 25:33,34,41). Others are apparently given the reasons for the verdict first, and then explicitly told the verdict (Mt. 25:27). Others tell the Lord of their spirituality and are then told his comment (Mt. 25:20). Others don't realize the spiritual growth they've achieved (Mt. 25:37), others see it quite clearly (Lk. 19:16). To some, Jesus speaks first; in other cases, the believer starts the dialogue (Mt. 25:41-44 cp. 11,12,24-26). Some sense their rejection coming and plead to be let in to the Kingdom (Mt. 25:11,12); others complain at their Lord's apparent unfairness, as if they're sorry, but they just have to make their point to him (Mt. 25:44).

He points out their failings, then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44). There is an intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected within the Lord's parables of judgment in Mt. 25; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 44 cp. 25). According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9). Adam likewise began by answering back, blaming the woman and the fact God gave her to him (Gen. 3:12). So they go through three mood swings: 'Lord, Lord', assuring Him they have never omitted to serve Him (Mt. 25:44), then a more bitter feeling that He is unreasonable (Mt. 25:25), and now a desperate begging for mercy.

25:45 Another telling chronology is suggested by putting together a few Scriptures. The foolish virgins will knock on the door, as it were, and be told by the Lord "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12). Lk. 13:27 says that He tells the rejected *after* they have justified themselves to Him: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity". Mt. 7:22,23 describes a dialogue in which the rejected justify themselves by listing their good works, and the Lord will profess unto them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". All their good works He will see as works of sin, because they were not of faith. Mt. 25:41-45 gives more information: the rejected are told "Depart from me", but they argue back with self-justification, and then they are told that they had not shown love to the least of Christ's brethren, and are sent away to punishment.

One of the themes of the parables of judgment is that our attitude to our brethren will have an impact on the outcome of the judgment. Those who will be in the Kingdom will therefore be powerfully taught at the judgment the utter supremacy of love. This will be the basis upon which we enter the Kingdom. Mt. 25:45 seems to suggest that our attitude to the weak ones of the ecclesia will especially be considered by the Lord. Of course, he knows the verdict and why he has reached it already; but it seems that the parable is teaching that *we* will be brought to realize that our attitude to our weak brethren has such an impact on our position before the Lord. For then we will realize that we are all weak.

25:46 After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the faces, the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was

(Gen. 4:14). Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27). We are invited to see worthy and unworthy walking away from the throne *into* different futures. The sheep will enter *into* the city (Rev. 22:14), *into* the temple (Rev. 15:8), *into* their rest (Heb. 4:11), *into* the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; Jn. 3:5; Lk. 18:24; Mt. 18:3); *into* life (Mk. 9:45; Mt. 18:9; 19:17); *into* the joy of Christ (Mt. 25:23).

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so so unwillingly. The man who refuses to immediately respond to the Lord's call to service says that he must first *go away* from the Lord and bury his father (Mt. 8:21); the young man *went away* in sorrow (Mt. 19:22); people hear the Gospel and then *go away* to all their petty businesses of this life (Mt. 22:5). Those who couldn't handle the demanding Lord *went away* from Him (Jn. 6:66); and Judas *went away* of himself to hang himself (Mt. 27:5). He condemned himself. These are all the same words as in Mt. 25:46- those who of their own choice went away from the Lord now, although that isn't maybe how they saw it, will then go away from Him into condemnation. This point is made even within Mt. 25. The foolish virgins *went away* to buy oil- they didn't want to immediately go to their Lord (:10); the one talent man *went away* and buried his talent (:18). And then at judgment day they again *go away from* the Lord (:46).

26:3- see on Jn. 12:31.

26:6 Mary anointed the Lord's head (Mt. 26:6) in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness... this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

26:11 Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

26:12 What she did was "to prepare me for burial" (Mt. 26:12 RV). This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. Note in passing that her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of Mary. The good news was to be of the Lord's

death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in Mary- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake (Mt. 26:13).

26:13- see on Lk. 1:3.

26:15 The association between the love of wealth and *all* sin is demonstrated by the fact that Judas's offer to betray the Lord was conditional on how much the Jews would pay: "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you" (Mt. 26:15). He above all was caught in the snare of riches. The decision of Judas to make this offer is recorded as coming straight after the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet with the expensive ointment. Judas's heart cried out as he saw all that money wasted; he knew that the perfume could have been sold for much and the money entrusted to him as the treasurer, and therefore he would have had the opportunity to take some for himself. As I read the records, the motivation of Judas was *fundamentally* financial, whatever we may like to speculate about his other reasons. It's almost too far fetched to believe; that a man who walked in the company of the Son of God, who entered into deep spiritual conversation with him, who is even described by the Spirit of Christ as "a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:13,4), could steal the odd few dollars (in our terms) out of the bag of those 12 travelling men. It couldn't have been any great sum that he notched up in those three years. And yet this led Judas to betray the Lord of all grace, for a sum no more than at most a few thousand US dollars (in our terms). They valued the Son of God at 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 27:9)- and *all it could buy was a field*. And Judas was happy with that. The way he later hurled those coins down and stalked off to hang himself suggests that he saw the essence of his failure as being tied up with that money. "The reward of iniquity" was what Peter contemptuously called it (Acts 1:18).

26:20 Because we are *remembering* our great salvation, the memorial meeting need not be a place for guilt tripping. Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our passover.

26:21 You may like to underline two phrases in your Bible in Matthew 26. "*As they did eat...*" they began to keep asking Him [Gk.] "Lord, is it I?" (Mt. 26:21)... *and as they were eating* Jesus took bread..." (Mt. 26:26). The whole meeting, according to the Greek tenses, involved the disciples asking "Lord, is it I?" - and *as they were eating* the Lord shared bread and wine with them in the manner with which we are familiar at our communion service. In other words, the entire gathering was shot through with a spirit of urgent self-examination and recognition of their own possibility of failure and betrayal of the Lord. For all the joyful assurance which the communion speaks of, that assurance and joy is rooted in this other aspect- of self-examination with the knowledge that failure and betrayal of the Lord is a real possibility

26:22 We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come together unto condemnation.

26:26 When Jesus said “this is My body” (Mt. 26:26) we are to understand that ‘this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body’. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: “This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt”. It wasn’t of course literally the same bread. “This is” clearly means ‘this represents’ in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word ‘means’, it is simply a translation of the verb ‘to be’ (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). ‘This is’ should be read as ‘this means / this represents’.

The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

26:28 At the breaking of bread, it's as if Christ is sprinkling us with His blood, it's as if we are Israel assembled together, re-entering the covenant each time we break bread. No wonder we are asked to assemble ourselves together (as far as possible) to remember Christ (Mt. 26:28 = Heb. 9:20). We have elsewhere made the point that Hebrews is full of appropriate material for a breaking of bread exhortation, which we believe it to have originally been.

26:29- see on Lk. 14:10.

26:35- see on Jn. 13:37.

We can have the sense of compulsion which Jesus had (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49), and yet flunk out of it, as Peter did: “Peter said unto him, Though I *should* [s.w. translated ‘must’- he isn’t saying ‘even in the case I have to...’; he knew that ‘I *must*...’] die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples” (Matt 26:35). Peter knew he must pick up the Lord’s cross, he knew he must share it. But he sidestepped it when it came to real sacrifice. Even in his actual death, he was carried whither he would not- even though he knew he *must* die the death of the cross. The same idea is to be found in Rom. 8:26, where we read that we don’t seem to have within us to pray as we *ought*, i.e. as we [s.w.] ‘must’. It’s not that we just don’t know what to pray about; we don’t pray as we ought to / must, and yet our gracious Mediator makes intercession with unutterable groans. And the older Paul can lament his failures to preach as he “ought”, as he *must*, and therefore he appeals for prayer that he will witness to the Gospel as every believer of it *must* (Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4).

26:36 Mt. 26:36 has the Lord saying to the disciples: “Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there”, and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to ‘the cross’. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don’t know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

26:38 The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mt. 26:38- *heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity. See on Heb. 5:7,8.

26:39 Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the

same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

If *it* be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mt. 26:39) may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. See on Heb. 2:3.

26:40- see on 1 Pet. 5:8.

Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:41; Acts 22:7 = 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

26:41 Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 = Rom. 5:6). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. He told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase.

26:42 The Lord in Gethsemane took a long time to pray the simple words: "Father, if". It was long enough for the disciples to fight a losing battle against drowsiness and fall fast asleep (the Greek implies). But how do you pray? With simple, staccato words and phrases like His? Or do you desperately seek for words, any words, just to make it seem you prayed, trying to be like the more mature brethren you hear praying at gatherings? Or after many years of prayer, can I ask, are you just churning out the same old phrases and ideas, with little meaning put into the words...? If the Son of God Himself prayed in such simple terms, surely we ought to likewise.

26:44- see on Mt. 26:39.

26:50 God has recorded Paul's life in Acts is done in such a way as to show the similarities between him and Christ; thus the Spirit records that men "laid hands on" Paul (Acts 21:27), just as it does concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:50).

The Lord's words to Judas: "Do that for which thou art come" (Mt. 26:50 RV) can surely be read as nothing else than confirming a wicked man in the evil way he had chosen to take.

26:52- see on Acts 3:26.

26:53 The Lord Jesus could've called upon legions of Angels to help Him; but He chose not to (Mt. 26:53); He could have taken power there and then in His ministry and declared Himself King- but He walked off to the hills instead (Jn. 6:15). In these examples we see what we could call a renunciation of power. Time and again we are called upon to decide whether we will renounce what power we have, or use it or abuse it for our own selfish ends. A parent faces this issue so often with

a young child. The parent has more power; but how and for what reasons should she / he use that power? We can use 'power' in many ways in the trivia of daily life; but actually in most of those micro level decisions we are challenged with a choice as to what level of spirituality and unselfishness we are going to show.

26:56 - See on Ps. 31:11.

26:57 There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16; and notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

26:58- see on Jn. 13:37.

26:65 At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, 1995 ed., p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example. See on Jn. 19:19.

26:67- see on Mt. 26:39.

26:70 The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

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Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

26:75- see on 2 Pet. 3:2.

There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgement seat. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern.

27:3 Judas realized that he was right then condemned; it was as if he had an accurate preview of the future judgment, and realized that right there and then, he stood condemned (Mt. 27:3).

The repentance of Judas is often passed off as a mere change of mind; but I suggest that in a *moral* sense he did actually repent, in the way we would use the word today, but the repentance was only on the surface- and therefore it wasn't the real thing (Mt. 27:3). At the same time, Peter was going through a *true* repentance for, in essence, the same sin. The Jews left in the land just after the Babylonian invasion had a sense of guilt, a knowledge that they were sinners and were suffering for their sin; but they had to be exhorted to truly *repent*: "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'. Say to them... I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:10,11 NIV). Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

27:5 Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away) to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight... smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9). See on 1 Jn. 2:28.

27:9 Jesus was "him... whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.

27:11- see on 1 Tim. 6:13.

27:16 The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

27:25- see on Mk. 15:5.

27:26 The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: "Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we*, for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment.

27:28 "They stript Joseph out of his coat" (Gen. 37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit? Same LXX word in Mt. 27:28.

27:29 The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15,

where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruising') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it. It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and *kept on* saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break... he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked him for his apparent inability to do.

27:32 Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross;

for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

27:34 They arrived at the destination. "Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (Edwards). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar. To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within

the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.

- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying. Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that Christ would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony (Mt. 27:34); but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did. See on Heb. 2:3.

27:36 "And they sat down" after symbolically killing Joseph.

Sitting down *they* watched *him* there". Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on "he... him... his"; also "they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4). Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw

saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), "Father, forgive them"; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They kneeled on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well paid careers... all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt. The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

27:37 Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This *was*...'. But over the Lord it was written: 'This *is* Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations.

27:38- see on Mk. 15:38.

27:39 "Those that passed by" were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought "Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look". Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; "crowds came to the spectacle" (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

27:40 "Thou that destroyest the temple..." would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and

mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

27:42 "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

RV "He is the King of Israel..." - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King.

"If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instill faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

27:43 "If he desireth him" (RV). They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God *likes* Him', is what they were really implying.

27:44 The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man's conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was

going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God. This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

27:46 "My God"- reference to His Angel? See on 1 Sam. 16:23; 1 Chron. 28:20.

The Greek seems to mean "Why *didst thou* forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi"? Four times calling upon God?

Most 1st century religious Jews tried to pray to God in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. Yet even on the cross, Jesus prayed to His Father in Aramaic- *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*; rather than the Hebrew *Eli, Eli lema 'azabtani*. 'Abba' itself, which He so often uses, is an Aramaic rather than Hebrew way of addressing God. From this, I rather imagine the 21st century Jesus saying 'You' rather than 'Thee' in His prayers; and reading from a contemporary Bible translation rather than from the AV. And not using Hebrew words for 'God', either; for Jesus addressed the Father in Aramaic, when He surely could have addressed Him in Hebrew. This was a radical departure from contemporary Jewish practice, where prayers were said three times / day, preferably in Hebrew. But Jesus removed prayer from being mere liturgy into being a part of real, personal life with God. See on Lk. 11:4; Acts 10:9.

The Sayings From The Cross (4): "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)

We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why hast thou forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion:

14th Nissan	9p.m.	Last Supper
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. ("the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at the ninth hour* that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about the ninth hour*, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about the ninth hour*". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

Desire For Deliverance?

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11). This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

Defining Forsaking

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

God will not forsake His people if they are righteous

"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes...and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance...all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

God will forsake His people if they sin

"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)
"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me.... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* hast Thou forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) hast Thou forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It is finished*".

Bearing Israel's Sins

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin-bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe

how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of Israel", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)

"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)

"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)

The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).

The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children... of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20:26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Our Representative

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven,

with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18).

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "*leave (forsake) his soul in hell*". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

Fear Of Forsaking

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*")

"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

"Hide not thy face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection

"Forsake me not...*O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8)

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is

understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him.

Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us". This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink "that the Scripture might be fulfilled", or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

27:50 "Again" - after "It is finished". The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit.

27:51 Job said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock... for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

27:52 He was the single corn of wheat which fell into the ground and arose in resurrection (Jn. 12:24), but it was the wave-sheaf (Lev. 23:10-12) which typified His resurrection, and a sheaf implies many. So it was appropriate that others rose with Him from death to demonstrate how in His resurrection all His people rise. There is in effect only one resurrection, that of Jesus; ours are part and parcel of His.

As to who exactly rose and appeared, for the witness to have been meaningful and noticeable it must've been people who were known to the people of Jerusalem, perhaps believers in Jesus who had died during His ministry. "The saints that had fallen asleep" (RV) could imply they had fallen asleep recently.

27:53 That sinful city is called "the holy city", even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly... there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

27:54 There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:

- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us.

27:56- see on Lk. 8:2; Jn. 19:25.

27:61- see on Mk. 15:40.

27:64- see on Mk. 6:3.

28:2 The women went to the tomb in the immediate aftermath of a great earthquake; or perhaps it happened whilst they were on their way there. Their love of their Lord, purely as love for Him as a person, as they had little firm expectation of a resurrection, is amazing. The earthquake didn't phase them.

28:3 Of course Mary was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Mt. 28:3). Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him... drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

28:5 The confused women are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord' (Mt. 28:5)- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). They are described as 'seeking [the risen] Jesus' when they came mourning to the grave, thinking to anoint the body (Mt. 28:5). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

28:7- see on Mk. 16:7.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples... and they departed quickly... and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen... and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

28:8 The women went to preach the news of the resurrection with "fear and great joy". But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfill the great commission.

28:9- see on Jn. 20:13.

Mt. 28:9 speaks of Mary Magdalene falling down at the Lord's feet. Is this to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another's feet implying a desperate request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness.

28:10- see on Jn. 21:1.

Put together the following passages:

- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)

- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.

- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

28:10 "Go tell my brethren..." (Mt. 28:10) is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord's death and resurrection, we read that therefore "I will tell of Your name to my brothers". The "I" is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord's resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The "things concerning the name of Jesus Christ" would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfill those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name". And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary! She was to be Him, in the fulfillment of the great commission to tell the world.

The women were told by the risen Lord: "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Mt. 28:10). In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Go show these things... to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life

was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: "That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you", our brethren. It's as if John is acknowledging that the Lord's commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

28:17 Even after the resurrection, they *all* saw Him and *all* worshipped Him; but some of them "doubted". You can worship, see the evidence of the Lord with your own eyes, as Israel daily saw the manna, and yet still doubt. Despite having seen the risen Jesus before, they *still* doubted

28:18- see on Mk. 13:32,33.

The Lord gave a reason for His command: "Go ye *therefore*". "*Therefore*". Because of what? Mt. 28:18 provides the answer: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye *therefore*". Because of this, we must spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole planet, because His authority is over the whole earth. He has that power just as much now as He did in the first century; and *therefore* the command to spread the Gospel world-wide still stands today. Indeed, His words here in Mt. 28 have evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (note the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6).

Because "all power is given unto me... go ye *therefore* and teach all nations" (Mt. 28:18,19). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all. There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was Christ (2 Kings 9:2 = Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (v. 13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us...should be *so* exalted.

28:18,19- see on Rev. 14:6.

28:19

The Great Commission In Matthew

“Go ye into *all* the world” evidently connects with the Lord’s command in the parable: “Go ye” into the highways and “gather together *all*”, as many as were found. And this in turn is an extension of an earlier parable, where the net of the Gospel is presented as *gathering* “every kind”- every *genos*, every “kindred / nation / stock / generation”, as the word is elsewhere translated (Mt. 28:19; 22:9,10; 13:47). The work of the Gospel described in those earlier parables was now specifically delegated to the Lord’s men. Through the work of the Lord’s followers over the generations, there would in every nation and generation be some who were gathered in, of as many social classes as one finds walking along a street [highway / byway]. The net of Gospel preaching is filled (*pleroo*), and then pulled to shore for judgment. When the Gospel has been preached in all the world (with response), then the end will come. Elsewhere Paul uses the same word to describe how the Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25). To have the Gospel is to have an imperative to preach it.

Matthew’s record of the great commission draws on earlier themes and passages in his Gospel. The Lord told His men to go out and make disciples of men (Mt. 28:19 RV). In the immediate context, there are many references to the disciples (Mt. 27:64; 28:7,8,13,16). And the term “disciples” occurs more often (73 times) in Matthew than in any of the other Gospels (e.g. only 37 times in Luke). The Lord is telling His men: ‘Go out and make men like you- disciples, stumbling ‘learners’, not experts’. Thus they were to witness from their own experience, to share this with others, to bring others to share the type of relationship which they had with the Lord. In this sense preaching is seen by Paul as a bringing forth of children in our own image. John likewise was “the beloved disciple”, the *agapetos*. And yet this is the very term which he uses in his letters to describes his “beloved children” (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:11). He saw them as sharing the same relationship to his Lord as he had. The nature of our relationship with the Lord will be reflected in that of our converts. He tells His men to go to the lost sheep, and yet in that same context He calls them sheep, in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:6,16). They were sheep sent to rescue sheep- to plead with men and women as men and women, to witness to humanity through their own humanity. Likewise the Lord spoke of how the extraordinary unity of His men would convince others that “thou didst send me” (Jn. 17:23), having just commented how they had surely believed “that thou didst send me” (:8).

The command to ‘make disciples’ of all men in Matthew is framed in such a way as to make ‘...baptising them...’ a subordinate clause. Baptism is only part of the work of making disciples. In Mt. 28:19-20 *mathateusate* (“make disciples”) is the main verb, while *poreuthentes* (“while going” or “when [you] go”), *baptizontes* (“baptizing”), and *didaskontes* (“teaching”) are subsidiary participles. The focus clearly is upon making disciples- all the other things, the teaching, baptizing, our effort in travelling and preaching, are incidental to this main aim. This is why responsibility to those we may convert only begins at baptism; it’s a beginning of a man or woman being fashioned into the image of Christ, not the end. This is why Paul often uses the language of preaching about his pastoral efforts with his brethren [e.g. his desire to ‘preach the Gospel’ to the believers at Rome to whom he was writing]. He sees himself as preaching Christ to them still, in so doing warning them, “that we may present every man perfect” (Col. 1:28). Thus Paul parallels being a minister of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel, and being a minister of the church (Col. 1:23, 25). He saw his continued work amongst his baptized readership as *fully preaching* the word of God (Col. 1:25 AVmg.). So Paul said in Gal. 4:19 “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you”. How do we see our responsibility to those to whom we have preached the gospel? We should continue to nurture and feed them well after the time of their baptism. It seems that this is not a general responsibility which falls on the shoulders of all of us. Rather we have a personal responsibility to those we have begotten through the gospel (1Cor. 4:15).

28:19- see on Jn. 5:23.

all nations- see on Gen. 18:18.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced.

The Lord commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all; but He describes this in other terms as being witnesses of Him to the world (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred.

The aim of our fulfilling the great commission is above all to "make disciples", to get more followers behind Jesus, more learners of Him, a greater bride for Him. Gramatically in Mt. 28:19-20, *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, and *poreuthentes* ("while going"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. In other words, the focus of our work must be upon making disciples for Christ, on thereby bringing about His glory. All the baptizing and teaching which we do is subsidiary to this aim, and they can therefore never be ends in themselves.

The victorious truth that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" is purposefully juxtaposed against the next clause, which seems to contradict it: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:18,19). Through teaching and baptising all nations, the extent of that universal power is made known. But it depends on the freewill obedience of the believers to this commission. The Lord had the Spirit without measure, and yet He "could not" do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

28:20 If we say that we are *not* commanded to obey the command to go into all nations, then we must also conclude that we are not commanded to baptize people. And if these words about baptism don't apply to us today, then there is no command of the Lord Jesus to be baptized. The connection between the command to preach and the command to baptize is made clearer by the parallel record: "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of, AVmg.) all nations, baptising them...and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19,20), i.e. Christ will be with us in our preaching right to the ends of the world. The special closeness of the Lord in preaching work has been widely commented upon by preachers. The commission of Mt. 28:19,20 is alluded to in Acts 14:21 AVmg. concerning the work of Paul and Barnabas, neither of whom were among the twelve: "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had made many disciples..." . This in itself disproves the idea that the great commission was intended only for the twelve.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

Matthew

Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)

"...then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)

I am with you all the days (28:20 Gk.)

unto the end of the world

Daniel 12:13 LXX

Go thou thy way

till the end

for still there will be days

to the end of the world.

These connections suggest that the great commission to preach worldwide will be powerfully fulfilled in the last days- see on Mt. 24:14.

MARK

1:1 The Greek text in Mark often has a rhythm and rhyme to it created by similar sounding words- because the early church aimed for new converts to memorize Mark's Gospel. Just one example from Mk. 1:1:

Ar-khay tou you-ang-ge -lee-ou Yay-sou Khrees-tou whee-ou the -ou.

The 'ou' endings are somehow rhythmical. Especially do we see this rhythmical quality in the phrase used for "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in Mk. 1:1: "*Ieso-u Christo-u huio-u Theo-u*".

Mark's Gospel opens with Jesus going around preaching, appealing for people to repent and believe the Gospel (and this is described as "the beginning of the Gospel"). Mark concludes with *us* being asked to do the same, thereby directly continuing the work of the Lord, because we are in Him.

1:2 "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" is how Mk. 1:2 quotes Mal. 3:1; but "before thy face" is added, as if to create a reference to the Angel sent before Israel in the wilderness, to find a resting place (Ex. 23:20). The parallel is set up between John and the Angel, and therefore between Jesus and the people of Israel. The Lord Jesus *is* His people. He personally is the vine, the one body- symbols of the whole community. He isn't the trunk, and we the branches. We are the branches, and He is the whole vine. We are Him to this world. Thus Eph. 3:20,21 and many other passages parallel Christ and the ecclesia. "The servant" of Isaiah's prophecies is therefore both Israel and the Lord Jesus. The fact He was and is the representative of God's people means that those in Him must act and witness as Him.

In response to Israel's attitude of "Where is the God of judgment?", and a genuine failure to realize their sinfulness ("wherein have we...?"), God prophesied He would send His messenger and then His Christ; His Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

1:3- see on Mt. 11:14.

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

1:4 John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analyzed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the

real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: "They do *not* return to the Lord their God" (7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God's estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

1:6 John is presented as a cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

1:13- see on 1 Cor. 15:45.

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

1:15 The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21).

"Repent ye and believe the Gospel" might seem to be in the wrong order- for surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does. But the point is, life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place. Thus Rom. 6 teaches that we were once servants of sin... and we expect the sentence to conclude: 'But now you are servants of righteousness'. But it doesn't. We were once servants of sin but now we have obeyed the form of doctrine delivered to us... and are *therefore* servants of righteousness.

1:17 - see on Lk. 9:59.

It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, snap shotted in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life.

1:18- see on Mk. 10:28.

1:33 It was the mentally sick who were the main group to 'know him to be the Christ' (Mk. 1:33 RVmg.). And it was a woman, and one with a history of mental illness, who was chosen as the first and leading witness of His resurrection. And women had no legal power as witnesses.

1:34 The Lord had to command those who knew Him not to speak out that knowledge (Mk. 1:34 cp. 44)- because people knew Him, they quite naturally wanted to preach it. One cannot truly know the Lord and not tell others of Him. This is the power of true knowledge, believed as it should be believed.

1:35 The Lord Himself was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning.

The Lord's attitude to prayer was radical in itself. The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Perhaps He was motivated in His prayers by the lengthy implications of the fact that Yahweh is indeed one, and this demands so much of us.

1:40 Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If thou wilt, *thou canst* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

1:41 It has been observed that oral performance of texts like e.g. the Gospel of Mark was designed towards producing an emotional impact upon the hearers. We who read the same text and seek [quite rightly] to understand from it doctrine and practical commands for living somehow miss much of this; we inevitably subject the text to intellectual analysis, whereas the first century audience would have felt from their performance an appeal to convert, to accept, to feel something in response towards the Man Jesus who was presented there. Perhaps this is why a reading of the Gospels produces less response in us than that from a first century group hearing the same Gospels read / performed to them. Thus a first century reciter / listener would have paid special attention to the way Mark indicates the emotional state of Jesus as He said His words- angry (Mk. 3:5), compassionate (Mk. 1:41), snorting like a horse (Mk. 1:43 Gk.), troubled and distressed (Mk. 14:33). Likewise Mark's constant use of the term "immediately..." in his early chapters would've created a sense of urgency, fast flowing narrative, perhaps matched by the reciter speaking quickly.

1:43- see on Mk. 1:41.

2:1- see on Mk. 6:2.

2:3-12- see on Mk. 7:32-35.

2:5 Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. Thus when the Lord saw the faith of *the friends*, He forgave and cured the paralytic (Mk. 2:5). "When Jesus saw the faith of *the friends*, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, *thy* sins be forgiven *thee*" (Mk. 2:5). That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

2:8 Perhaps we're helped to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings by Mk. 2:8: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So Mk 2:8 gives us as it were an

insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator.

2:10 He cured the man sick of a palsy that the onlooking, cynical Scribes *might know* that He had power to forgive sins (Mk. 2:10). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

2:14 He valued persons for who they were, and this had radical results in practice. And yet He spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed (Mk. 2:14), is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

2:17 The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

2:19 Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work (Mk. 2:19). But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

2:20- see on Jn. 14:2.

2:23 The Pharisees had reasoned themselves into a position whereby plucking heads of corn whilst walking through a corn field on the Sabbath was regarded as reaping. When the Lord was questioned about this issue, He didn't reply as most of us would have done: to attack the ridiculous

definition of 'work on the Sabbath'. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter.

2:23-28 The Lord's men were accused of 'threshing' on the Sabbath because they rubbed corn in their hands (Mk. 2:23-28). The Lord could have answered 'No, this is a non-Biblical definition of working on the Sabbath'. But He didn't. Instead He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

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

2:26 The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency... all means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

2:27 God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

2:32 Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them (e.g. Mk. 2:32,34).

3:4 When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are.

He said that if Had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. See on Mk. 7:11.

The Lord said that He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying

life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

3:5- see on Mk. 1:41.

The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mk. 3:5), and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind...? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

3:13 In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses (Mk. 3:13). Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially.

3:14 It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with him and that he might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

3:17 James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on Mt. 16:19.

3:21 As Paul wrote to his unspiritual Corinthian brethren, he was doubtless hurt at the thought of their opposition to him; yet his mind flew to the similarities between himself and his Lord being rejected by *his* brethren (Mk. 3:21 = 2 Cor. 5:13).

When she stands outside the house asking to speak with Jesus, Mary is identified with her other children who considered Jesus crazy. Jesus says that His mothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. This must have so cut her. There is a rather unpleasant connection between Mk. 3:32 “they stood without” and Mark 4:11 “unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables”. And further, Lk. 13:25 speaks of how the rejected shall stand without [same words] knocking and asking to speak with the Lord. Mk. 3:20 RVmg. says that Jesus came home- i.e. to the family home in Nazareth, and it turned out that the interested visitors took the house over, with His relatives, mother, brothers, sisters etc. left outside (Mk. 3:21 RVmg.). No wonder the point was made that He now had a new family; and His natural family, Mary amongst them, resented it.

The incident of Mary and her other children coming to Jesus is inserted by Mark in the context of his record that the Scribes concluded that He had “an unclean spirit”. In that same context, we read that Mary and His brothers concluded that He was “beside himself” (Mk. 3:21,22). The language of demon / unclean spirit possession is used in the Gospels to describe mental rather than physical illness. The Scribes thought that Jesus was demon possessed; His family and mother thought He was mentally ill. The two thoughts are parallel, as if to imply that His family had been influenced by the prevailing opinion of the elders about Him. The Lord responded to the Scribes by warning them that they ran the risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by saying this of Him. And it would appear that His own mother may have been running the same risk. This is such a tragic difference from the young, spiritually minded woman who was so convinced that her Son was indeed Messiah and the uniquely begotten Son of God. And it happened simply because she was influenced by what others thought of Jesus, rather than what she had learnt from the word and experienced herself. It’s a powerful warning to us.

3:21 In Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how “his own” family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God’s word. The parallel Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase “his mother and his brethren”, as if to link her with them. Clearly the brothers, who didn’t believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: “Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant”. The last sentence is the essence of the Lord’s saying that His true family are those who keep God’s word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

3:23 When accused of being in league with ‘satan’, the Lord didn’t read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn’t bind ‘satan’ unless He were stronger than Satan (Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn’t take the tack that ‘Satan / Beelzebub / demons’ don’t exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

3:24 The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself (Mk. 3:23-26) in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6) – as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

3:26 . The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan “has an end” (Mk. 3:26). His approach was ‘OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that’s the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That’s the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed ‘binding the strong man’, rendering Satan powerless, making him ‘have an end’, and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now’. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: “If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] ‘Beelzebub’, how much more shall they call them of his household?” [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn’t *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn’t make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled ‘Satan’ were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of ‘Satan’. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: “Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah” (*Maimonides’ Epistle to Yemen*). It’s been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression ימח שמו וזכרו (*yemach shemo vezichro* – “May his name and memory be obliterated”). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally ‘the lord of the house’; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

3:27 When accused of being in league with ‘satan’, the Lord didn’t read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn’t bind ‘satan’ unless He were stronger than satan (Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn’t take the tack that ‘satan / Beelzebub / demons’ don’t exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal ‘Satan’. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the “strong man” – the Devil – was really to show that the “Devil” as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn’t use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called “the Devil” as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial [‘satanic’] position to Jesus.

3:28 His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (Mk. 3:28)– for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord

went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others... See on Mt. 10:29.

3:29 Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. See on Rev. 3:17.

3:32- see on Mk. 3:21.

Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and brethren seek for thee", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for thee"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary sought for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

4:1 We read that Jesus "entered in to a ship, and sat in the sea" (Mk. 4:1). Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AV mg.]" – to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

Think about how Mark speaks of Jesus "sitting in the sea" teaching the people on the shore (Mk. 4:1). All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence.

4:4 "The kingdom of God" was then understood to have been the nation of Israel, and many parables of the Kingdom focus upon them (e.g. the leaven of Mt. 13:33 is "the leaven of the Pharisees" of Lk. 12:1; those who would not understand the word in Mk. 4:4 are those of Judges 2:17).

4:5 When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

4:6 The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

4:8 Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible.

Mk.4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in two ways:

1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.

2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn.15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn.15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows that; the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and Christ's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If thou wilt be *perfect*...' sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. Christ wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly Christ sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

The Sower Parable: An Unreal Response

The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide, rather than sowing like any normal sower would do. This taught that even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. To reach "all men" must be our brief; all types of men and women, including those who are obviously going to respond poorly (1). Yet the parable talks of one grain of corn that yields one hundredfold (Mk. 4:8). Any farmer would pick up on this impossibility. An average yield in 1st century Palestine was about ten fold (2). What kind of response was *this*? What kind of grain of corn? Clearly, the Lord Jesus- who described Himself in John's record as the grain of corn that was to fall into the ground and bring forth much fruit. But the other grains of corn yielded 30 and 60 fold. This was quite amazing response too, totally unheard of in practice. Was it not that the Lord was trying to show us just how radically His Gospel can transform human life? Amazing fertility was a feature of the future Messianic Kingdom (Amos 9:13; Jer. 31:27; Ez. 36:29,30)- it's as if the Lord is saying in the sower parable that the abundance of the future Kingdom can begin in human life now.

(1) In fairness, this parable can be read another way. In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface.

(2) This has been carefully worked out by R.K. McIver 'One Hundred-Fold Yield', *New Testament Studies* Vol. 40 (1994) pp. 606-608.

4:10- see on Mk. 3:14.

The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?" - i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

4:11 The Lord had said that parables only remained incomprehensible to "them that are without" (Mk. 4:11). That phrase seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power.

The Lord speaks of how "to them that are without all these things are done in parables" (Mk. 4:11). But those "without" in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand "without" begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those 'without' in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord's teaching, for whom it's all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn't mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires.

4:11- see on Jn. 16:25.

4:12 Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness (Mk. 4:12). Moses persevered because he *understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience. See on Mk. 7:29.

4:17 It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk.4:17 = Mk.14:27; Mt.26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

4:20 One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

4:21- see on Mt. 5:15.

The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden. He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him.

We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them.

4:22- see on 1 Cor. 14:25.

The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them.

4:27 The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "he knoweth not how" (Mk. 4:27, with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit unmeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase.

He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

4:29 He is closely watching our spiritual growth, as the farmer watches the wheat and then *immediately* begins to harvest it once the humidity and growth is just right (Mk. 4:29). This is the

enthusiasm with which the Lord watches our growth, not just individually, but as a community, i.e. the whole field. As the growth is still in some sense a mystery to the farmer, so it may be to Christ (Mk. 4:26,27); we grow, "he knoweth not how". This could be taken as an eloquent essay in the Lord's own limitation of knowledge.

4:31- see on Jn. 12:23-25.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

4:32- see on Rev. 17:18.

The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33.

Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

4:33 The Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to hear it", not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics.

There is tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right : wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So

often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

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

4:38- see on Mt. 8:25; 20:32; Jn. 10:13.

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

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

4:40- see on Mt. 8:26.

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us.

It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in what or whom?*'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

4:41 Jesus does not proclaim Himself, and yet He expects us to base our lives around Him. This is yet another paradox. Clearly we are intended to reconstruct Him from our repeated and sensitive readings of the Gospels. We in our day must read the Gospel records, portraying Him as they do from four different angles, and seek to reconstruct Him in our own minds as a person. His actions spoke loudly [and in this He is a pattern to us in our witness]. When He stilled the storm, the disciples marvelled: "What manner of man is this?", knowing full well that His actions were in fulfillment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much much more than that. But because we are human, we have to

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

5:1- see on Mk. 10:28.

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

Legion and the Gadarene Pigs

Mark 5:1–17 (Matthew 8:28–34; Luke 8:26–38) “They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. and when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon–possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon–possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region”.

In considering this passage, let's bear in mind some conclusions reached elsewhere:

- The Bible uses the language of the day, speaking of some things as they appeared in the eyes of their first audience
- ‘Casting out demons’ is a way of saying that mental illness had been cured
- ‘Demons’ in the first century were understood to be demigods responsible for illness; they are paralleled with idols, and we are assured that demons / idols have no ultimate power or existence

These principles enable us to understand the passage as an account of the healing of a mentally disturbed man – albeit written in the language of the day, from the perspective and worldview of those who first saw the miracle. The following comments hopefully assist in clarifying this interpretation:

1. Mk. 5:2 describes Legion as a man with an “unclean spirit”. He cried out. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: “Many who were mentally afflicted cried out”. This is because, according to George Lamsa, ““Unclean spirits” is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics”⁽¹⁾. It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It’s significant that Lamsa’s extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the Devil and demons – he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

2. When Legion was cured of his ‘demons’, we read of him as now “clothed and in his right mind” (Mk. 5:15). His ‘demon possession’ therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the ‘casting out’ of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon – “He has a demon, and is mad” (Jn. 10:20; 7:19–20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

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

“Torment *me* not” (Mk.5:7) = “Are you come to torment *us*?” (Mt. 8:29).

“*He* [singular] besought him” (Mk. 5:9) = “*the demons* besought him” (Mk. 5:12)

The man’s own words explain his self-perception: “*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)”. This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

4. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. “*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country” (Mk. 5:10) parallels “*he*”, the man, with “*them*”, the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: “*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss” (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn’t suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of “demons” is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There’s another example of this, in Mark 3:11: “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, “You are the Son of God!”“. Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called “unclean spirits”. James 2:19 likewise: “The demons believe and tremble”. This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and ‘belief’ is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting “demons” for ‘mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured’. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: “Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit”. He doesn’t say to the *unclean spirit* “Come out of the man”. Jesus addresses Himself to “the man”. The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it’s always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn’t do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive – the Lord wasn’t speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man’s belief that he had demons within him. The ‘demons’ plead with Jesus

not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. ‘They’ believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. ‘They’ hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of ‘demons’ as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

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

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it’s understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the ‘spirit’ assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: “I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him” (Mk. 9:25). It’s in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion’s cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that’s why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel’s sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would’ve reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion – the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God’s Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus “from out of the city” (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7) – full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion’s greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man’s request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would’ve made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the ‘demon possessed’ man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23) – showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits. Steve Keating pointed out to me that the madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs – and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his “problem” with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Levitical law. The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this.

The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it’s an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples’ idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

6. The Lord focused the man’s attention upon the man’s beliefs about himself – by asking him “What is your name?”, to which he replies “Legion! For we are many!”. Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against

illegal keeping of unclean animals – rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

7. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him. Anyone dealing with mentally disturbed people soon learns that you can't correct all of their delusions at one go. You have to chose your battles, and walk and laugh with them to some extent. Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the Devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness by the spirit (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'Devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

8. A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had – that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression; I am grateful to John Allfree and Andrew Perry for bringing some of them to my attention:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3–4).
- Legion was always "in the mountains" – the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.
- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob
- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?"
- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk. 5:3,4) – just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

– When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent “out of the country” (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: “And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land”.

– The herd of pigs being “destroyed” in the water recalls the Egyptians being “destroyed” in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles “were afraid”, just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed “great things” (Mk 5:19); and Israel’s exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called “great things” (Ps 106:21).

Note

(1) George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58.

5:12 Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

5:19,20 The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples’ own preaching and obedience to the Lord’s commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion’s disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19

Go to thy *house*

unto thy *friends*

tell them [Lk. 8:39 “*show* them”- by personal demonstration to individuals]

how great things

the *Lord [i.e. God]* hath done for thee

and how he had mercy on thee.

Mk. 5:20

He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]

He goes to *strangers*

He “*publishes*”

how great things

Jesus had done for him

[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness.

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

5:30

Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

Focus	Distraction	Resumed Focus
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)

He explains how He
must die

Peter rebukes Him

He repeats His message,
telling them that they
too must follow the way
of the cross (Mk. 8:31-
34)

5:31- see on Mk. 14:70.

5:34 The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 9:20)- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

5:37- see on Mt. 17:1.

5:39- see on Acts 21:13.

5:41 "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

6:1 We read that Jesus "came into his own country" (Mk. 6:1)- an artless reflection of the way in which He really was so human, having His "own" native area- here on this earth and not in any pre-existent form in Heaven! He had a very common Jewish name. The brothers of Jesus had names which were among the commonest Jewish names at the time- James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). I know we know this, but just remember how Jesus truly shared our nature. He smelt the smells of the marketplace, as He walked around helping a little child crying because he'd lost his mum. From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there truly came the words of Almighty God. There, in the very flesh and body tissue of the man Jesus, was God manifested in flesh. And yet that wondrous man, that being, that Son of God who had no human father, readily laughed at the funny side of events, just like anyone else. His hands and arms would have been those of a working man. He is always described as walking everywhere- and it's been calculated that He must have walked 10,000 km. during His ministry. He slept under the Olive trees at the foot of the Mount of Olives; the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head. So He would often have appeared a bit rough, His feet would have developed large blisters, and His skin would have been sunburnt. Palestine was infested with bandits at the time. It was almost inevitable that the Lord was robbed and threatened at least once. He would have gone through all the gut feelings one does when they are mugged: the initial shock, the obvious question that skates through the mind 'How much harm are they gonna do me...?', the bad taste left in the mouth afterwards, the way one keeps on re-living every moment of what happened. He would have known those feelings.

6:2 To my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-wordliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it

hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was “hidden” as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being “at home” there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his “own city” (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don’t forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn’t exactly show herself for Him.

6:3 It has been suggested that the title “son of Mary” given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father’s name. ““Jesus, son of Mary” has a pejorative sense... [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother’s name”. The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as “the son of Mary” (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn’t allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as “son of Mary” (Mk. 6:3) rather than “son of Joseph” is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord’s lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father’s house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 “the last deception shall be worse than the first” is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the “first deception”.

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him” (Mk. 6:3). In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can’t hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord’s character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter’s son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it’s always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord’s achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He’d gone crazy.

When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to

irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasant who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety". If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it... He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

6:5 He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6).

6:6- see on Lk. 2:33.

The Lord Himself *marvelled* at the unbelief of men (Mk. 6:6), despite knowing what was in man. Surely He could only have genuinely felt such marvel because He began with such an essentially positive spirit.

6:8-10 Our Lord's perceptive mind picked out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how his disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the

twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats". All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter... there abide till ye depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

6:11 The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Indeed, John's immersion of repentant Israelites would have recalled the way that Gentiles had to be likewise dipped before being accepted into the synagogue. He was teaching "that all Israel were Gentiles in the eyes of God". Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations. The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world..."

6:12 Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. See on Heb. 7:19.

6:14 When the disciples went out preaching around Israel, Herod heard of the fame of *Jesus*-because they so manifested Him (Mk. 6:12-14).

The Lord's relationship with His cousin John provides an exquisite insight into both His humanity and His humility. The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

6:36 They ask the Lord to send the multitude away (Mk. 6:36), whereas Jesus had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37), and had just shown that He did not 'send away' the demons from the sick man, because the man had asked for them not to be sent [far] away (Mk. 5:10).

6:37 The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

6:38 He calmly bid them feed a huge crowd with just a few loaves: "How many loaves have ye? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38). We are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out

their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

6:45-51 Mark's account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

6:48 Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them" (Mk. 6:48). I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective.

6:56- see on Mt. 9:21.

Mk. 6:56 speaks of His preaching campaign as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society.

7:2-8 Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

7:6- see on Heb. 11:4.

7:9 They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27).

7:10 Thus the Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the* commandment" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them.

7:11 The Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other). See on Mk. 3:4.

7:13- see on Mt. 13:39.

7:17- see on Mk. 8:29.

The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high

hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

7:18 The world would not perceive (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had.

7:19- see on Acts 10:35,36.

Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records.

7:19 Jesus clearly explained that nothing a man eats can spiritually defile him; it is what comes out of the heart which does this (Mark 7:15-23). "In saying this, Jesus declared *all* foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19 NIV). Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

7:27 The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs (Mk. 7:27). Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

7:28 Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

7:29 "For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter" (Mk. 7:29) shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

I think the extraordinary sensitivity of the Lord Jesus is reflected in the many examples of Him displaying extraordinary perception and precognition of what had happened or was going to happen. He had felt that Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree before they even met (Jn. 1:48); He knew the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter had been cured (Mk. 7:29); He knew the thoughts of men, etc. Now all this may have been due to the Father directly beaming that knowledge into Him through a Holy Spirit gift of knowledge. Maybe. And this was the explanation I assumed for many years. But I have noticed in myself and others that at times, we too have flashes of inexplicable precognition; we somehow know something's happened. I remember sitting next to a sister, and she suddenly came over looking distressed. She simply said: "John Barker's mother has just died". And so indeed it was. I think we've all had such things happen. And we share the same nature which the Lord had.

So my restless mind wonders, and no more than that, whether His extraordinary precognition was not simply a result of a bolt of Holy Spirit knowledge, but rather an outflow of His extraordinary sensitivity to other people and their situations. This Lord is our Lord, the same today as He was back then yesterday. In any case, living as such a sensitive person in such a cruel and insensitive and blunt world would itself have been almost unbearable. And yet He was like that for us, the insensitive, the ignorant, the selfish and the uncaring, in so many moments of our lives.

7:32-35 Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry (Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

7:33 Because the tongue controls swallowing, surely the man was frothing in his own spittle. And yet the Lord spits and puts His spittle on that of the man, to show His complete ability to identify with the human condition.

The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

7:36- see on Mk. 5:19,20.

8:2 Reflect how the Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place (Mk. 8:2). They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of Jesus towards this world; so must our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

8:4 "From whence shall we get bread here in the wilderness?" is how Peter / Mark recorded their question to the Lord (Mk. 8:4). But the wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasize his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?"

8:6 The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by

the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for “set before” recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we’ve really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on.

8:14-21 The Lord’s teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers. John’s Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

8:15 The preaching of the Kingdom by us is likened to leaven- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the ‘lump’ of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

8:17- see on Mk. 7:18.

If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter’s Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn’t understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

8:18 There’s so much we don’t perceive as we should, so much we are blind to. And this blindness separates us from God. It frustrates the Lord Jesus; he is angry when those who have eyes to see (i.e. have been converted) still don’t see (Mk. 8:18).

8:19-21 On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord’s words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus they failed to see after two miracles relating to bread, that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord (Mk. 8:19-21)

8:22- see on Mk. 5:1.

8:23 Ultimately, we will only truly see in the Kingdom (Is. 29:18; 42:6; 1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will know (see) face to face. We will see God face to face, i.e. understand Him. It follows therefore that in some ways we are blind, or partially sighted, now. This is indicated by the Lord’s symbolic healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk. 8:23-26). Firstly, the man saw men as if they were walking trees. Probably he scarcely knew what a tree or man looked like. Yet he is described as receiving his sight at this stage (8:24 Gk.). And then the Lord touched his eyes again, and again he is described (in the Greek) as receiving his sight (8:25- same phrase as in v.24). This time he saw all things (Gk.) clearly. This surely represents the full spiritual vision of the Kingdom. According to this type, we are at the stage of seeing men as if they are walking trees, perhaps wildly guessing about some things, lacking the most basic sense of proportion. Perhaps when we speak so glibly about “eternal life” or being in the Kingdom, we are speaking as that partially healed blind man.

8:24 Having a true, accurate self-perception and appreciating the tremendous significance of the true person as opposed to our mere personas... this affects our relation to others. We will seek to decode the images presented to us by our brethren, and relate to the Christ-man within them, to the real and true person rather than the persona they act out. Because we see the Christ within them, the real Duncan or Dmitry or Ludmila or Sue or Jorge... we will realize that relationships are worth fighting for. The world of unbelievers then becomes perceived as a mass of persons waiting to be

born, to become born again after the image of Christ through their conversion and baptism. The healing of the blind man as recorded in Mk. 8:22-26 is unusual in that the healing was in two stages. Initially the man only “beheld men as trees, walking”. As a blind man, he would have had very limited experience of people. He initially saw them merely as part of the landscape, as important to him as trees. But the aim of the miracle was to convict him of this, and lead him to understand people as more than trees, more than just part of the natural creation with as much meaning as trees. That man represented us all; part of coming to the light, of receiving spiritual sight, is to perceive the value and meaning of persons; to see the world of persons rather than a world of things. No longer will we divide people as the world does into winners and losers, successes and failures; rather will we see in each one we meet a potential brother or sister. For they have all been invited into God’s family, insofar as we pass them the invitation.

8:25- see on Mt. 20:32.

The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55), He healed the blind man in two stages so that he wouldn’t be scared when he first saw people moving (Mk. 8:25).

8:27 Mark, who as we have suggested was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord’s prediction of the cross was met by the disciples’ misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn’t understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should’ve done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter’s preaching of the Gospel message; He’s surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Qualms of conscience about ‘wasting time’ can so often be part of a guilty fear of not having ‘done’ enough. The Lord Jesus was not beset by guilt, and a sensitive reading of the Gospels reflects the way that this ultimately zealous servant of the Lord never appeared to be in hurry. He had ample time to speak to the woman He met at the well (Jn. 4:1-26), to take time out with the disciples (Mk. 8:27), He had the leisure time to admire wild flowers (Mt. 6:28), comment upon a sunset (Mt. 16:2), to go through the lengthy process of washing the feet of His men (Jn. 13:5) and to be able to answer

their naive questions without the slightest hint of impatience (Jn. 14:5-10)... and of course to walk some distance to find a place conducive to prayer (Lk. 5:16).

8:29- see Jn. 1:41.

Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

8:32 When He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-

carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

8:33 The Lord "rebuked" Peter for seeking to stop Him die on the cross (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] straitly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "straitly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

8:34- see on Gal. 6:10.

8:34-37 I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is therefore more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

8:35 The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words.

Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation. To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

8:36 Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What will it profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What does it [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at

the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

8:37 Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: " Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross...*for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV " soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other.* We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: " Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

8:38- see on Rom. 1:16.

Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what he was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross...*for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other.* We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will be evident to all then (Rev. 16:15).

The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing

away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

9:1 The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

9:2 *Transfigured*- The Greek *metamorphoo* speaks of a transformation, and the context of the vision is the Lord's comment that some will see the Kingdom coming. So it seems that this was a vision of the Kingdom.

9:3 *Shining, exceeding white as snow*- This is Kingdom language. The Kingdom face of Jesus is pictured as the sun shining (Rev. 1:16), and in that day "then shall you also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4- surely a transfiguration allusion). We shall then walk with Him in white (Rev. 3:4), arrayed in exceeding white clothing (Rev. 19:8), shining forth as the sun in the Kingdom (Mt. 13:43; Dan. 12:3). Yet the topic of conversation was the Lord's upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). This brief vision of the Kingdom therefore illustrates how the meaning of time will be changed- in one sense, they were as it were in the Kingdom; but they were still also talking about the Lord's upcoming death. From the Lord's perspective, the encouragement was that His cross and the future Kingdom were so intensely related- the Kingdom would only be made possible because of His death. And He was being encouraged that the Kingdom surely would come and the resurrection from the dead of those like Moses and Elijah- because He was going to succeed in His mission. In this sense a vision of the Kingdom and of future resurrection of the faithful was an ideal way of encouraging Him to persevere with His mission.

9:5 Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must

take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

9:6 *Knew not what to say*- These three Greek words occur together again in the records of Peter's denials of the Lord, when he says "I know not what you say" (Lk. 22:60). The implication could be that Peter's fear and refusal to understand the message of the cross, the *exodus* of which Moses, Elijah and Jesus were talking (Lk. 9:31), were tantamount to denying the Lord. Yet God's gracious glory still enveloped him, and pleaded with him to hear God's Son in reality.

Sore afraid- s.w. only Heb. 12:21, where Moses and all Israel were 'exceedingly fearful' at Sinai. The whole situation is reminiscent of Sinai- a meeting with God on a high mountain, glory, the voice of God, and the presentation of God's Son as God's word in place of the 613 commandments. The fear of the disciples and their falling asleep suggests that like Israel, they feared God's voice and didn't want to hear it.

9:7 *My beloved Son*-s.w. LXX Gen. 22:1, where God recognizes that the sacrificial Isaac is "your son, your only son *whom you love*".

9:11 The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them.

9:17 When the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today.

9:21- see on Mt. 20:32.

9:22 Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves.

9:23 In Mk. 9:23, the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*.

We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do

anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The same message is taught by putting together the fact that with God nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37), and the fact that nothing is impossible *unto us* (Mt. 17:20). God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as...so" ; 9:29 "according to" ; 12:22 "inasmuch").

The word "believe" is omitted from many texts. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that 'If you can...' which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth".

It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

9:24- see on Lk. 1:13.

It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. The father of the epileptic boy is the clearest example: "I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mk. 9:24).

9:25 There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today - e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia.

9:29 They tried to do miracles without even praying about it (Mk. 9:29).

The Lord Jesus went on to comment on the healing of the boy: "This kind (of cure) can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:29). Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party.

9:31- see on Mt. 27:26; Lk. 9:44.

9:31-34 When the Lord taught them about His death, they always seem to have started arguing amongst themselves; the tremendous significance of what He was saying was evidently lost on them (Mk. 9:31-34; 10:34-38).

9:35 The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be...servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even*

as the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

9:36 In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"- presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people.

9:41 His attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

9:45 The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life.

9:46 There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were

able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

9:47 The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day¹. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27-33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39-43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25-28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

9:49 He spoke of the destruction of the unworthy in Gehenna fire, and went straight on to comment: "For every one shall be salted with (Gk. 'for the') fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted" (Mk. 9:48,49). Unless we become a living sacrifice, wholly consumed by God's fire, laying ourselves down upon the altar, then we will be consumed by the figurative fire of Gehenna at the day of judgment. Again, there's no real choice: it's fire, or fire. See on Mt. 3:11; Lk. 15:24.

9:50- see on Rom. 12:18.

The need for peace amongst ourselves as a community is brought out in the parable of the salt that lost its saltiness. Straight away, we're faced with a paradox- for true salt can't lose its saltiness, seeing that sodium chloride is a stable compound, free of impurities. Salt was a symbol in the Lord's teaching for having peace with one another. If we don't have this, we're not salt. If we're not any influence upon others, we're not salt. It's as simple as that.

The Lord realized that it was easy to have an apparent love and peace with our brethren, when actually we have nothing of the sort. In the context of His men arguing with John's disciples, the Lord told a small parable, in which He made having salt in ourselves equal to having peace with our brethren (Mk. 9:38-40; 49,50). He warned that salt which has lost its saltiness looks just the same as good salt; but salt that has lost its saltiness is *nothing*, it's just a lump of substance. Surely He's saying: 'You may think you have peace and love for your brethren, when actually you don't; and if you don't have it, you're nothing, just a lump'. Not without relevance He mentioned that every sacrifice had to have good salt added to it. His point was that all our devotion and sacrifice is meaningless if it lacks the *real* salt of true love for our brethren. Which is exactly the teaching of 1 Cor. 13. Love is a matter of deep attitude as shown in the small things of life, not the occasional heroism of (e.g.) giving our body to be burned.

The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6).

10:1- see on 2 Tim. 2:24.

10:5- see on Dt. 31:9.

10:12 The Rabbis in Christ's time were split into two schools on the question of divorce. One school taught that divorce was available for any reason, whilst the other said that it was only for sexual impurity. The question was put to Jesus as to when he thought divorce was possible. It seemed that he was going to be forced to take sides with one of the two contemporary attitudes. But he cut clean through the whole thinking of first century Israel by basing his argument on the principles of Eden: God created man and woman, and joined them together; therefore, he reasoned, the ideal standard is that there should be no divorce for any reason, including adultery. This is a cameo of the teaching of Christ; through radical and fundamental recourse to the Old Testament, his teachings cut right through all the conceptions and expectations which were present in the mind of first century Jewry as a result of their cultural conditioning. We too must cut through the cultural conditioning of our era. In the time of Jesus, Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands; some of the women of Herod's family got divorces like this. Jesus was aware of this, and commented upon this local social attitude, roundly condemning it: "If a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery". If Jesus was so unafraid to challenge local cultural attitudes towards women, why should we think that He merely went along with those local contemporary attitudes?

10:14 The value of persons felt by the Lord is made very obvious when we notice His attention to women, children, Gentiles and the mentally ill / deformed. These three groups often occur together in the Rabbis' teaching. The very people who were not counted as persons, the Lord went out of His way to express value for. And in this He sets us an example. Children were counted as of little value- but the Lord spoke about salvation for children (Mk. 10:14), and of the need to become like a child if we are to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 18:3). This purposeful recognition of the value of *all*

human persons was a radical and difficult thing in His surrounding culture. And so it can be in ours too.

10:17 This young man (Mt. 19:20) was a "ruler" (Lk. 18:18). To come to Jesus in a public place ["in the way"] and running- when rulers were supposed to never run in public but maintain decorum- all positively indicates a genuine belief in Jesus. Kneeling before Him was also a public sign of acceptance of Jesus as Lord. But he failed as so many do with respect to his wealth. He was a yuppy, a high flier, a rich young man who was also a "ruler". And he wasn't going to give that up; his 'sincerity' is shown by his sadness [RV "his countenance fell"] and his going away "grieved" (:22). This walking away is an anticlimax, not the expected outcome of all the devotion displayed. But the account is structured in this unexpected way to highlight the extraordinary significance of a person's attitude to wealth, and how this can make all their other devotion meaningless.

Inherit- but Jesus had taught that the Kingdom of God on earth would be 'inherited' by the poor and meek (Mt. 5:5). If the man had thought that one through, he would've known the answer ahead of time. If he was rich and young, the chances are he had inherited his wealth- and he wanted to know how he could inherit eternity as well. He likely figured that money can buy everything- and in a strange way, the Lord was saying that the giving of wealth and inheriting eternity *aren* in fact related, although actually ultimate 'goodness' and acceptance with God can't come from any such work of obedience.

10:18 The extent to which this man from Nazareth, who sneezed and slept and thirsted as we do, was really God manifest in the flesh... this needs sustained personal meditation. That from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew really came forth the words of Almighty God; to the extent that it had to be said that never man spake like this man; and He Himself could assure us that heaven and earth would pass, but not His words (note the links with Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)... that this man died for us... rose again, ascended... and now works His saving work for us, hour by hour. Mark records how a man once in an offhand way addressed the Lord Jesus as "good master". The Lord's response was to say that if the man *really* accepted Him as 'good' he ought to share His cross, and sell what he had and give to the poor. The real extent of Jesus' goodness will move us to deep personal response, if we truly perceive it.

10:20 "From my youth"- but he was a "young man" (Mt. 19:20). Note the Lord's grace- instead of being turned away by the man's youthful arrogance, instead the Lord perceives the positive in him and loves him for it (:21). See on Mk. 10:40.

10:21 Thou lackest- s.w. to be destitute of. In response to the man's question "What lack I yet?" (Mt. 19:20). He lacked nothing materially, but therefore he lacked the important thing- treasure in Heaven. The word play involving 'lacking' suggests that spiritual wealth and material wealth are opposites; likewise to give away treasure on earth is to as it were transfer it to Heaven. All this underscores the point that we can't have both. All our material wealth is to be given away in order to get spiritual treasure (Mt. 13:44). "What thou lackest" is parallel to the phrase Mt. 19:21 records: "If you will be perfect / complete". The man could still have had a relationship with the Lord if he hadn't sold all; but he wanted perfection and went away from Jesus because he couldn't face up to the fact that he wasn't perfect, would be saved by grace and now by his own obedience. And so many 'perfectionists' have done likewise. It's perhaps because of the man's tendency to perfectionism that the Lord prefaced His answer to the question by saying that even He wasn't completely "good" as God alone is "good" (10:18). The humanity of Jesus is therefore, in a way, an answer to 'perfectionism'. Not that there is ultimately any such thing as 'perfectionism', for it cannot be in man to be perfect. Perfectionism is merely an arrogant illusion. The record in Mt. 19:16,17 brings this out clearer- "Good Master, what *good* thing shall I do... why do you call me "*good*"? There is none "*good*" but one, that is, God". The man thought that by his "good" deeds he could become as "good" as God, the only "good" One. And He walked away from Jesus because he was unable to accept that this is not in fact the case, and that even Jesus Himself stood as 'not good'

compared to God; He stood 'perfect' with God by reason of the relationship He had with God, not solely on the basis of His good works. However, even total generosity and giving away of wealth will not bring total completeness. 'You lack one thing' appears to be an allusion to Ps. 23:1 LXX: "The Lord is my shepherd; not one thing is lacking to me". To take up the cross and follow the Lord Jesus as our shepherd, with the loss of material wealth this implies, is the essence of lacking nothing. For walking with Him is perfection, completeness, our everything.

The very fact that we want to rise up to the heights commends us to God. When the rich young man, in his zeal for righteousness, claimed: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth", the Lord didn't rebuke him for self-righteousness; instead, He beheld Him (with His head cocked to one side?), He took a long wistful look at Him, and *loved him* (Mk. 10:21). The Lord had a wave of warmth come over Him for that arrogant young man, simply because He appreciated the evident spiritual ambition which was within him. It was for this reason that the Father so loved the Son. God caused the Lord Jesus to approach unto Him; "for who would dare of himself to approach unto me?" (Jer. 30:21 RSV). The Father confirmed the Son in His spiritual ambition, recognizing that very few men would rise up to the honour of truly approaching unto God.

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him. Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

"Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor

...and come, take up the cross

and follow me"

"We have left all

[no comment by Peter]

...and have followed thee"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at several times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

Take up *the* cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "*the* cross" rather than '*a* cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between *our* taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our *attitudes*. "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Mt. 11:29). To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Consider the contexts in which Christ spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Mt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ - but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with Christ. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ. Israel were an empty vine, without fruit in God's eyes- because the spiritual fruit they appeared to bring forth was in fact fruit to themselves (Hos. 10:1).

10:22 Walking away from Jesus in sorrow is a picture from the scenes of the final judgment. In this case, the man rejected himself, he chose to walk away- just because he couldn't accept that he wasn't perfect.

10:23 Have riches... paralleled, or expanded, in 10:24, with "those who trust in riches". To have wealth is to trust in it. Hence the danger of it- wealth militates against faith. Hence Paul warned "them that are rich in this world that they... *trust not* in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

10:24- see on Lk. 18:24.

Astonished- the disciples were so immature that they thought wealth was a sign of Divine blessing. And were astonished to hear that it's really hard for wealthy people to be saved. Hence, in loving pity at their immaturity, the Lord addresses them as "Children...".

10:25 The camel must shed its load of riches and goods, so that it can pass through the gate into the Kingdom. But we are doing that right now! We will pass through the gate into the Kingdom when the Lord returns (Rev. 22:14), and yet through shedding our materialism, we do it now. John puts it more bluntly and yet more absolutely: now, through the life of faith, we have the eternal life, in that we begin to live now the type of life which we will eternally live. We receive the Kingdom of God here and now, in that we receive the Gospel of the Kingdom; and if we accept it as a little child, we begin to enter it, now- in that the lives we live determine whether or not we will enter it at the Lord's coming. We are on our way into life! We have received the Kingdom, our names were written from the foundation of the world, and only our falling from grace can take that away. This is almost too good news to believe.

10:27 Having said that it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom- as hard as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle- the Lord comments that 'what is impossible with man, is possible with God' (Mk. 10:27). In first century Palestinian Judaism, this saying was a kind of figure of speech for describing a miracle. If any rich person gets into the Kingdom- it will be a miracle. That's what the Lord is saying. And He says it to us today. Generosity alone, of course, won't bring

us into the Kingdom. It's not as if we can buy our way in. But there are major implications that our attitude to wealth is in fact a crucial indicator of whether or not we will be there.

Having explained "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom", the Lord went on to comment: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:25,27). It is impossible for a rich man to be saved, He seems to be saying. And as we seek to convert the rich and self-satisfied in the societies in which we live, this does indeed seem the case. But although on one hand it *is* an impossibility, yet not with God: for He desires to seek and save the rich too. And indeed He does, achieving what with men is impossible. And the Father seeks to impress His positive attitude upon us.

10:28 Was Peter really correct to say that he had really "left all"? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's..." (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

10:32 Tragically He so often sought to explain to the disciples about the cross; and yet always they met His efforts either with silence, or with irrelevant changing of the subject, or even protest, in Peter's case. The tragic mismatch between the Lord's cross and the mind of the disciples is brought out in Mk. 10:32-40. Having set His face to go up to Jerusalem, the Lord "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid". The words imply that He took the lead and walked forcefully a few paces ahead of them in a startling manner. "If anything in the Gospels has the stamp of real and live recollection upon it, it is this". His mind was evidently dwelling in His forthcoming death, in which He may well have foreseen that He would be crucified with sinners on His right and left. But then two of the disciples respond to His prediction of the cross by asking that *they* should sit on His right and left hand in glory over the others. Here we see, on the Gospel writers own admission, the paucity of their effort to grasp the real message of the cross. May it not be so with us. May we at least strive to enter into His struggle, and be moved to a true and unpretended humility by it.

There was something in His body language during His last journey to Jerusalem which was nothing short of terrifying to the disciples: "They were amazed; and as they followed Him, they were afraid" (Mk. 10:32-34). All this came to a climax in His extreme sweating in Gethsemane as the great horror of darkness began to actually descend on Him (Mk. 14:33-42). Contrast this with the calmness of suicide bombers or other religiously persuaded zealots going to their death. The Lord- *our* Lord- was too sensitive to humanity, to *us*, to His *own* humanity, to His own sense of the possibility of failure which His humility pressed ever upon Him... than to be like that. See on Heb. 5:7,8.

10:34-38- see on Mk. 9:31-34.

10:36 "What would ye that I should do for you?" (Mk. 10:36) was surely said by the Lord with a gentle irony; He had just been speaking of how He would die for them. James and John evidently didn't appreciate the wonder, the blessing, the honour of the fact that the Son of God would love them unto the end. All they wanted was the human blessing, in this life, of being able to tell their brethren that they would be *the* greatest in the Kingdom. "What would ye that I should do for you" - in addition to loving you unto the death, of loving you with a love greater than that of *anyone* else? Their minds were all too set on the present, the petty glory of here and now. But when they actually beheld the cross (Lk. 23:49 suggests James also did), they would have learnt their lesson. And so it was with Job. Throughout the core of the book, he consistently addresses God as 'Shaddai', the fruitful one, the provider of blessing. But in the prologue and epilogue, he calls God 'Yahweh'. It may be that He came to *know* the wonder of God's Name to the extent that he quit his perception of God as only the provider of material blessing.

10:37 When the Lord Jesus promised those who overcome that they would sit down with Him in His throne (Rev. 3:21), He was surely casting a glance back at the way His men had asked to sit at His right and left hand, in His glory (Mk. 10:37). He knew He was promising a future glory far above what to them must have been the heights of their spiritual ambition.

10:38 In Gethsemane He spoke of drinking the cup of His final death and suffering. But earlier He had spoken in the present tense: "the cup that I drink of... the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mk. 10:38). The drinking of the cup of death was ongoing. Likewise there are several verses in Psalms 22 and 69 which are evidently relevant to both the Lord's life and also His final hours on the cross. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" is in the context of the cross, but is applied to an earlier period of the Lord's life (Ps. 69:9 cp. Jn. 2:17). "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" is another example (Ps. 69:8); it is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet it is elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry.

James and John pestered the Lord to give them glory in His Kingdom. He didn't refuse their request; He simply turned the question round to them: 'Can you really carry my cross? Don't be so obsessed with getting salvation out of me. Concentrate instead on carrying my cross, being baptized with my baptism, and then the corollary of that- sharing my resurrection- will follow in its own time'.

10:39- see on Gal. 3:27.

10:40 The altogether lovely manner of the Lord is shown in how He dealt with immature understanding and ambition amongst others. James and John wanted to sit on either side of the Lord in His Kingdom glory. Instead of telling them to be more humble, the Lord gently went along with them- so far. He said that this great honour would be given to "them for whom it is prepared" (Mk. 10:40). And whom is this? *All* those redeemed in Christ have that place "prepared" (Mt. 25:34). The immediate context speaks of the cross (Mk. 10:33,45), and it is this which prepared the places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). Thus the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Actually, all those redeemed in Christ will sit down with Him in His very throne- not just on the right and left side of Him (Rev. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord's subsequent parable about the places prepared in the Kingdom, and people being on the right *and* left hand of Him at judgment, with the rejected on the left hand, was perhaps His gentle corrective to James and John. But my point is that He was so gentle about the way He corrected their error. Actually twice before in Mark 10, the Lord had shown this spirit. The arrogant young man told Him that he'd kept all the commandments from his youth [and, get it, he was only a young guy anyway...]. And yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mk. 10:20). And then moments later in the record, Peter starts on about "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee"- and the Lord so gently doesn't disagree, even though Peter's fishing business and family were still there for him to return to it seems, but promises reward for all who truly do leave all (Mk. 10:28-30). So just three times in one chapter, we see the gentle patience of the Lord with arrogant, small minded people,

who thought they understood so much and were so righteous. They were nothing compared to Him. But the way He deals with them is indeed “altogether lovely”.

10:43 When the disciples argued about who should be the greatest, the Lord replied that “it is not so among you: whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister” (Mk .10:43 R. V.). He expected them to live up to the righteousness which He imputed to them.

10:44- see on Phil. 2:7.

It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus. And yet we are also to be slaves to all His people (Mk. 10:44), for the Lord Jesus *is* His people: they are His body. To serve our brethren is to serve the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus *expects* us to relate to Him as bond slaves. He speaks of how a bond slave can be working in the field all day, come home tired, and then be immediately commanded by the master to prepare his meal and only then get his own meal- and the master won't thank him, but just expects it of him. And the Lord Jesus applies this to His relationship with us. The Lord of all grace is, by absolute rights, a demanding Lord. He commented that we call Him Lord and Master, and we say well, for so He is (Jn. 13:13). If we are truly the bond-slaves of the Lord Jesus, we have no 'free time' for ourselves. Neither will we expect to have time for ultimately our 'own thing'. The craze for personal and social freedom which sweeps the modern world will leave us untouched. Ultimate freedom and total independence is not for us.

10:45 In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45). In His death for Israel, He was “a minister [lowly servant] of the circumcision”, i.e. the Jews (Rom. 15:8). Yet we *are* His ministers, His slave / servants. The same word is used for how the women and Angels ministered unto Him (Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41), and how He anticipated men would minister to Him (Jn. 12:26 Gk. cp. 2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). But both then and now, He came and has come in order to minister / serve us, rather than to be served by us; even though this is what we give our lives to doing. Yet He is still all taken up with ministering to us. He came more to serve than to be served. We are slaves, all of us, of the lowest sort. It's hard for us to realise the lowliness of being a Roman slave; and the sheer wonder of being made a free man, purely by grace. This is what *each and every one of us* has experienced. Servanthood / slavery should be the concept that dominates our lives; for we cannot be a servant of two masters (Mt. 6:24). We are to be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord Jesus and those in Him. See on Lk. 17:10.

11:1- see on Mk. 7:32-35.

11:13 God is in search of man, and so is His Son. We surely all at times get depressed, feeling we are nothing and nobody, just used rather than needed. But just as we have our need to be needed, so does God, seeing we are made in His image and likeness. We see it all worked out visually when the Lord Jesus was starving hungry (Gk.), and saw a fig tree far away. He walked towards it, fixing His mind upon the tree. It wasn't the time for figs, but the tree had leaves, and He was so hungry, He'd have been prepared to eat the most immature, unripe figs (Mk. 11:12,13). This is an acted parable, of His search for man, for fruit upon us. The same imagery of a fig tree bearing fruit is used by the Lord in Lk. 13:6 to speak of His hope of spiritual fruit from Israel. But when the Lord finally arrived at the leafy fig tree, He found no fruit at all, and so He cursed it, and it withered. The same word is used about the withering of those rejected at the last day by the Lord Jesus- they will be withered, and then gathered up and burnt (Jn. 15:6). So as the Lord Jesus strode the long way towards the fig tree, focused upon it with all the focus and hope of a hungry man, so eager and hopeful to find fruit... so He is striding towards us with the same hope in us, of finding at least something, however immature, however unripe. But at least something. The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9: “As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy

them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob... and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there". The "elect" are paralleled with "my servants". Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom

11:14 Mk. 11:14,21,22 imply that Peter was amazed that something the Lord had predicted about the fig tree had actually come true.

Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God's threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don't somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many 'repentings' are "kindled together" as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8).

The fig tree would never bear fruit (Mk. 11:14). But Israel will blossom and bud and fill the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6); hence the fig tree bearing fruit when it has been condemned never to bear fruit is such a dramatic sign (Lk. 21:29,30.). The Lord spoke His words about Israel's future budding with full knowledge that He (and several OT passages) had condemned her to eternal barrenness. He knew, however, the paradox of grace.

11:17 Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called..." a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It "shall be" a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The 'fulfilment' of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. 'Prophecy' really means the speaking forth of God's word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. "My house shall be called a house of prayer" had the extent of its possible fulfilment limited by the Jews turning the temple into a trading centre (Mk. 11:17).

11:20 Take the incident of the withered fig tree in Mark 11:20-24 as an example of where Jesus didn't want us to perceive Him as too different from us. The disciples are amazed at the faith of Jesus in God's power. He had commanded the fig tree to be withered- but this had required Him to pray to God to make this happen. As the disciples looked at Him, wide eyed with amazement at His faith, very much into the "Wow!" experience, the Lord immediately urged *them* to "have faith in God... *whosoever* [and this was surely His emphasis] shall [ask a mountain to move in faith, it will happen]... therefore I say unto *you*, Whatsoever things *you* desire [just as Jesus had desired the withering of the fig tree], when *you* pray [as Jesus had done about the fig tree], believe that *you* receive them, and *you* shall have them". I suggest His emphasis was upon the word *you*. He so desired them to see His pattern of faith in prayer as a realistic image for them to copy. How sad He must be at the way He has been turned into an other-worldly figure, some wonderful, kindly God who saves us from the weakness and lack of faith which we are so full of. Yes, He *is* our Saviour, and the "Wow!" factor leads us to have a burning and undying sense of gratitude to Him. But He isn't *only* that; He is an inspiration. It is in this sense that the spirit of Christ can and does so radically transform human life in practice. Of course, we have sinned, and we continue to do so. For

whatever reason, we are not Jesus. But our painful awareness of this [and it ought to be painful, not merely a theoretical acceptance that we are sinners]... shouldn't lead us to think that His example isn't a realistic pattern for us.

11:21- see on Mk. 8:29; Jn. 21:7.

11:22 We are asked to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48); to have the faith of God (Mk. 11:22 AVmg.). By faith in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we can attain these heights; but not in our own strength. In our every spiritual struggle and victory against the flesh throughout the day, we are playing out the finest and highest heroism that any playwright could conceive: the absolute underdog, the outsider without a chance, winning, at the end, the ultimate victory against impossible odds.

11:22-24 Dear Peter exemplified how we so often behave, when he gasped at how deep was Jesus' faith, as he saw the fig tree withered in exact accord with the Lord's earlier words. But the Lord turns on Him immediately: "[*You*] have faith in God... *you* must believe, and whatever *you* ask in faith will happen, if you like me, see it as if it has happened at the point of asking for it" (Mk. 11:22-24).

11:23- see on Rev. 8:8.

It was the Lord's radical usage of language which led to the huge, seething anger which He provoked, culminating in the demand for His death. He seems to have purposefully reinterpreted and reapplied symbols and ideas which spoke of Jewish national pride, and applied them to something quite different. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, not a war horse, and in order to die... led to so much anger exactly because He had subverted such a familiar and longed for hope and symbol. We have to remember the huge value of symbols in the first century, living as we do in an age when the written word has become paramount. For the illiterate, symbols and acted parables were of far greater importance than the written word. We may think of 'Jesus' in terms of His teachings recorded at a specific chapter and verse of our Bibles. To the illiterate first century Jew, they thought of Him in terms of what He *did*- His cleansing of the temple, His image of the temple mount being plucked up and cast into the sea. The Lord's teaching about the temple was especially subversive- for the temple played a "decisive role... in resistance toward Rome". It was "the focal point of the hope of national liberation, and hence was regarded as a guarantee of security against the pagans". But what does Jesus teach about the temple? It will be destroyed, His body shall be greater than the temple, it was to be a place of blessing for pagan Gentiles, because of Israel's wickedness the abomination would be set there, every place was hallowed ground, He was the true priest, etc. According to the *Mishnah Berakoth* 9.5, the faithful were to wash the dust from their feet before entering it- and Jesus washed His disciples feet in likely allusion to this before they lay down in a private room and broke bread with Him (Jn. 13:1-20). As the Lithuanian Jewish Rabbi Jacob Neusner commented about Jesus' institution of the 'breaking of bread': "The holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples". The Lord Jesus used the term "the blood of the covenant" at the last Supper, with reference to how Zech. 9:9-11 prophesied that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would be because of this "blood of my covenant". Yet the restoration / redemption which the Lord had in mind was not politically from Rome, but from sin and death through His blood. The temple had no great role in the Lord's teaching. By driving out traders from the temple, the Lord was effectively suggesting that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21, of how in the restoration there would be no Gentile traders there, was coming true in Him. And the elders of the Jews are thus paralleled by Him with the Gentiles. He speaks of how "this mountain"- and He must've been referring to Zion, the temple mount- was to be plucked up and cast into the sea of Gentiles (Mk. 11:23). And He was alluding to Zech 4:6,7, which spoke of how the mountain of Babylon would be cast into the sea at the restoration- with the 'splash' expressed in the words "Grace, grace". This was to associate the Jewish temple system with Babylon- just as Revelation 17 likewise does. The Lord opened up a new

universe of symbols; in an almost kaleidoscopic way, He twisted all the well loved symbols around. And when you mess with symbols, people get angry. Having lived in the Baltic States many years, I observed how inflammatory is the issue of messing with war memorials. Russians and Balts can slag each other off verbally all they wish, and people shrug. But mess with symbols, remove or rededicate a war memorial- and the crowds are on the streets. And this was, partially, what led to the fury with Jesus which led to His lynching. He who proclaimed non-violent revolution, the radical transformation of the inner mind into God's temple, Israel's true Messiah, was seen as the ultimate threat to all that it meant to be Jewish- all because His language and actions subverted the beloved symbols of the social club. When we experience this... we are sharing something of His sufferings.

The Lord's utter confidence in the power of prayer is reflected in the way He speaks to lepers, to waves of the sea, to blind eyes and deaf ears, commanding them to do things. Yet clearly this was a result of His own prayer to the Father. Yet He was so confident that what He had requested would really come true. And in Mk. 11:23 He challenges us to tell mountains to be removed. He doesn't tell us to ask God to move a mountain; rather does He teach us to talk directly to the mountain. It's been observed that Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'yes'; instead, in order to show agreement, the preceding words of the speaker are repeated. Examples are in Esther 5:7 Heb. and Gen. 18:15. Seeing that Biblical Hebrew reflects to us something of the mind of God, it seems to me that we're being taught by this to believe that what we ask for from God, we will receive; our request is the nature of the answer. Hence the need for care in formulating *what* we ask for, believing that God's 'yes' will be effectively a repeating back of our words to us.

The Christian must "believe that what he saith cometh to pass" - present tense. He is to visualize the immediate fulfilment of what he asks for in the court of Heaven. Compare the RV and AV of Ps. 92:11 in this connection: "Mine eye also shall see [RV 'hath seen'] my desire... and mine ears shall hear [RV 'have heard'] my desire". The confusion in the tenses is surely intentional- David really felt he had already received that which he prayed for. He shows this again by the way in which he uses tense moods perhaps purposefully ambiguously in Ps. 56:13. The AV has: "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling...?", whereas the RV renders it: "Hast thou not delivered my feet from falling?". Another example is in Ps. 18:44,47: "The strangers *shall* submit themselves... God [right now, by faith in prayer] subdueth the peoples". David perhaps perceived that the requests of prayer must also be some sort of statement that the prayer was answered already.

The Lord taught that we should believe that "what [we] say [in prayer] shall come to pass" (Mk. 11:23 RV). This is very much the language of God's word- what *He* says, comes to pass for sure. And so we're being invited to see *our* words in prayer as effectively like God's words; for if we pray according to His word, surely we will be heard. See on Jn. 15:7.

Consider how the Lord taught ambition in prayer- He put before His men the real possibility of moving a mountain into the sea, if that was what was required (Mk. 11:23). This example wasn't off the top of His head; He was consciously alluding to Job 9:5, where Job says that God alone, but not man, can do something like moving a mountain into the sea. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, God alone can do it; but such is the potential power of prayer, that He will hearken to your requests to do such things- and do them'. The whole process of Nazariteship was to encourage the normal Israelite to have the ambition to rise up to the spirit of the High Priest himself; the restrictions governing Nazariteship were a purposeful echo of those regarding the High Priest. The way God describes Himself as depriving Israel of "wine or strong drink" (Dt. 29:6) throughout the wilderness journey is Nazarite language: as if in all their weakness and profligacy, God still sought to inspire them to rise up to the heights.

11:24 The experience of answered prayer inspires us to pray yet more. "What things soever ye desire, believe that ye [did] receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24 Gk.) can be read as meaning that we should remember how we received things in the past, and therefore we should have faith that the things we now desire really will be likewise granted. It is for this reason that the

prayers recorded in the Psalms constantly look back to previous experiences of answered prayer as a motivation for faith and Hope: Ps. 3:4,5; 44:1-4; 61:5; 63:7; 66:18-20; 77:4-16; 86:13; 94:5,7-19; 116:1; 120:1,2; 126:1,4; 140:6,7. Jeremiah likewise (Lam. 3:55,56). And even the fact other believers had received answers to prayer inspired David's faith in prayer (Ps. 74:11-15; 106).

The close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit 'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

Even in His mortal life, the Lord was eager to as it were close the gap between Himself and His followers, so that they didn't feel He was an unattainable, distant icon to admire, but rather a true friend, leader, King and example to realistically follow. Thus when He cursed the fig tree, having prayed about it and firmly believing that what He had asked would surely come about, Peter marvelled: "Master, behold, the fig tree you cursed is withered!". The Lord replies by urging Peter to "Have faith in God. For truly I tell you, *whosoever* (and this is the stress, surely) shall say unto this mountain (far bigger than a fig tree), Be removed be cast into the sea (a far greater miracle than withering a fig tree overnight), and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says will come to pass (referring to how the words of Jesus to the fig tree were effectively His prayer to God about it); he shall *whatever* he says. Therefore I say unto you, Whatever you desire (just as I desired the withering of the fig tree), when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them (just as I did regarding the fig tree)" (Mk. 11:21-24). Peter's amazement at the power of the Lord's prayers was therefore turned back on him- 'You too can do what I just did, and actually greater things are possible for you than what I just did'. That was the message here- and He repeated it in the upper room, in encouraging them that "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12).

11:25 The Lord assumed that whenever we pray, we will include a request for forgiveness. Not only is this one of the few requests in His model prayer, but Mk. 11:25 reflects the same assumption: "*Whensoever* ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; that your Father... may forgive you" (RV). *Whenever* we pray we should be seeking forgiveness. And the Lord also implies that whenever we pray, we will almost always have something against someone else. For He knew well that human society is inevitably filled with misunderstandings and bad feelings against each other.

11:26 The conditions on which God's love and forgiveness operate was likewise stressed by Christ: "When ye stand praying, forgive... that your Father... may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:25,26). God's eagerness to forgive us is therefore reflected in His eagerness to see us forgive others. His desire to make all grace abound towards us is something beautiful, something wondrous.

11:30 The 'naturalness' of Jesus becomes all the more powerful when we grasp Biblically that Jesus is our representative; exactly because He was really, genuinely human, He is such a natural and powerful imperative to us in our behaviour. Take, for example, His perception of His own baptism. Surely why He went through with it was to show His solidarity with us, who would later be baptized. He lined up along the banks along with big time sinners, nobodies, dear old grannies, weirdos, starry-eyed youngsters, village people stuck in the monotony of a hand-to-mouth existence, all of them standing there probably half-naked... and took His turn to be baptized. When asked later to account for His authority, Jesus asked whether His questioners accepted John's baptism as from Heaven or from men (Mk. 11:30). This wasn't merely a diversionary question; it was dead relevant.

His authority was [partly] because He had been baptized by John. This was how much John's baptism inspired Him. It meant so much to Him, to have been thus identified with us. And it was that very identification with humanity, as the "son of Man", that gave Him His authority.

11:32 Although we would all agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is quite possible that we fail to *feel* this as we might when we read it. The people "verily held John to be a prophet" (Mk. 11:32 RV) but they rejoiced only for a short time in the light of his words. They rejected his most essential message- whilst still believing he was an inspired prophet. Or, thinking they believed he was.

12:6 It is noteworthy that the parable of Mk. 12:6 has Jesus describing Himself as both a servant- the last servant- and the only beloved son of the vineyard owner.

"Surely they will reverence my Son" is the thought imputed to Almighty God in the parable, as He sends His only Son to seek for spiritual response in Israel (Mk. 12:6). The parable frames God as almost naive in believing that although Israel had killed the prophets, they would reverence the Word made flesh, and the speaking of God to them in Him. Yet of course God knew what would happen; but in order to express the extraordinary, unenterable extent of His hopefulness, He is framed in this way. Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then shalt thou be ashamed... for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The Father had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). The Lord Jesus reflected the Father's positive spirit in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son to feature the Heavenly Father as running out to meet the returning son, falling on his neck and kissing him... in *exactly* the language of Gen. 33:4 about Esau doing this to Jacob. The connection can't be denied; but what was the Lord's point? Surely He was willing to see something positive in the otherwise fleshly Esau at that time, He as it were took a snapshot of Esau at that moment... and applied it to God Himself, in His extravagant grace towards an unworthy Jacob. This was how positive minded the Lord was in His reading of even the darkest characters.

12:9- see on Mk. 8:34-37.

The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will [the owner of the vineyard] do?" (Mk. 12:9), those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What... to do... what I will do".

12:10 Mind- s.w. understanding, imagination. Our imaginations, our small scale dreams and fantasies as we go about life, should be devoted to loving God through loving our neighbour. "What could I do for him / her...?" should be a recurrent question.

12:14- see on Jn. 10:13.

12:29-31 Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:28: "*this* do...". See on Mt. 22:40.

Jesus was asked which was the first (i.e. the most important) commandment; we would expect Him to just recite one of them, and to say 'Well, there you are, that's my answer; that's the first one, either numerically, or in terms of importance'. But in reply to this request to name just one of the ten commandments, He actually quotes two of them. "Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is

the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *There is none other commandment greater than these*". There is no greater command (singular) than these *two*. So Jesus saw those two commands as one, the greatest, most important principle of our life before God. Yet He begins by speaking of the unity of God as expressed in His memorial Name, Yahweh your elohim, and says that *this* is what will lead to us loving God with all we have, and also to our loving our neighbour as ourselves. The Lord is saying that if we really appreciate this idea of the unity of God, that Yahweh is our God, then we will *therefore* love God, and also our neighbour. So what does it mean, to love our neighbour as ourselves? In the context of the Decalogue, the neighbour of the Israelite would have been his fellow Israelite, not the Gentile who lived next door to him. The command to love our neighbour as ourselves is elsewhere given an equivalent under the new Covenant: to love our brother or sister in the ecclesia as ourselves. Gal. 5:14 and James 2:8 quote this command in the context of ecclesial life.

The Lord said that the first, the most important, of the commandments was that God is one Yahweh. He didn't see this as an abstract doctrine. He saw the doctrine of the unity of God as a command, it demands behaviour in response to it. Thus the command continues: "And (therefore) thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... soul... strength... mind... and the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment (singular) greater than these (two)" (Mk. 12:28-31). The Lord saw those two commandments as effectively one commandment; remember, He was answering the question about what was the greatest (singular) commandment. Christ saw the unity of God as part and parcel of the command to love our neighbour (in Christ) as ourselves. Why? Surely He saw that the facts that God's Name is one, and all His people are in some way *in* His Name, mean that we must love others in that Name as much as we love ourselves and as much as we love God. Now apply this to the phenomena of Christian disillusion with the church. We are *in* God, and God is one. So we are all one with each other. Loving our neighbour in Christ as ourselves is placed parallel with loving God with all our heart, strength etc. This means that the main drive of our service to God should be devoted to loving our brother, our neighbour. All those who are baptized into the Name must be loved as we love ourselves. This in itself sinks the possibility of a 'desert island' existence. We just can't live alone. We can't quit on the brotherhood if we want to love God. And this tough, far reaching conclusion comes from knowing that God is one, and all in Him are therefore one.

12:30- see on 1 Thess. 1:2.

12:32 In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh. We must love others who bear that Name "as ourselves", so intense is the unity between us. In some ways, we should lose the sense of our own self interest; we should somehow be able to have the same spiritual interest in others (for this is true love) as we do for ourselves. So this sense of true selflessness which we would dearly desire is connected with an appreciation of the doctrine of the intense unity of God and of His Name, and of the glorious principle of God manifestation. By sharing the one Name, we are one together. See on Jn. 5:23.

12:33 The Scribe said that the most important commandment to love God "with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (Gk. 'in an intellect-having way'), He said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom". Notice how 'understanding' with the intellect is put higher in the list than loving one's neighbour. The fundamental thing is to correctly understand, and this will naturally lead to a life of

practical love. Our surrounding 'Christian' world has inverted this order; love of neighbour has been placed above correct understanding of God. Because the Scribe answered in an intellect-having way, the Saviour said that He was near to the Kingdom. To reach the Kingdom therefore involves correct understanding. The words of Mk. 12:33 allude to a number of OT passages which likewise show the superiority of knowledge and practical service over sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Putting them together we find the following parallels:

To obey God's word	is better than sacrifice
To listen to God's word	is better than sacrifice
To show mercy	is better than sacrifice
To know God	is better than sacrifice
To be humble and just	is better than sacrifice
To understand God	is better than sacrifice

Understanding God, hearing His word, knowing God (all acts of the intellect) are therefore paralleled with practical things like loving out neighbour, showing mercy, justice etc. These practical things are an outcome of our correct knowledge of God.

12:34 A correct *understanding* of the Law and the sacrifices meant that a man was near the Kingdom (Mk. 12:34).

12:43- see on 2 Cor. 8:11,12.

12:44 The Lord condemned the Pharisees for devouring widow's houses (Mk. 12:40), but then goes on to show how the widow who threw in all her wealth to the treasuries of the corrupt Pharisees had actually gained great approval in God's eyes by doing so (Mk. 12:44). Out of evil, good came. The Lord didn't just lament the cruel selfishness of the Jewish leadership. He pointed out how God worked through even this to enable a poor woman to please Him immensely. There is a wondrous ecology in all this; nothing is lost. Nothing, in the final end, can be done against the Truth, only for the Truth.

13:4 The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

The disciples (in their childish way) showed the Lord the greatness of the temple, and he commented that soon it would be destroyed. They asked the obvious question: When? Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions; he gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of they coming, and of the end

of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. The Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but his real coming and the main ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

13:5 The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

13:9 When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

13:9-13- see on Mk. 14:68.

13:10- see on Acts 16.

13:11- see on Ex. 4:12.

13:13 The Olivet prophecy as recorded in Mark 13 has many allusions to the sufferings of our Lord, thereby suggesting that our sufferings during the coming tribulation will make us fellowship the cross as never before. The whole idea of darkness, earthquake, open graves, rocks shaking etc, which we read of in the Olivet and other last day prophecies is evidently the language of the crucifixion. The description of suffering before "the end" comes (Mk. 13:7,13; Mt. 24:14) invites connection with Christ's death also being described as "the end", coming as it did after a period of suffering (Mt. 26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). This connection is strengthened by the way in which each record of the Olivet prophecy leads straight on into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. There is to be a

“little while” between the death of those persecuted in the last days, and the coming of the Lord; using the very same word which John uses for the “little while” of the three days of the Lord’s death (Rev. 6:11; Jn. 16:16-19). Rev. 12 speaks of how the dead bodies of the tribulation victims will rest for three and a half days, just as the Lord’s body did. They will fully fellowship His death and therefore His resurrection. Similarly, the idea of all God’s word being fulfilled by the Lord’s death (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 19:28; Acts 3:18) follows on from the prophecy that all will be fulfilled at the time of suffering which heralds the second coming (Lk. 21:22). Mt. 24:13 commends those who endure to the end- of the great tribulation. The same word occurs in Heb. 12:2,3 about Christ enduring the cross- we fellowship the cross during the last day tribulation. The word in Mt. 24:29 for “the tribulation” is used in Col. 1:24 about the afflictions of Christ. And as the Lord’s critics could not find a way to answer Him, so in our tribulation, all our adversaries will not be able to gainsay us (Lk. 21:15). The Lord in Jn. 16:2,4,32 used the term “the hour” to refer both to the ‘hour’ of His own sufferings, and the ‘hour’ of tribulation for His people. He clearly saw what He was about to endure as being repeated in the latter day tribulation of those for whom He was about to die.

The other tribulation prophecies, notably in Revelation, are also shot through with allusions to Christ’s passion.

"They shall deliver you up to the councils...	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
beaten...	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony...	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
brother shall betray the brother...	Judas; Peter's denial?
turn back to take up his garment...	John Mark's linen garment
false Christs...	Barabbas
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
watch and pray...	" Watch with me" ; Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing...	Peter's denials
in the morning...	Trial and crucifixion
find you sleeping"	Disciples in Gethsemane

13:14 The Lord speaks in a latter day context about “let him that readeth understand” Daniel’s prophecies (Mk. 13:14)- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord’s teaching here: “Let him... understand... let him... not go down... let him... not return... let them... flee”. The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord’s Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs-

as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works. See on Heb. 5:6.

13:18 "Pray ye that your flight (the time of your flight) be not in winter". This indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

13:19 The LXX uses this same word for "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:

"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)

"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming. At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

13:20 Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. The days will be shortened for the elect's sake (Mk. 13:20); for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours.

The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very

end time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened (Mk. 13:20). And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..." - i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days.

The Lord's description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: "Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake... he shortened the days" (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

For the elects' sake, the days to the second coming *will be* shortened (Mt. 24:22); but the Lord also said, perhaps in the same sentence, that the days *have already* been shortened (Mk. 13:20). This alone shows that God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

13:24- see on Lk. 21:24,25.

"The sun shall be darkened" after the tribulation (Mk.13:24), as it was when Jesus died (Lk.23:45). See on Mk. 13:13.

13:27 The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them.

13:32,33 It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy

and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils	As Christ to the Sannhedrin
beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch and pray...	"Watch with me"; Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping	disciples in Gethsemane

13:34 Each has his or her calling, and therefore we should each have a sense of authority because we realize this. We have a job to do, a mission to accomplish, and we have authority from the Lord Himself. For the Son of man gives to *each* of His servants both "authority" and his or her specific work to do (Mk. 13:34). See on Mt. 21:41.

His enthusiasm for us comes out in Christ's description of Himself as 'taking a far journey' away from us to Heaven. The Greek strictly means 'to leave one's own native people to go abroad'; with the implication that the Lord feels closer towards us than the Angels. This is exactly the line of argument of Hebrews 1 and 2: Christ didn't come to save Angels, He came to save us, therefore He had exactly our nature and feelings, not theirs.

The "porter" was commanded to watch (Mk. 13:34); and he represents us all (Mk. 13:37). Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets in the Old Testament parables of judgment were the watchmen of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Speakest thou this parable unto us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although He didn't say so explicitly. Instead He said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and

the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Peter, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, rather than the hobby of trying to match current events with Bible prophecy.

13:35 The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road.

We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). See on Lk. 6:47.

13:37 The "porter" was commanded to watch (Mk. 13:34); and he represents us all (Mk. 13:37). Yet the Lord was the porter (s.w. Jn. 10:1); we who are in Him are likewise. All that is true of Him is in some way true of us. Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets were the watchmen of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Speakest thou this parable unto us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although he didn't say so explicitly. Instead he said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Pete, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, this is the result of our awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return.

"Watching" is not only a guarding of one's own spirituality; the idea of guarding a house and the people and goods inside it suggests that our watching is of our brethren and sisters too. Elders "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17) in this sense. Christ's parable about the gate-keeper might at first suggest that the duty of watching is only with the elders; it is for *them* to watch and feed the flock, in the same way as it was the duty of the house manager to guard the house and feed the other servants (Mt. 24:43-51; Mk. 13:33-37). But that parable is intended for *all* of us; "Watch ye therefore (as intensely as that manager)... and what I say unto you, I say unto *all*, Watch" (Mk. 13:37). In other words, we are all elders, the command to watch for each other extends to each of us. And yet how really concerned are most of us about each other's salvation?

14:3 Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that

used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be coincidental. Surely Mary inspired him.

14:7 We find an example of Paul holding up Mary Magdalene as our example in 2 Cor. 8:12, where he speaks of how the Lord although He was rich became poor for our sakes, and we ought to be inspired by this to generosity towards our poorer brethren. The connection with Mary Magdalene goes back to Mk. 14:7, where Jesus said that Mary *had* in fact given her wealth to the poor, by anointing Him, the poor one, the one who made Himself poor for our sakes.

14:8- see on 2 Cor. 8:11,12.

Whether the woman of Mk. 14:8 really understood that she was anointing His body for burial is open to question. But the Lord's positivism graciously imputed this motive to her. See on Mk. 16:3.

14:9- see on Acts 10:4.

memorial Mk. 14:9 could mean that when the Gospel message is proclaimed in all the world at Messiah's return, then what Mary had done would be told [before God] that He may mercifully remember her for good at the judgment. This may sound a forced interpretation to Western ears and eyes, but we must remember that the idea of 'for a memorial' denoted being spoken of for good before someone, in this case, the judge of all. What follows from this is that there will be a direct link between our deeds today, and the judgment process of tomorrow [or later today]. What we have done will be told before God, and He will remember us for good. On one hand, works are irrelevant. We are saved by grace. On the other hand, there will be a certain 'going through' of our deeds before Him. Quite simply, there is a direct link between our behaviour and our future judgment. Nothing will in that sense be forgotten.

The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. Mark records how the Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached world-wide (Mark 16:15); but he surely intends this to be linked with his record of how the generosity of the sinful woman would be told "whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world" (Mk. 14:9). 'The Gospel' was therefore not just the basic doctrines; it was the whole record of the life and works of Christ. This is why each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. And the comment that wherever the Gospel was preached, her example would be preached (Mk. 14:9) is tantamount to saying that her action was to be the pattern for all who would afterward believe the Gospel. Note in passing that the Gospel was not intended by the Lord to be a mere set of doctrinal propositions; it was to be a message which included practical patterns of response to it, of which Mary's was to be always mentioned.

14:12 We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. Reflect how the disciples, with all the petty pride of the practical man wishing to do something practical for the leader he adores, earnestly asked the Lord: "Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that *thou* (singular) mayest eat the Passover?" (Mk. 14:12). He told them to find a certain man, and ask him where the Master would eat Passover *with His disciples*. He would show them an upper room furnished and already prepared. '*There*', the Lord added with His gentle irony, 'prepare for *us*, not just me but you as well, to eat. Even though I've already arranged it all, and I'm inviting *you* to eat with *me*, well, I understand you must feel you do your little human bit, so there *you* prepare; although I've already prepared it all'. 'What love through all his actions ran'. This was grace and understanding and accommodation of men *par excellence*.

14:19 Mark 14:19 reads: "And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?". It is easy to assume that this "another" was Judas. But it has been suggested that in spoken Aramaic, "and another said..." would be a device for saying 'And I, I said...'. If Mark's Gospel is a verbatim account of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, this would be so

appropriate. Peter would be saying: 'All the disciples couldn't imagine it was them who would betray Jesus; and I, yes I also asked if it was me who would betray Him. I was so sure I wouldn't'. The record in Mark 14 then goes on to describe how Peter *did* effectively betray / deny the Lord.

14:20 He lamented that His betrayer was one who had dipped in the dish with Him at the last supper (Mk. 14:20). There was no way that this was meant to be an indication to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer- for they all ate the supper and dipped in the same dish. Hence His point was surely to foreground the awful fact that *it was a brother who had broken bread with Him* who would now betray Him. Ps. 41:9 laments that it was one who "ate of my bread" who betrayed Him. This is why the challenge "Lord, is it I?" echoes down to every communion service.

14:23 The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. Joachim Jeremias cites evidence that "By the time of Jesus, individual cups were used at the Passover meal", and yet Mk. 14:23 implies that He used only one cup, which was passed around amongst those at the last supper: "He took the cup [RV "a cup"]... he gave it to them: and they all drank of *it* [singular]". They didn't take up their own cups and drink- the Lord gave them His cup, just as He passes on to all in Him a participation in His "cup" of suffering and final joy. Reflect how deftly and determinedly the Lord must have "received the cup" (Lk. 22:17 RV), knowing what it represented; imagine His body language. Paul's references to "*the* cup" imply the same. This change was surely to indicate the unity that His death, His blood, His life, was to inspire amongst those who share in it. This, in passing, is behind my undoubted preference for not using individual cups at the memorial meeting. It would seem to be a returning to the Jewish legalistic tradition, however unintentionally. I have elsewhere commented upon the clear link between the death of Jesus and our unity. The memorial meeting is the supreme celebration of that unity between us. To deny a brother or sister participation in it is something serious indeed. Tragically, and it is a tragedy, we have tended to use the memorial meeting as a weapon for exclusion rather than as a celebration of our unity. Yet this was the intention, without doubt. Comparing Lk. 22:20 and Mk. 14:24 we find the Lord saying that the cup of wine was "for you poured out, poured out for many"- as if He wanted them to be aware at the memorial meeting that it was not only they who had been redeemed in Him. Likewise the Passover was essentially a remembering of the deliverance of a community, through which the individual worshipper found his or her personal salvation. This is why it is just not good enough to insist on breaking bread alone, or with no thought to the fact that all of us were redeemed together, as one man, as one nation, in Him. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is "derived from a verb meaning 'to eat'". That covenant was made with a community, the Israel of God; by eating the covenant meal we recall that collective covenant, that salvation of a community of which we are part- and it is appropriate therefore that it becomes a symbol of our unity within that community. The Old Testament idea of covenant is associated with words like *hesed* (kindness, love, devotion, grace), *emeth* (truth, integrity), *emunah* (faithfulness, allegiance). These are the characteristics associated with being in covenant relationship; and we are to show them to all others who are in covenant relationship, not just some of them.

14:24 Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers⁽²⁾. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

14:25 The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it "until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our

breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that "In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time. Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged". Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat.

The Lord's promise that He would not break bread again until He did it with us in the Kingdom (Mk. 14:25) seems to require a literal fulfillment. In a non-literal sense He breaks bread with His people even now. Therefore His statement that He would not do it again until the Kingdom seems to refer to His literal taking of bread and wine. Likewise His promise that He would literally gird Himself and come forth and serve us at a future banquet has to be linked in with this (Lk. 12:37). If all the faithful are to be gathered together to a meal, and literally eat bread and drink wine with the Lord, this suggests all sorts of logistical and practical 'problems'. It is easier to understand that space and time will have different meanings at the judgment and after.

14:26- see on Jn. 17:1.

14:27- see on Mk. 4:17.

14:28 Christ's promise that "I will go before you into Galilee" (Mk. 14:28) sounds very much like a conscious allusion to the Angel going ahead of Israel; as if Christ felt that He (through the Comforter Angel?) had taken over the role of the Angel that represented Him previously?

14:29 The RV brings out a significant nuance of the Greek text at Mk. 14:29: "When the fruit allows, immediately he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest is come". The 'sending forth' of the sickle is to be connected with the sending forth of the Angels at the Lord's return (Mt. 13:41). But this moment depends upon 'when the fruit *allows*'. The timing of Christ's coming is dependent upon the harvest being brought forth- both in personal spiritual development of the last generation of believers, and in the harvest of converts in literally all the earth. This same principle of fruit 'allowing' events in God's program is reflected in how Paul perceived his missionary work. He says that if he "satisfied" by the fruit of the converts in Rome, then he could move on to preach in Spain, if he could seal the spiritual fruit of unity between Jewish and Gentile converts in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:24 RV).

4:31 Mark's record goes on to include the parable of the birds living in the big mustard tree, soon after that of the sower. The tiny grain of mustard seed "is sown in the earth", connecting with the sowing of the word/ seed. If it is in the right ground, it develops into a huge tree "so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mk. 4:31,32). The connection with the wicked "fowls of the air" in the sower parable is evidently intentional. Surely the message is that if we will only let the word/ seed develop in our lives, those things which threaten to take away our faith (i.e. the devil/ fowls) will then be completely subordinate to us. Yet that tiny seed of the word is so easy to despise, its potential power so hard to imagine and believe.

14:32- see on Mk. 5:1.

We shouldn't be unduly phased by the idea of the early Christians memorizing the Gospels. Even today in the Islamic world, students in religious schools are expected to memorize the entire Koran, which is roughly the same size as the entire New Testament. There are reports of this even being achieved by a seven year old. The whole structure of Mark's Gospel seems designed for

memorization- the material is arranged in triplets, and the sections have chiastic structures [e.g. material arranged in the form ABA, ABCBA, ABCDCBA]. Even within the triplets, themes often occur in triplets- e.g, the three experiences in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42), Peter's three denials (Mk. 14:66-72), three wrong answers about the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:14-16; 8:28). The use of triplets and tripilisms is common in folk stories- to aid memorization.

14:35- see on Lk. 22:46.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

14:36 "We cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as "heavy" in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about Christ in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

14:37- see on Mk. 14:72.

There are good reasons for thinking that Mark's Gospel record is actually Peter's; and in his preaching of the Gospel he makes ample reference to his own failures [he contains the most detailed account of the denials of all the Gospels] and to the misunderstanding of his fellows. Both Matthew and Luke record that the Lord asked the three disciples 'Why are you [plural] sleeping?' (Mt. 26:40). It is only Mark who says that the Lord asked this of Peter personally, in the singular (Mk. 14:37). And compare Matthew's "Could ye [plural] not watch with me?" with Mk. 14:37 to Peter: "Couldst not thou [singular] watch?".

14:38- see on Acts 20:29,30.

The Lord took a very positive view of his struggling, stuttering followers, especially in the run up to His death. His teaching had throughout emphasized the importance of the heart, and how thought and action are linked. Yet He appears to have made a temporary exception when He generously excused His disciples' sleeping in Gethsemane: "The spirit [mind] truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk. 14:38). The theoretical willingness of the mind does not usually excuse fleshly weakness, according to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that this statement of His, which for me gets harder to interpret the more one ponders it, is simply the Lord's generous, justifying impulse towards His weak followers. And He was feeling like this towards them at the very time when, in symbol and in essence, they had condemned themselves. For He 'comes' to them, finds them asleep, like the sleepy virgins in His recent parable, they were dumbfounded and unable to answer Him, just as the rejected will be at judgment day, and then they fled, as the rejected likewise will (Mk. 14:40,41,51). If these were His generous feelings for them, then... what comfort it is to know we follow the same Lord.

14:40 The disciples' sleepiness is excused in the statement "for their eyes were heavy" (Mk. 14:40), even though their falling asleep at that time was utterly shameful. Luke's record excuses them by saying they slept for sorrow- which isn't really possible. It's the grace of inspiration covering up for

them. Yet He kindly says that their spirit is willing but their flesh was weak (Mk. 14:38); although elsewhere, the Lord rigorously demonstrates that mental attitudes are inevitably reflected in external behaviour, and therefore the difference between flesh and spirit in this sense is minimal.

Not only did Jesus 'answer' to the needs of others, but He Himself was a silent, insistent question that had to be responded to. He came and found the disciples sleeping, and they didn't know what to *answer* Him (Mk. 14:40). His look, the fact that when facing super exhaustion and sleep deprivation He endured in prayer... this was something that demanded, and demands, an answer- *even if we can't give it*. He responds / 'answers' to us, and we have to respond / answer to Him. This is how His piercing sensitivity, coupled with the height of His devotion, compels the building of real relationship between ourselves and this invisible Man.

14:49 There is a sense of compulsion associated with the cross. The Greek word *dei*, translated "must" or "ought", is repeatedly used by the Lord in reference to His death. He spoke of that death as the coming of His hour, as if always and in all things He felt a compulsion that He must die as He was to. Listing the references chronologically gives an impressive list:

"I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures *must be fulfilled*" (Mark 14:49). Three times in say 30 minutes, the Lord has stressed the compulsion of the cross.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders" (Mt. 16:21).

"And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and [*must*] be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21-22).

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he *must suffer* many things, and be set at nought" (Mark 9:12). These last three references all occurred within a day of each other, if not a few hours. The Lord at least three times was emphasizing how He *must* die the death of the cross.

"Nevertheless *I must* walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for *it cannot be* that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)

"But first [i.e. most importantly, not just chronologically] *must he* suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (Luke 17:25).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man *must be lifted up*? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:32-34). When the Lord spoke of "*If I be lifted up*", there was no doubt about it. The idiom was correctly understood by the people as meaning: "I absolutely *must*". And for them this was a contradiction in terms: a "son of man" Messiah who *must* be crucified.

"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover *must* be killed" (Luke 22:7).

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:15-17). Embedded in the context of prediction of the cross, the Lord described that act as being how He *must* bring His sheep unto Himself.

“But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that *thus it must be*?... For I say unto you, that this that is written *must yet be accomplished* in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me *have an end*” (Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37). See on Lk. 24:6.

14:51 It is possible to argue that the young man who followed Jesus and then ran away was in fact Peter. Mk. 14:54 RV tells us after this incident that “*Peter* had followed him afar off”. Peter describes himself in the third person a few verses previously: “A certain one of them that stood by drew a sword...” (Mk. 14:47 RV). And then we go on to read in v. 51 of “a certain young man” (RV). But when speaking of his denials, Peter records them in the first person- he totally owns up to them. All of Mk. 14:27-52 concerns Peter’s part in the story, and then vv. 54-72 likewise. So it is likely that the record of the young man following disguised in a linen cloth is in fact referring to Peter too. So Peter followed, ran back, followed again, then ran away to Galilee, and then followed again. This was how hard it was for him to pick up the cross of identification with Jesus and follow Him. And for us too.

14:53 Mary's devotion to the Lord, based on the understanding she had, is truly inspirational. The original word translated "nard" is a foreign [non Greek] word, and appears to have originated far away from Palestine. The suggestion has been made that this bottle of nard belonged to some foreign royalty. The price of "more than three hundred pence" (Mk. 14:53) must be understood in terms of a penny-a-day employment rate for labourers (Mt. 20:2). This bottle would typically only be used at the burial of a king. Yet Mary dearly loved her brother Lazarus, and had only recently buried him. But she hadn't used the nard for *him*; hence perhaps the information is added that his body would be stinking after four days- implying such expensive nard had not been used in embalming *his* body (Jn. 11:39- the fact it's Martha who observes this may suggest she resented Mary for not using her nard for Lazarus, just as she resented how Mary didn't help her in the kitchen but instead sat at the Lord's feet). And the Lord Jesus perceived all this; for He commented to the disciples that Mary had "kept the nard for *my* burial" (Jn. 12:7). The Lord's reference to her 'keeping' the nard can be powerfully understood in the context of Mary not using it for her brother's burial, but rather deciding to keep it for His burial. This not only shows the clarity of Mary's understanding of the Lord's upcoming death. It also reflects how she would give her most treasured possession in an apparently senseless act of devotion to Him. She anointed Him because she understood Him to be Christ, the anointed one. But this is what we expect of a woman who won the accolade from the Lord that she sought after the "one thing" that really matters- which is Him and His word (Lk. 10:42). Our eyes have been opened to that same "one thing", and we too claim to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; and so to place devotion to Christ above family, above retention of personal wealth and value... is the intended issue of all this for us too.

14:61- see on Mk. 8:29.

14:62- see on Mt. 24:28.

14:64 The spiritual culture of Almighty God is shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

14:65 Men smote “the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with “strokes of rods”. Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we

come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

14:68 Bible minded Peter must surely have later reflected that he had said those very words: 'I know not this man'. He "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet he was able to repent and come back. Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'. And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict. Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ. The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus. And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.

"Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. In Mk. 14:68 he records himself as having said: "I know, neither understand I what thou sayest". He stresses the nature of his own rejection of knowledge of the Lord. A similar awareness of the weakness of the flesh is found in 7:21: "From within, out of the heart of man...".

14:70 From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there came the words of Almighty God. And yet He spoke them in the accent of a rural Galilean. We know this because Peter was identified as being one of the Lord's close disciples because of His accent (Mt. 26:73; Mk. 14:70). The dialect of Aramaic used in Galilee was a permanent topic of sarcasm in Jerusalem circles. There is a story in the Mishnah (bErubin 53b) which mocks how the Galileans pronounced words which began with a guttural [deep-throat] consonant. It ridicules how a Galilean in Jerusalem tries to buy something in a market but is mocked by the merchant: "You stupid Galilean, do you need something to ride on [*hamair*- a donkey], or something to drink [*hamar*- wine], or something to make a dress with [*'amar*- wool], or something for a sacrifice [*immar*- lamb]". What an essay in God's preference for using the things which man despises- that He should arrange for His Son to speak His words in the most humanly despised dialect of the ecclesia. In this context, it is interesting to note the debate over the original text of Mk. 5:41, where the Lord is recorded as saying the Aramaic words *Talitha kum* in the oldest manuscripts, but it seems this has been changed to the more grammatically correct *Talitha kumi* in later codices. *Kum* would apparently have been the slovenly Galilean way of speaking, whereby the masculine form of the imperative is joined to a feminine subject. It could be that the Lord spoke in the Galilean way, technically incorrect grammatically- as a Londoner might say 'We was waiting for a bus' rather than 'we were waiting...'; or an Ulsterman 'how are yous all?' rather than using the more correct 'you' for 'you' plural. If this is so, we have another window into the person of Jesus. There was a naturalness about Him, an expression of the ultimate image of God in totally human form, which was so attractive.

14:71 Mk. 14:71 can be read as meaning that Peter actually cursed Christ, as well as taking an oath that he didn't know Him. Commenting on the verb form of *anathematizein* there, Raymond Brown comments: "[it] should be taken transitively with 'Jesus' understood as the object: Peter cursed Jesus and took an oath that he had no personal acquaintance with him" - R.E. Brown, *The Death Of The Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1994) p. 605. I find it significant that the most awful detail about Peter's denials is provided in Mark's record, which I have suggested elsewhere is in fact Peter's record of the Gospel, written up by Mark.

14:72 It is only Mark who records the two cock crowings at the time of Peter's denial. Peter wished to quietly emphasize the exactness of fulfilment of the Lord's words about his denial. Mark / Peter likewise record Peter's words as: "I neither know nor understand what you mean". The 'what' can apply to both Jesus personally as well as the general 'being with' Jesus. Peter is admitting that He had denied having any understanding at all of the Lord- the Lord whose knowledge he now preached. One can imagine Peter's voice quivering as he recounted his Gospel story. Note how Luke says that all the disciples slept in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:45); but Mark [Peter] records how only Peter, James and John slept (Mk. 14:37).

15:3 Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: "as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent". The LXX has: "Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job's experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always "greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place

where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice. The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments. And yet the woman was to be silent... as Christ was. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband". And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

15:4 A theme of the whole record is that Christ gave His life of His own volition. This must be remembered as we reflect upon the background to the crucifixion. His refusal to answer Pilate meant that Pilate had to pronounce Him guilty (Mk. 15:4)- hence his marvel at the Lord's silence, as if the Lord was willingly allowing Himself to be condemned.

15:5 Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish

religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it'. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

15:15 As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions. Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't". All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading under foot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

15:20 The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

15:22- see on Jn. 19:25.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

15:25 And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry.

15:29 The Christian life, as crucified with Christ, cannot be kept secret from the world. This is why the place of crucifixion was so public- it was near a road, for passers by spoke to the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:29), and Simon was a passerby coming in from the field (Gk. *agros*, Lk. 23:26). The cross confronted people in their daily living, just as it should us today. Quintillian (*Declamationes* 274) records how crucifixions were always held in the most public places where crowds would gather. For us, if we are living the crucified life with Jesus, it cannot be done in a corner. See on Rom. 4:25.

15:30 All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

15:33 Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

Mark's account of the crucifixion has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). See on Lk. 23:48; Jn. 19:25.

15:36 When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh...I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

15:38 Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".

15:39 He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him".

15:40 Perhaps when He crossed Kidron He would have thought back to how Asa had to separate himself from his mother in the very same place (1 Kings 15:13). The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth.

We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message

of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed “the little one”, remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself ‘the little one’, through sustained meditation upon the cross. See on Jn. 19:25.

15:40,41- see on Rev. 14:4.

15:44 Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller (*The Bible As History* p. 356) explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). if the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed". It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostals muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile... is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: “Is it worth to weigh down on one’s own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?”. In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death. Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (38:10; 73:26).

16:3 The women who came to the garden tomb weren't looking for the risen Lord; they came to anoint the body (Mk. 16:3). But their love of the Lord was counted to them as seeking Him (Mt. 28:5).

Here's an example of our prayers and needs being answered whilst we are yet speaking. They worried about what had already been sorted!

16:7 Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: “He is going before you to Galilee; they you will see him, as he told you”. But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you”. Perhaps what the Angel said was: “... as he told you... Lo, I have told you”, thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel.

16:8 There has always been opposition to spreading the Gospel outside our own environment. Jonah was unwilling to take it to Nineveh, Israel failed miserably in their intended role as a missionary

nation, and the apostles showed remarkable reluctance to obey the command to take Christ into all the world in the first century. The women were told to go tell the disciples of the resurrection, but they went away and told nobody, Mark records (Mk. 16:7,8). The other records say that they did tell the disciples. There is no contradiction here; Mark's point is surely that they were reluctant to obey the great commission initially.

After initially saying nothing, they did eventually tell the disciples. Matthew and Luke omit this disobedience to the Lord's command to witness. The record in a beautiful way both covers their weakness, and yet also brings it out. In fact resistance to the command to tell others, or being slow to fulfil it, is another theme of the resurrection accounts.

16:9

The Chronology Of The Resurrection Of Christ

Not without some hesitation do I add to the various chronologies that have been worked out. I only do so because some important- in my view- devotional lessons arise from reflection upon what actually happened. And further, there are some simple Biblical facts which I find stubbornly refuse to fit into the existing chronologies which have been suggested:

- Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Jesus (Mk. 16:9)
- Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, didn't find the body of Jesus, went to tell Peter, and then returned to the tomb and saw Jesus (Jn. 21)

Without wishing to expose the further difficulties of other chronologies, here is what I suggest:

The Women	Mary Magdalene
Bought spices to annoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)	Bought spices to annoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)
1. There is an earthquake and the Lord resurrects	
2. Mary Magdalene is alerted by the earthquake and goes to the tomb alone "when it was yet dark" (Jn. 20:1), and finds the stone rolled away and the body missing.	
3. The women go to the grave as the day breaks; they find there is no body there (Lk. 24:3)	3. Mary then goes to tell Peter and John (Jn. 20:2)
4. They are confused (Lk. 24:4)	
5. Love's intuition leads them to go and have another look in the sepulchre; they then see Angels (Mt. 28:5; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4)	4. Mary, Peter and John rush to the tomb (Jn. 20:3)

6. The Angels tell them that Jesus has risen, and they are told to quickly go away and tell the disciples (Mt. 28:7)

7. They run away, very fearful

Peter and John go into the tomb but see only the empty tomb; they return home (Jn. 20:10)

8. They leave, in obedience to the Angelic command to go and tell others. But they do not, initially, go and tell the disciples; they say nothing to anybody (Mk. 16:8). Presumably they stood or sat down somewhere along the way, overcome with fear.

Mary remains, meets two Angels, and then meets Jesus (Jn. 20:11-17)

9. Jesus meets them (Mt. 28:9)

10. They tell everything to the eleven "and all the rest" (Lk. 24:9)

Mary returns to Jerusalem and tells the apostles what had happened (Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:18)

The only 'problem' with this chronology of the resurrection is that whilst it satisfactorily solves all the problems which the other chronologies leave outstanding, the resurrection records are introduced by passages which appear to state that all the women, including Mary Magdalene, came to the tomb and had their experiences *together*. I submit that this 'problem' arises because we are not reading the records with Semitic eyes, nor with consideration as to how God's word records and presents facts and chronologies. The European linear view of time is simply not something which we find in Scripture. We expect to be given a clear timeline, with it made clear as to who did what. In both sciences and the written arts, this is how we Europeans (and our diaspora) have been trained to think, read literature and perceive life. But it's just not there in Scripture. Many of the difficulties Europeans face in interpreting the Biblical record are rooted in this fact. This is why, e.g., the Old Testament prophecies appear to 'jump around all over the place'; one moment they are speaking of events just before the Lord's return, then back to their own contemporary situation, then on to events after His return. And likewise, characters aren't clearly defined and introduced to us at the start of a narrative, in the way that we are accustomed to. The problem is we read in a linear fashion and process in a logical fashion, whereas the inspired authors tend to write in a chiastic fashion, with the main point in the middle or X / 'chi'. The Gospel records in Matthew, Mark and John each speak as if only certain women were involved- John implies only Mary Magdalene, Matthew speaks of "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary", Mark speaks of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. But Luke tells us that "the women" were those "which came with him from Galilee". There's no absolute reason to think that "the women" all had their experience at the same time. Indeed, John's Gospel, written after the other three, appears to be perhaps correcting this impression by explaining in detail the unique experience of Mary Magdalene.

When you read some of the records, it would appear that the risen Lord appeared first to Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). Indeed, the record in 1 Corinthians 15 doesn't even mention the crucial appearances to the women. The appearances are listed there as firstly to Peter, then to the "twelve" [although there were only eleven- another example of a different use of language], then to 500

brethren, then James, then “the apostles”, and finally to Paul (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Quite simply, we have to put all the records together, and realize that each of them gives only an aspect of the historical picture. But we believe that the records don’t contradict each other, they were all inspired and are infallible. The structure of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are similar, in that they all begin with some definition of the women involved, upon whom the writer wishes to place the spotlight. But there is no *ipse facto* reason to think that all the women had the same experiences together, at the same time- even though this is how a Western reader might read the records.

Practical Insights

If the above chronology is in fact correct, we find a number of inspirational insights arising from what happened. Firstly, after a “great earthquake”, most people are distraught, frightened, worried, fixated on the immediacy of what’s happened, and tend to remain where they are or with others whom they know. But love of the Lord Jesus and an incipient belief and hope, however tiny, in His resurrection, led Mary to do what was counter-instinctive. In the night, in the darkest hours before Dawn, she ran through the rubble of houses and cracked streets to a tomb guarded by aggressive soldiers. This is what love of the Lord Jesus, even when we have such little understanding of Him, inspires us to do. No wonder she was rewarded with the priceless honour of being the first human being to see the risen Lord. The woman who sought the Lord early, at night, picking her way through the rubble of an earthquake, breaking the Sabbath, casting away all her legalism, the worldview with which she’d grown up...found Him.

Mary comes over as not being anywhere near as fearful as the other women. Not once do we read of fear being her dominant emotion. Instead, we read of her love, her weeping, her eager, desperate clinging hold of the risen Lord. The other women and the disciples are characterized by fear; fear of the Angelic appearance, fear at the appearance of Jesus, fear stifling their sharing the good news with others. And it is fear, in all its multiple forms, which is the very antithesis of faith and love; it is fear which stifles our love for the Lord, the expression of joyful, uninhibited service. Fear of our own unworthiness, fear He may not accept us, fear we might say and do the wrong thing, fear we may look foolish or get ourselves in trouble in the eyes of others... But let Mary be our heroine, an example of how love in its maturity, in its ultimate end, casts out fear. For we, with all our fears, misunderstandings, doubts, uncertainties, confusions... have been given the very same commission to go tell others which those early men and women were. For the great witnessing commission given to us all follows on seamlessly from the command of both Angels and the Lord Himself to those early witnesses of the resurrection to spread the news to others. And it can only be fear that holds us back, locks us up within the complexes which are so easily part of our personhood, and stifles our witness to others.

We’ve given reasons elsewhere for thinking that Mark’s Gospel record was actually the words of Peter transcribed by Mark. Significantly, it is Peter who makes the point that the Lord appeared *first* to Mary (Mk. 16:9). And yet according to Lk. 24:34 and 1 Cor. 15:5, Peter is framed as the first to see the Lord. Yet with characteristic humility, his version of the Gospel makes the point that actually, it was Mary. And he goes straight on in Mk. 16:14 to record how the Lord “upbraided” [a strong Greek word] the male disciples for not believing the women. The Lord was mad about this. They had failed to believe the women, probably because they were in the first century mindset of not accepting the legal testimony of a woman. And so Peter tries to make that good by pointing out *en passant* that it was actually Mary, not him, who first saw the risen Lord. Like John in his Gospel, Peter is drawing out the supremacy of Mary over himself. And we should likewise respect her. And it is apparent from the chronology presented above that the other women didn’t immediately fulfil the commission to go tell others about the Lord’s resurrection. They initially don’t tell anyone (Mk. 16:8); even though they were told to go and inform others “quickly”. Indeed, the above chronology of events means that in order for Mary to have met the Lord alone, the women can’t have stayed long at the grave. They went away quickly, but they delayed in telling others what had happened. In

contrast, Mary doesn't delay. She goes straight away, according to John's account, and tells the others.

16:9 One would have expected that Jesus would have first of all appeared to His dear mother, after resurrecting. Indeed there was a time when I assumed that this happened, although inspiration has more spiritual culture than to record such a personal event in the Lord's life. But I have to face up to Mk. 16:9: "Now when he was risen... he appeared first to Mary Magdalene". His mother could so easily have taken this as yet another snub, similar to the way in which He had rebuked her for not knowing He must be in His Father's house, how He addressed her at Cana as "Woman" and asked her what He had to do with her; how He told those who informed Him that His mother was outside that all those who heard God's word were His mothers; how He said that His mother wasn't blessed for suckling Him, but rather, blessed were all those who heard God's word. And the way He chose to appear to the other Mary rather than His own mother could have been taken by her as yet another snub. Yet these incidents weren't snubs. The Lord loved His mother, with a depth of passion and emotion that maybe we [and she] will never know. Yet He wanted the best for her spiritually. He wanted her to relate to Him for who He really was, not for who she perceived Him to be. It must have so hurt the Lord to work with her in this way. And so it is with His workings with us, as He seeks to bring us to know Him in truth. It must be hard for Him to bring distress into our lives. Yet with His dear mother, it worked. For the next we read of her, she is meeting with the rest of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and, according to how we read Revelation 12, the Lord Himself saw her as clothed with the sun in glory, responsible for the birth of Himself as the man child, who would bring the Kingdom of God on earth. She made it in the end.

16:10 The account of the disciples' response to the realisation of the resurrection shows perfectly how men will rise above every barrier, both within them and without, to speak the good news of what they now realise to be absolute truth. Mary, bashful ex-hooker that she was, "went and told them that had been with him", the broken-down women "with great joy... did run to bring his disciples word", those on the Emmaus road "went and told it unto the residue", "the other disciples *therefore* "told Thomas, John told Peter "It is the Lord", and finally they all "went forth, and preached everywhere" the news of the resurrection (Mt. 28:8; Mk. 16:10,13,20; Jn. 20:25; 21:7). The speed and spirit of the narrative pounds away at a major theme: The natural desire to tell others the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection. This same spirit of *urgently* passing on good news pervades the preaching recorded in Acts.

Note that the disciples are described as "weeping" for the loss of Jesus, the Greek word meaning specifically to weep aloud (Mk. 16:10). And yet the Lord appears to them in that state and upbraids them for not believing His words and for having *hard* hearts (Mk. 16:14). Faith is *so* crucial- and for all their *love* of Him, they didn't have much *faith* in Jesus. Are there similarities with ourselves? Do we on one hand love Him, and yet remain hard hearted to His words?

16:13 Although the disciples accepted that Jesus had appeared to Simon, they didn't believe the account of Cleopas and his friend. The record emphasizes their refusal to believe.

16:14 The Lord "upbraided" the disciples for their immaturity and unbelief concerning His cross and resurrection (Mk. 16:14). The Greek word is always used in a very severe context of 'reviling' (Mt. 5:11; 11:20; 27:44; Rom. 15:3; 1 Tim. 4:10); it's a tough and abusive word. It appears out of place when applied to the Lord. Yet what it indicates is that the Lord was so angry with them for not believing the witness of the women. Discounting people's experience of Jesus merely on account of their gender or background was *so* angering to the Lord. And He's the same today.

A read through the Gospels reveals the deep frustration and anger of the Lord Jesus because of the blindness of the disciples. Mark's record brings this out especially. The following comments by the Lord, almost under His breath, were all made within a matter of days of each other: "Peter said,

Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also *yet* without understanding? Do not ye *yet* understand?... do ye not *yet* understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand? Perceive ye not *yet*... having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?... how is it that ye do not understand?... O faithless generation, *how long* shall I be with you? *how long* shall I suffer you? (with reference to the disciples' faithlessness)... the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth (i.e. responded) *again*, and saith unto them, Children ...and they were astonished out of measure... Jesus went before them: and they were amazed... and he took *again* the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen... Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask" (Mt. 15:17; 16:9; Mk. 8:18,21; 9:19; 10:1,24-32). Notice the stress on "how long" and "yet". The Lord clearly was disappointed at the slow rate of development. Their blindness was an agony to Him. Especially does this come out in His attitude to the disciples after His resurrection. The exalted Son of God, *the Son of God*, poured out His anger on those eleven men. You get the sense of them cowering before the presence of a super-human intellect, beneath a force of personality that could concuss men when turned against them. He *upbraided* them for their lack of perception, their lack of understanding (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:25). As I read the record of this, there's part of me that feels so sorry for them. Thoughts of sympathy skate through my mind: *they weren't a bad crowd... only ordinary men... just poor little human beings down here on earth... only men... only human beings... limited by their own nature*. But this wasn't how the Lord saw it at all. He was angry with them. The picture of the Son of God, the exalted Son of man with eyes as a flame of fire, upbraiding His friends, those he had died for... because they hadn't understood something which he knew and they knew had been within their power to. The picture is awesome.

The experience of emotion on reflection at the Lord's sufferings can be yet another area where our spirituality isn't genuine. The scene of those 11 grown men mourning and weeping at the loss of their Lord makes me think 'They were a soft hearted lot really, behold how they loved him...'. But then the Lord appears to them and upbraids them for being *hard* hearted and indifferent to His words (Mk. 16:10,14). His upbraiding of them must have really hurt- for they must have been sure that they were anything but hard hearted towards Him.

The even greater commission to go into all the world with the Gospel followed straight on from Christ upbraiding the eleven "with their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mk. 16:14,15). That 'upbraiding' must have left them wallowing in their weakness. It would have been quite something. The Son of God upbraiding His friends. But straight on from that: "Go ye... go ye into all the world" (Mt. cp. Mk. shows "go ye" was said twice). And He told them to preach that those who believed not would be damned- after having just told them that they were men who believed not. Mark's record stresses three times in the lead up to this that they "believed not"; and then, he records how they were told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that. The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide was in fact alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the 'Gehenna' of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent "unto the nations...and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles". The rejection process glorifies God's righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men "out of all nations" (:20) to God, just as Israel's condemnation was an "instruction" unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace.

16:15- see on Mk. 14:9.

The essential spirit of the great commission was "Go!", following on as it does from the repeated commands to "go" and share the glorious news that Christ had risen. And yet so many congregations of believers seem to stress instead "Come in to us!". And every manner of carrot is dangled before the public to entice them to 'come in' to some church event. But the emphasis was

clearly, and should still be, upon ‘going’ to people. Our turning of ‘Go!’ into ‘Come to us’ is all part of a wider picture, whereby the group of hard core, desperate men who first followed Jesus, the whores, the gamblers, the mentally ill, the marginalized women... have all been diluted into a religion of conformists, a spiritual bubble in which we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, and comfortably continue in the way of our fathers who were also members of the same church as we are.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. We are to preach to “all the world” (16:15)- the *kosmos*. In the last days, the Gospel will go to “all nations”- every *ethnos* (Mk. 13:10). The parallel record in Mt. 24:14 has Jesus saying that it must go to the whole world- *oikoumene*. What did He actually say? I suggest He used both words, in an emphasis of just how universal the witness would be: ‘The Gospel will be preached in the whole *oikoumene*, yes, to every *ethnos*...’. This is all some emphasis- every creature (individual), in the whole world system, every part of society (*kosmos*), of every nation (*ethnos*), on the whole planet (*oikoumene*) was to have the message. And this is our unmistakable mandate. The number of different words used by the Lord was surely intentional.

As so often with reading the Gospels, it is profitable to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke the words which are recorded. "Go ye *into all the world* and preach the gospel to *every creature*". If only we could sense the intensity of desire, the deepness of spiritual meaning, which His voice would have conveyed. We *must* have the spiritual ambition to take the Gospel to the whole world- no matter how small our world may be. The world of our street, of our town, nation- and as far as we are able, the whole planet. Paul had this ambition, quite apart from any personal commission he received.

The great commission is framed in language which picks up on the descriptions of the Lord’s own preaching earlier in His ministry. His idea clearly enough is that He will no longer be on earth; therefore His people must be ‘Him’ to the whole earth:

The great commission to us	The personal preaching of Jesus
Make disciples (Mt. 28:19)	Made disciples (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11)
Preach the Gospel, teach people (Mk. 16:15)	Proclaimed the Gospel (Lk. 4:18), taught people (Mk. 6:30)
Proclaim repentance (Lk. 24:47)	Proclaimed repentance (Mk. 1:15)
Forgive and retain sins (Jn. 20:23)	Forgave sins (Mt. 9:1-9; Mk. 2:1-12)
Retained sins (Jn. 8:21-24; 9:41)	
Witnessed to others in obedience to the great commission (Acts 1:8)	Witnessed what he had seen and heard (Jn. 3:11)
Cast out demons, heal (Mk. 16:16)	Cast out demons (Mk. 3:15; 6:7,13), healed (Mk. 6:13)

16:15,16 In the very context of the Lord upbraiding them for their slowness to believe the Gospel of His death and resurrection, they were asked to go and teach others that he who didn't believe this same message would be damned (Mk. 16:15,16). Their witness, as it is recorded in the Gospel records, is therefore shot through with recognition of their own weakness. They record how Peter their leader was described by the Lord as a "satan" (Mk. 8:33). They were good fishermen- yet their records show that never do they record themselves as catching a fish without their Lord's help. In this they set a model for our witness; it must be shot through with a full recognition of our weakness, our own struggles to believe that which we invite others to believe. And the more real, the more credible. Not only did the Gospel writers portray their own weakness and slowness to believe; they write in such a way as to minimize their own personalities and presence. They don't continually harp on about the fact they were really present.

16:18 In Old Testament times, God described His whole people as His anointed one, His Christ: "The Lord is a strength unto his people, and he is the saving strength of his anointed" (Ps. 28:8 RVmg.). The whole people were His anointed King, His Messiah, the anointed one. And so it is for all those today who are "in Christ". Thus the prophecy about Christ personally that He would tread upon snakes and wild animals (Ps. 91:13) is quoted as being fulfilled in the disciples, who 'were' Christ on their preaching mission (Lk. 10:19; Mk. 16:18).

LUKE

1:1 Luke saw the whole of the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account “of those matters which have been fulfilled” (Lk. 1:1 RV). And “those matters” he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of “the word”. The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

1:2 Luke saw the link between the Lord’s death and His whole life when he says that they had been “eyewitnesses” of the Lord’s ministry, using the Greek word for autopsy- Luke saw his record of the Lord’s life as being an autopsy of His death (Lk. 1:2).

1:2,3 Luke’s inspired Gospel was compiled from the testimonies of “those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word” (Lk. 1:2,3). Some of the events he records could only have been told him by women; and so the Spirit accepted their witness, and encouraged them to make it because *God* accepted their witness. Only women were witnesses of the Lord’s burial- yet belief in His burial is listed by Paul as an essential part of the faith. Yet the only reason the early believers had to believe this was the testimony of women.

1:3 Luke’s Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been ‘catechized’, taught by rote, one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account (Lk. 1:3,4). Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his ‘word’ about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how “Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with Christ’s prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the ‘Gospel’ that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman’s anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So ‘preaching the Gospel’ is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry.

1:4 Lk. 1:4 mentions that the history of Jesus was something in which a new convert was “instructed” or [Gk.] catechized, as if the Gospel record was learnt by repetition. Luke as a serious historian mentions his sources, describing them as “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word”. The Greek *hyperetes* which translates “ministers” is the Greek form of the Hebrew *hazzan*. The word recurs in Lk. 4:20, about the “minister of the synagogue”. The task of the minister was to look after the scrolls- “the chest with the books was brought in to the synagogue when required from an adjoining room and brought back there afterwards”. Luke’s idea is that instead of humping a bunch of scrolls around, the ‘ministers’ were the eyewitnesses who recited what they had heard of Jesus. But because they would die out, there was a need for people like Luke to compose documents which recorded their testimony.

1:6 Lk. 1:6 = Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 3:13. We are to have the serene spirituality, all down the years, of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Zacharias was “blameless” in God’s sight, even though in this very period of his life he was in some ways lacking faith that his prayers would be answered (Lk. 1:6).

1:8 The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice. It was *whilst* Zacharias went about his service to the Lord that we were given the news that he would finally have a son (Lk. 1:8). And we all find this true. As we enter more deeply and more passionately into the things of the Lord, so He leads us further into new understandings and fresh areas of endeavour.

1:10 There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to Christ's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). We have seen from Joel 2:17 and many other passages that the remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days, as will spiritual Israel.

1:10,11 In Luke 1:10,11 we see the priest's offering of incense paralleled with the prayer of the people, and in reply to these prayers and those of Zacharias an Angel comes and stands at the right hand of the altar of incense to announce the granting of the peoples' request (for forgiveness), and Zacharias' request for a child, in the form of the birth of John and his ministry of reconciliation with God. The incense altar represented the offering of prayer- the Angel coming to stand at the right side of the altar indicates answered prayer. The command from the altar (of incense?) in Rev. 9:14 to the sixth Angel telling Him to loose other Angels was maybe from this same Angel of answered prayer. All these suggestions need very careful development, especially guarding against making the Angels rather than Jesus our mediator. There is only one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

1:13 Because God responds to our spirit, our overall situation, sometimes He does things which seem to be an answer of prayers which were not properly believed in by the person who prayed. Examples include: Gen. 30:16,17; Ex. 14:10,11 cp. Neh. 9:9; Ps. 31:22; Lk. 1:13. Belief and unbelief can quite comfortably co-exist in a man (Mk. 9:24; Jn. 12:39-43). These prayers were answered because God saw the overall situation, He read the spirit of those who prayed and responded appropriately, even if their faith in their specific, vocalized prayers was weak. Perhaps in similar vein, James 4:6 appears to teach that God will hear the prayers of the humble man when a proud man is praying at the same time; faith is not mentioned here.

1:14 God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds" - just as men had to John.

1:15 Paul seems to have admired the humility John the Baptist manifested in his preaching. He knew he had been chosen from the womb for his mission, as John had been (Gal. 1:15 = Lk. 1:15).

Paul was keen for others to copy John the baptist, to find in him the inspiration which he too had found. So he encourages his Ephesians not to drink wine but instead be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)- the very language of John (Lk. 1:15). In other words, 'Be like that Spirit-filled zealot John rather than enjoying the sloppy pleasures of this life!'

1:16 "Many" – relatively- would be converted to the true ways of God by the work of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:16), whilst numerically the majority of those who heard John's message eventually turned away from it, culminating in their crucifixion of the Messiah. See on Mt. 20:16. Or it could mean that many potentially could have been converted. Or many were converted- but fell away.

1:17 Lk. 1:17 gives the Spirit's commentary upon Elijah's achievement. The "spirit and power" of Elijah had been to turn "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" and to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord". And yet Elijah felt his ministry had been a failure; that nobody had responded. And yet his achievement is used as a prototype for the later achievement of both John the Baptist and the latter day Elijah prophet. There's a great encouragement for us here. We may feel our witness, our ministry, even our life's work- be it in formal preaching, in raising children, in seeking to be the salt of the earth- has been without fruit. But actually, according to the pattern of Elijah, we may achieve far more ultimately than we realize, even if the fruits are seen after our death. What's important, as it was in Elijah's life, is the spirit and power we personally develop and

set as an example; even if concretely and materially we don't achieve what we aim to in the lives of others. It was in this sense that God used Elijah, and uses us.

Latter day Israel will *turn* to the Lord their God, and part-and-parcel of this process will be the *turning* of the hearts of the fathers to the children (Lk. 1:16,17). When Israel earlier played traitor to their brethren, by doing so they broke their marriage covenant with God (Mal. 2:10); their attitude to their brethren was essentially their attitude to their Heavenly Father. Our God and our brethren simply can't be separated. Asa's broken relationship with God resulted in him 'crushing' the people at the same time (2 Chron. 16:10 AVmg.). See on Jn. 8:42.

1:18- see on Lk. 22:45.

1:18-22 At the shores of the Red Sea, it seems Moses' faith wavered, and he prayed something at best inappropriate. All we read is God's response: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Ex. 14:15). It seems that Moses' 'cry' isn't recorded- by grace. Likewise it seems Zacharias probably said far more than "Whereby shall I know this?" when Gabriel told him he would soon have a son. It would seem the conversation went on for so long that the people outside wondered why he was staying so long. Presumably he remonstrated with the Angel with other, graciously unrecorded words, and thereby earned the punishment of dumbness (Lk. 1:18-22).

1:19- see on 3 Jn. 11.

Luke 1:19 exemplifies how Angels are used in answering prayer. The Angelic context is set by v. 65 saying that Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God"- recalling the language of the Law, where coming before God was coming into the presence of the Angel in the tabernacle. In God's sight no man is justified (i. e. counted to be righteous)- Ps. 143:2, although men may be justified in the view of His Angels. The people praying outside made a fitting parallel with the incense being offered in the temple. Seeing it was the day of Atonement, the prayers were fundamentally for forgiveness of sins which the animal sacrifices of the past year had not properly atoned for. The answer came in the form of an Angel standing on the right side (implying acceptance) of the incense altar, and giving news of the coming ministry of Jesus, the true means of Atonement. Gabriel says that He had been sent in answer to this prayer (v. 19)- He was therefore the Angel that appeared to Zacharias. See on Is. 6:7.

1:27 Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person. Luke's Gospel makes the same point as John's but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context.

1:28- see on Lk. 1:38.

Mary is set up as the representative and epitome of all Israel / the people of God should have been. She was the seed of David, the daughter of Zion from whom Messiah came. The "highly favoured... blessed" woman (Lk. 1:28) is the daughter of Zion of Joel 2:21-27; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:14,15; 9:9. She "rejoiced" as the daughter of Zion was to rejoice at the coming of her king. She was the "servant Israel", the "handmaiden" (the female form of "servant") who was now "holpen" by God (Lk. 1:54). "Blessed be the fruit (LXX offspring) of your womb" (Dt. 28:1,4) was the promise made to Israel- and these words are applied to Mary in Lk. 1:42. See on Rev. 12:5; Mt. 5:6.

Mary was “highly favoured” (Lk. 1:28); yet the only other place the word occurs is in Eph. 1:6, where we are told that “He has made *us* accepted [highly favoured] in Christ”. Thus in the thinking of Paul and the Spirit, Mary is to represent all of us.

Hannah’s song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a *katalyma* on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the “inn” in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask *why* Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as “favoured” (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name ‘Hannah’. The record is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- ‘Hail, Hannah-like one’. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel’s bidding. She came to share God’s perception of her as a woman like Hannah. ‘Hannah’ comes from the Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / ‘Hannah-ed’ by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah’s song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world’s perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting “Hail!”, literally, ‘rejoice!’. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary’s Magnificat are really quite detailed:

1 Samuel Luke / Magnificat

1:3	1:7
1:18	:38
“	:30
2:1	:46
1:11	:48
2:2	:49
2:4	:51
:3	:51
:4	:52
:8	:52
:5	:53
:10	:69
:26	2:52

:10 anointed LXX “His Christ”- the first occurrence of ‘Messiah’ in the O.T.

And there are plenty of allusions in the Magnificat to other parts of Scripture and well known Apocryphal writings, especially the Psalms, which Mary evidently had committed to memory:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has found gladness in God my Saviour;

Ps 35:9 Then my soul will find gladness in the Lord; It will take pleasure in His salvation.

I Sam 2: 1-2 (Hannah’s hymn): My heart is strengthened in the Lord; My horn is exalted in my God...I delight in your salvation.

Hab. 3: 18 (Habakkuk's hymn): I shall find gladness in the Lord; I shall rejoice in God my Savior.

Because He has regarded the low estate of His handmaid-

I Sam 1:11 (Hannah praying for a child): O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid,

Gen 29:32 (Leah after childbirth): Because the Lord has regarded my low estate.

4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman): God heard you're your handmaid and regarded my low estate, And considered my distress and gave me a son.

For behold, henceforth all generation will call me fortunate-

Gen 30:13 (Leah after childbirth): Fortunate am I, for all women call me fortunate.

Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.

Deut. 10:21 (Moses to Israel): He is your God who has done great things in you.

Zeph. 3:17: The Lord your God is in you, A Mighty One will save you.

And holy is His Name,

Ps. 111:9: Holy and awesome is His name.

And His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.

Ps 103:17:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him.

Psalms of Solomon 13:11: His mercy upon those who fear Him.

He has shown His strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones

and has exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

I Sam 2:7-8 (Hannah's hymn): The Lord makes poor and makes rich: He reduces to lowliness and he lifts up. He lifts the needy from the earth, and from the dung heap He raises up the poor to seat them with the mighty, making them inherit a throne of glory.

Ps. 89:11(10- a hymn praising God's action for the Davidic king): You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: And by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies.

Sirach 10:14: He has put down the thrones of princes and has seated the humble before them.

Job 12:19: He has overthrown the mighty.

1QM xiv 10-11: You have raised the fallen by your strength, and have cut down the high and mighty.

Ezek 21:31 LXX (26 Heb.): Having reduced the proud to lowliness, and having exalted the man of low degree.

Ps 107:9: He has filled the soul of the hungry with good things.

He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke unto our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever.

Isa. 41:8-9: You, O Israel, My servant Jacob whom I chose, seed of Abraham whom I loved, whom I have helped from the ends of the earth.

Ps. 98:3: He has remembered His mercy to Jacob and His goodness to the House of Israel.

Psalms of Solomon 10:4: And the Lord will remember His servants in mercy.

Micah 7:20: You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Israel, as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

2 Sam. 22:51 (David's hymn at the end of his life) Showing mercy to His anointed one, to David and his posterity forever.

And a few more:

Luke

1:47 = Gen. 21:6

1:48 = Ps. 138:6 LXX; Gen. 30:13

1:49 = Ps. 126:2,3; 111:9

1:50 = Gen. 17:7

1:51 = Ps. 118:14,15

1:28-31 When the LXX and Hebrew readings are combined, it becomes evident that the Angel is inviting Mary to see herself as the "daughter of Zion":

Zeph. 3

Luke 1:28-31

Rejoice [LXX *chaire*], daughter of Zion (Zeph. 3)

Rejoice [*chaire*]...[Mary] Notice how *chaire* is also addressed to the Daughter of Zion in Zech. 9:9, a passage also applied to Jesus in Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:14,15.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of you [*en meso sou*] (Zeph. 3)

The Lord is with you [*meta sou*]. "The king of Israel" was a well known Messianic title. He was in the midst of Mary in the sense that He was now in her womb.

Do not be afraid, Zion (Zeph. 3)

Do not be afraid, Mary

The Lord your God is with / in you (Zeph. 3)- the Hebrew can imply 'in your interior parts', cp. the womb

You have found favour with God. We can perceive a double meaning now in Zephaniah's words- the Lord God was with Mary, but was also within her manifest in His Son.

The mighty one will save you (Zeph. 3)

"God my Saviour"- as if Mary picked up the allusions and responded to them.

1:30 Lk. 1:30 = Heb. 4:16. When you ask for forgiveness, be like Mary in her spiritual ambition in asking to be the mother of Messiah.

1:33 Jesus will have a Kingdom, the house of Jacob, which shall have no end (Lk.1:33). We know that "of the *increase*" of His Kingdom there will be no end; surely meaning that Christ's domination of the believers' minds will grow and grow; our relationship with Christ will grow progressively deeper. Likewise the grip which He has on the lives of the mortal believers will also increase.

"Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times", and therefore as those things progressively increase, so will the peace and stability of the physical and spiritual environment in which the mortal believers live.

1:34 So great is the depth of Mary's perception that I am led to make the suggestion that she may have actually comprehended that Isaiah 7:14 required a virgin to be made pregnant by God, and she was anticipating this happening. I am led to this possibility by musing upon her question in Lk.

1:34: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?". She had been told that she was to bear the Son of God, Messiah, but initially she is not told that this would be due to the Holy Spirit coming upon her. Her response is to ask how this will be possible, seeing she doesn't know a man. Yet she was engaged to a man, and engagements in Galilee rarely lasted longer than a year. The obvious deduction for her would have been to think that when her and Joseph married, their child would be Messiah. So why does she ask how it can be, seeing she doesn't know a man sexually? Is there not here the implication that she had picked up on the Angel's allusion to Isaiah 7:14 and realized that it required a virgin to conceive in order to make the Messiah both Son of God and son of David through a woman? And so she asks how actually this is going to come about; as if to say 'OK I understand it requires a virgin conception, but how physically is it going to work out?'. Most marriages were arranged marriages; she had been betrothed to Joseph, but was earnestly praying to be mother of Messiah, and yet she realized that it required a virgin conception. And yet soon, she would be married. She must have feared that her life was going to become just like that of any other woman. But now with ecstatic joy she realized that God had heard her, and intervened. She was to have a virgin conception before she got married to Joseph! It must have all seemed too wonderful to be true, and yet she believed. One can only be impressed at the speed and depth of her response to the Angel. The Lord's same ability was surely at least partly inherited from His mother.

1:35 The Holy Spirit came upon her, and so *Mary's* spirit was full of gladness (Lk. 1:35,47). She walked in step with the spirit (Gal. 5:25 NIV). Because she believed that really the child she would bear would be "holy", she can extol God as "holy" (1:35,49). She says that God "*Hath* done to me great things" - she believed that what was promised would actually happen, to the point she felt it had already happened. Now this surely is the essence of faith.

Jesus will be given the restored kingdom of David (Lk.1:35); therefore David's kingdom also prefigures that of Jesus. One of the emphasized features of David's Kingdom is the system of hierarchy around which the administration was organized: there were chief rulers, and then "Ezer the first, Obadiah the second, Eliab the third..." (1 Chron.12). The subdivisions of the mighty men of David is another example. Again we see the theme of a variation in rank among the saints in the Millennium. We will rule over different things, and with varying degrees of power. Christ will rule the world "by the rod of his mouth", i.e. by his word. Those who reign over ten cities will be able to speak forth this word with more power than those who rule over only two cities, for example. Our love of the wisdom of God in this life will therefore be proportional to the extent to which we use it in the ages of eternity.

The Angel's description of Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary (Lk. 1:35) could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The LXX uses the word for "overshadow" about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If Mary's mind had been alerted to this possibility, she would have seen the relevance of Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). For they are remarkably similar to the LXX of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam. 6:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of 2 Sam. 6:12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of 2 Sam. 6:15. If one

combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we have the word of God becoming flesh and “tabernacling” among us in the womb and faith of Mary. If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed.

1:38 The Lord had called His mother “Woman...” in Cana. She had also said and later sung to Him perhaps: “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Lk. 1:38). In Mt. 15:28 we have the Lord addressing the Canaanite woman: “Woman....be it unto thee even as thou wilt”. That woman restimulated memories of His dear mother.

Yet not only did Mary see herself as representative of Israel [see on Lk. 1:28]; she also felt a strong connection between herself and her Messiah Son. Any woman would feel this connection and identity with her child; but in Mary’s case, her child was the Son of God, Messiah of Israel. And she had the spiritual ambition to see herself in some way, thereby, as Messiah. Consider the evidence:

- Lk. 1:38 “the handmaid of the Lord” uses the Greek female form for “servant of the Lord”, a clear title of Messiah.

- She appropriates words spoken in the spirit of Christ to herself: “You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing: and by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies” (Ps. 89:10 cp. Lk. 1:51-53).

- She refers to herself in saying that God has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy; yet His Servant was Messiah, according to Isaiah’s servant songs (Lk. 1:54,55).

- Lk. 1:28,42 “blessed among women” alludes to Jud. 5:24, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Lord’s destruction of sin with the hammer of God’s word. Mary is tied up with her son’s victory- for He was part of her. There is a parallel between Mary and the “fruit of thy womb”, they were both to be blessed together (:42), as if God recognized this link between the mother and Son. The fact He ‘allowed’ this, rather than just using a cold ‘channel’ for His purpose, is simply surpassing in its wonder.

- Her words of Lk. 1:47 “my spirit shall rejoice in God” allude to Ps. 63:11: “But *the king* shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped”. Mary parallels herself with “the King”, seeing herself as connected with Messiah.

- “The servant of the Lord” would rejoice in God: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God” (Is. 61:10), and yet Mary as the female “servant of the Lord” also rejoices, sharing the joy of her Son.

- Lk. 1:48 has Mary rejoicing: “All generations shall call me blessed”, alluding to how in Ps. 72:17 “all nations shall call *him* [Messiah] blessed”. Mary is equated with her son, Messiah, and she recognized this. He was part of her.

- Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah’s exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* low estate with *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus?

- She appropriated the promises to Abraham’s seed [which according to Galatians 3:16 is one man, Jesus] to her personally (Lk. 1:55).

1:39- see on Lk. 2:19.

One is hard pushed to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture (Gen. 19:32,34; 30:14,15; Ex. 2:1-10; Jud. 5:28-30; Ruth 1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17; 2 Kings 5:2,3). The narrative of the women at the tomb and the resurrection is another example (Lk. 23:55-24:4). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective.

1:40 The usual girlie teenage thing would have been to go talk to her contemporaries about it. But not Mary. She went on probably the longest journey she had ever made, and alone, to see Elisabeth. She describes herself as the lowly, the hungry, who had been exalted and fed... whereas the proud and haughty had been disregarded. These words, and the evident allusions she makes back to Hannah's song, could be read as reflecting what had actually been wrought in Mary's own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy. Jn. 2:11,12 speak of three groups- the disciples, who believed, the brothers of Jesus who didn't (Jn. 7:5), and Mary, whose level of faith isn't commented upon. She stands alone. Recognizing this tendency to isolationism within her [see on Lk. 2:19], the Father seems to have encouraged Mary to open herself up to Elisabeth, encouraging her that her relative was in a somewhat similar position, having been barren for a lifetime and now expecting a child. Although Elisabeth was somewhat distant from Mary- for Mary hadn't heard the wonderful news that this elderly, barren relative was six months pregnant- Mary immediately goes to see her, following the prompting of the Lord. The record is styled to show the experiences of the two pregnancies as parallel:

- "The virgin's name was Mary" (1:27) = "her name was Elisabeth" (1:5).
- Both were startled at the Angelic appearances (1:12,29), and were comforted not to be afraid.
- "You will call his name John... you will call his name Jesus".
- "He will be great... he will be great".
- "How am I to know this?", and the Angel responded; "How shall this be?", and likewise the Angel responded.
- Both were given signs- the dumbness of Zacharias, and the pregnancy of Elisabeth.
- Both John and Jesus are described as growing up and becoming strong (Lk. 1:80; 2:40).

This is not the only time when we see circumstances repeating between Bible characters. The similarities were to direct them back to former and contemporary examples, to find strength. And this is one of the basic reasons for Christian fellowship amongst believers. Yet it would seem that as time went on, Mary became more introverted, she stored up "all these things" in her heart and couldn't share them with others. Whilst due to her unique path this is understandable, it may be related to the loss of spiritual perception and activity which it seems set in after she gave birth to Jesus.

1:42- see on Lk. 1:28.

1:45- see on Lk. 1:53.

Mary was an inspiration to Paul in his trial (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25).

Believers worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies. Thus Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk. 1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order

that the prophecies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47).

Lk. 1:45 records Elisabeth's comment on Mary: "Blessed is she that believed". In Jn. 20:29, Jesus unconsciously alludes to His mother's blessedness even after His glorification. Mary must have many times recounted the story of Elisabeth to Jesus, and His memory of it influenced His sentence construction even after His glorification. This gives a window into the extent to which we will be still who we are now in the Kingdom. Divine nature won't totally change who we are nor the influence of our parents upon us. This is a great encouragement to parents- who they influence their children to be, will be what they eternally will be. For Jesus alluded to the memory of His mother even in Divine nature.

1:46 "*My soul doth magnify the Lord*" (Lk. 1:46) is alluded to by Paul, when he uses the same Greek word in Phil. 1:2: "Christ shall be *magnified in my body / soul*". If this is a valid allusion, then "the Lord" is a reference to Jesus. In Lk. 1:43 Elisabeth had just described Jesus as "my Lord" . And then Mary in v. 46 parallels "the Lord" with "God my saviour / my Jesus" . She understood how God was to be manifest in Jesus, as she parallels "my soul" with "my spirit" . It's amazing that an illiterate teenager should have risen to such heights of understanding, probably without learning much at all from the local synagogue.

1:47- see on Lk. 1:38.

Lk. 1:47 rang in Paul's mind (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3).

Mary's words of Lk. 1:47 "my spirit hath rejoiced" are alluded to by Jesus unconsciously in Lk. 10:21 [the only time the Greek phrase "spirit... rejoices" is used]. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit" and thanked God that the humble not the wise had been chosen- showing exactly the spirit of Mary's words of Lk. 1:52,53, the words she had probably sung to Him around the house as a child. Unconsciously [?] Jesus was alluding to Mary His mother's attitude. Such was the Jesus-Mary relationship. Luke brings this out in his record in the connections he makes. Mary had an influence even on the Son of God- quite some encouragement to all parents and those who spend time with children as to the influence they have.

The Spiritual Ambition Of Mary

It seems to me that Mary had prayed to be mother of Messiah, thus showing the ultimate level of spiritual ambition. Consider the evidence:

- In Lk. 1:48 Mary exalts: "He hath looked upon..." (ASV). Mary is reflecting how God "looked upon" Elisabeth and also gave her conception- 'looking upon' is an idiom for answered prayer or God's response to human request (Gen. 6:12; 29:32; Ex. 2:25; Dt. 26:7; Jud. 6:14). All this implies that Mary like Elisabeth had requested to have this child- to bear Messiah. She sees what God has done as "His mercy" to her (1:50), as if a request had been granted.

- She was "graciously accepted" (Lk. 1:28 AVmg.); she "*found* favour" with God (1:30), using the same word as in Heb. 4:16 about us *finding* answers to prayer.

- Lk. 1:42 "blessed be the fruit of thy womb" alludes to Dt. 7:13, where the fruit of the womb was blessed if Israel kept the words of God's covenant. For Mary to have the fruit of her womb blessed therefore implied that she was being rewarded for her obedience. She was not just a channel for the fulfilment of God's purpose to the extent that any womb or woman could have been used.

- "Hail!" is translated by e.g. the LNT as "Congratulations!", as if a request had been heard, and an honour striven for.

- Hannah's prayer of thanks is clearly the basis for Mary's emotions; and Hannah had prayed for a child, and received it. As Hannah described herself as "thine handmaid" (1 Sam. 1:18), so now did

Mary too (Lk. 1:38). God remembered His mercy in making Mary conceive (Lk. 1:54), just as God had remembered Hannah in answering her prayer (1 Sam. 1:19). And just as Hannah “rose up” and went to Ramah, so Mary “rose up” and went to Judea (Lk. 1:39). Yet there is reason to think that Hannah too desired to bear Messiah. She speaks of how her “horn” has been exalted in the same way as Yahweh’s horn has been (1 Sam. 2:1,10); and the language of a horn being exalted was understood to be referring to Messiah (Ps. 89:24).

- Gabriel appeared to her; yet Gabriel in the OT is nearly always the Angel associated with answered prayer.

- To me the clearest indication that she had prayed for Messiah to be her baby is in her joyful reaction to the Angel’s message. She was engaged, and then suddenly she is told that she will soon be pregnant, before she marries, but not from any human being. On a worldly level, her life had just been messed up. There would have been major doubts in her mind as to whether Joseph would ever believe her story. And her parents... her brothers... the villagers... But amazingly enough, she is ecstatically joyful (Lk. 1:47). This would be psychologically unlikely, unless she had specifically requested this honour. She’d have been hopelessly confused and worried and upset that her planned marriage would likely founder because she had been made pregnant. The fact Mary so rejoices, and joy is a major theme both of her words and of the OT allusions she makes, is to me the greatest proof that she had requested to be the mother of Messiah, and now this was being granted.

- She knew that Joseph her boyfriend was the rightful king of Israel, according to the genealogies presented in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Yet for the promise to David to be fulfilled, that of the fruit of his body according to the flesh there would come Messiah, Mary must have been also in the direct line of David. Jesus was “born of the seed of David” (Rom. 1:3)- this passage surely implies that Mary was also “of the seed of David”. Likewise Heb. 7:14 says that Jesus “sprang out of Juda”, which could only have been true if Mary was of this tribe too. Mary had to go to Bethlehem to be taxed presumably because she was from Judah. The Old Syriac [Sinaiticus] text of Luke 2:4 says that Joseph and Mary went “to the city of David because *both were* [AV “he was”] of the house and lineage of David”. Yet her cousin Elisabeth was from Levi. Mary would have perceived that she was in an ideal position to give birth to a king-priest, which various OT prophecies implied Messiah would be. She therefore would have thought that the offspring of Joseph and herself would be ideally suited to be Messiah. Hence her confusion when she was told that her child would be produced without intercourse with Joseph. It has been suggested that the fact Luke makes no reference to the parents paying five shekels to buy back the child (required for non-Levites under Num. 18:15,16) is because Luke frames Jesus as a Levite who would remain in the Lord’s service.

- The Angel repeats the words of 1:28 in v. 30: “Thou that art highly favoured... Fear not Mary, for *thou hast* found favour with God”. She had some understandable tendency to self-doubt. After all, could it really be that she alone was to be pregnant without any man’s intervention...? It must have all sounded like a fairy tale or pagan myth, or maybe a hallucination. No wonder she ran off to see Elisabeth and see whether these strange pregnancies really were possible in reality; whether prayer really was heard in the way it seemed hers had been. ‘Finding favour’ is an idiom for prayer / request being heard. She is being comforted that yes, her prayers really had been heard. We too can struggle in just the same ways- for the Gospel is often too good news for us. That we, the nothing and nobodies, really are the highly favoured ones.

- She comes to see the solid truth of it all when she exalts in Lk. 1:48 that God ‘took notice of me’, another idiom for prayer being answered.

- Jn. 1:13 in some texts reads: " Who [i.e. Jesus] was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man [Joseph], but of God [through the Holy Spirit]. And the word was made flesh..." . This was John’s account of the virgin birth. My point is that the Lord was born not of the will of the flesh- but of the spiritual will of a woman.

For all these reasons, she was motivated to ask to be the mother of Messiah. And yet when the Angel appeared and told her that it had all been heard and arranged, she was scared. Initially she was scared, and then becomes ecstatically joyful that her dream is coming true. This has the ring of truth and likelihood about it. We can pray for something and yet when it comes true, disbelieve it. Consider how when a prayer meeting was called by the early brethren for Peter's release, they considered any such possibility that he had actually been released, i.e. that their prayers had been heard, as being absurd. Zacharias and Elisabeth had prayed all their lives for a child but when it was announced as coming true, Zacharias just didn't believe it. And so we must be the more careful what we ask for, and live in the real expectation it will come true. Jeremiah prayed for hard things to come upon the men and women of Jerusalem; and then spends the whole of Lamentations praying for God to lift the effects of his earlier prayers.

Mary And Ambition

All this reflects the level of spiritual ambition to which Mary attained. Her self-perception went beyond that of Leah to whose words she alludes ("all women call me fortunate", Gen. 30:13 LXX). Elisabeth had said the same: "Blessed are you among women" (Lk. 1:42). But Mary perceives that all generations, not just all contemporary women, would call her blessed. Yet she was the most humble woman- who was the most highly exalted. In this she not only lived out the pattern of her dear Son, setting Him an example, but she showed us a lesson: that humility does not mean that we do not have a high self-perception. She saw her strength, i.e. her humility, and perceived the high status of her place in God's plan without being proud. It seems to me that our view of human nature has resulted in our feeling we are lumps of sin walking around on this earth who can never please God. But we are made in His image, we may be animals in the way that we die, but we are still wonderfully highly perceived by our maker if we are in Christ. We can only love our neighbour if we first of all love / respect ourselves. This is a fundamental truth we do well to reflect upon more deeply. Lack of self respect means we will not truly respect or care for anyone else either. We are seen by Him as His beloved Son. And this is the essence of being brethren in Christ.

The fact we have the opportunity to be spiritually ambitious raises the question of whether God has a predetermined plan that He forces men and women to fulfill. We would rightly reject this view of predestination; rather, we have total and real freewill to choose to serve God. Mary could have declined to be the mother of God's Son; she could have simply focused on her boyfriend and upcoming marriage, and never given a thought to daring to wish to be the virgin of Is. 7:14. But she rose up to this height. She says that "nothing said by God can be impossible" (Lk. 1:38), as if to imply that although God is almighty, there is an element of possibility and conditionality in His promises. Nothing He says need be impossible; but it can be impossible if we refuse to do our part. And she continues: "May it be to me as you have said" (NIV), as if her agreement was required for God's wondrous plan to be realized. Hence the comment: "Blessed is she that believed, that there may be a performance of those things which were told her" (Lk. 1:45- same construction Acts 27:25). Thus the wonderful promise that she would have a child that would be God's Son was all conditional upon her faith and agreement and participation, even though that condition isn't directly stated.

In Lk. 1:49 Mary speaks of "He that is mighty". The Greek word *dunatos* is translated "possible" 13 times, "able" 10 times, "mighty" 6 times. She speaks of the possibilities of God in that she knew that it was due to her prayers, her spiritual ambition, that she was to be the mother of Jesus. God's mightiness is His possibility, which we limit. All things are possible to God, and all things are possible to the believer (Mk. 10:27; 9:23)- in that we limit what God can do. All the *dunamos* family of words carry not only the idea of naked power, but more of possibility. This means that God's power is under various possibilities of directing it. Recall how the man asked whether, if Jesus could do anything, He would. And the Lord replied by putting it the other way: If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. The believer limits the Lord's ability; He

Himself has boundless possibility. Mary believed *so that* there was a performance of what God had promised (AVmg.). Without her faith, God's promise would not have been fulfilled, just as her dear Son was to have the same struggle later on. Only by His obedience would the Scriptures be fulfilled; but there was the real possibility that He could have failed.

1:48- see on Lk. 1:38.

low estate Mary's quotations and allusions to the OT are nearly all from the LXX, and it is almost certain that she would have been familiar with some of the Apocryphal books bound up with the LXX at that time. Consider the words of 4 Ezra 9:45, where Zion speaks as a barren woman: "God heard your handmaid and regarded my low estate, and considered my distress and gave me a son". Clearly she saw herself as the representative of Zion. Moses told Israel that God "has done great things in you" [cp. In her womb?] (Dt. 10:21). She felt that God had helped her "His servant Israel"- alluding to Ps. 98:3 LXX "He has remembered His mercy to Jacob". Unto *us*, Israel, a son was to be given (Is. 9:6 cp. Lk. 2:11), but it was actually given to Mary. See on Lk. 1:28.

God recognized her "low estate" [humility] and exalted her above all women (Lk. 1:48), just as He would His Son among men. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation ['low estate'] his judgment was taken away". It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: "He *humbled himself*". In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of his mother. She taught him the life and the way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again in Mt. 23:12: "Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

When Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was in Gen. 30:13: "the daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed", and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of her. She was so humble to compare herself with the servant girl. Yet she also had in mind Prov. 31:28, where the virtuous woman is blessed by all. She saw herself as the virtuous woman who excelled all- yet she was so humble. She was the most highly favoured woman, but was so humble. It's hard to know your true value without being proud about it. It seems to me that we must learn to value ourselves far more, to love our neighbour AS we do really love / respect ourselves, without being proud. The ability to see your own worth and value in God's purpose is crucial; we tend to be either proud, or too negative about ourselves. Mary was so spiritually ambitious to want to be the mother of Messiah, understanding He would be God manifest.

Mary realized that her great honour was being given in response to her humility- God had regarded her "low estate (Lk. 1:48), her humility. She was humble enough to know God had noticed her humility- and still not be proud about it. She had enough self knowledge to perceive this. It's as if she is saying 'Thank you for taking note of my humility'. This is really a deep essay in humility- to recognize she was humble without being proud about it. And to be able to say it sincerely. Mary's humility was programmatic for Jesus on the cross; for there He humbled Himself that He might be exalted. This was the theme that, according to Phil. 2, was ever in His mind.

Later Scripture seems to allude to Mary's words of praise in Lk. 1 and set her up as a representative of us all. She speaks in Lk. 1:49 of her "low estate", alluding to Ps. 136:23, which describes us all in this way.

1:49 The Magnificat shows that Mary had a fair appreciation of God's Names, in that she refers to Him as "He that is mighty", interpreting for us the Old Testament idea of El Shaddai, the God of fruitfulness [Heb. *shad* = 'breast']. Note how neither Mary nor the NT writers transfer the OT Hebrew titles of God, e.g. 'Yahweh', rather they interpret them. She sees her conception of the Son of God as an example of how "holy is His Name" (Lk. 1:49). The Lord Himself understood that "Hallowed be Thy Name" is to be paralleled with the Father's will being done. The Name of God speaks of His actions; because He is who He is, He will articulate this in how He acts. This is why all His actions are understandable and broadly predictable in terms of the basic characteristics that comprise His Name. The Name is not just a word, a lexical item. And Mary perceived all this- that the Holy Name of Jehovah was to be manifested ultimately and supremely in the Son she would bear. For this is the climax of God manifestation. Because "Holy is His Name", she would bear a "holy thing" that manifested that Name. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby the plural form is used to reflect the greatness of a singular thing. Thus 'Jehovah Elohim', Jehovah who will be mighty ones, can be read as a specific prophecy of His definitive revelation in the 'mighty one' of His Son. And could it be that Mary grasped all this? I for one think she did.

1:51 Through Christ, God "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Lk. 1:51). This is quoting from Gen. 6:5 LXX concerning the wicked imagination of man's heart at the flood. This is even more evidence that we can read the events of the flood as typical of two things; our salvation from the judgment upon sin, and also of the events of the last days, when that salvation will be physically manifested. We are in Noah's position; we can see clearly the judgments which must come upon sin.

1:51-53 Such a Bible minded woman inevitably had faith. For faith comes by hearing the word of God. Mary believed the Angel's words fully- hence her rejoicing. The aorist tenses of Lk. 1:51-53 seem the equivalent of prophetic perfect tenses in Hebrew- Mary firmly believes that what is still future is as good as happened. She had the faith that considers what has been promised to have actually happened. At that moment it was as if God *had* scattered the proud, the rulers and the princes- even though this would only be achieved by the Lord's life, death and glorification (Acts 2:33; 4:24-27; 5:31).

1:52- see on Lk. 1:38; 23:31.

Despite all the undoubted spiritual perception in the Magnificat, she didn't have totally pure understanding. It seems that her allusion in Lk. 1:52 to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel's prophesy about Messiah's restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of "Him whose right it is" as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future. Likewise "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" *may* imply [although not necessarily- see later] that she hadn't grasped the implications that Messiah must be the result of a virgin birth, as per Is. 7:14. Yet for all this, she still had acceptability before God, and the required spiritual ambition to be Messiah's mother.

Mary perceived the importance of humility. Her song of rejoicing is a consciously arranged poem by her. It is in two strophes, each climaxing with the themes of lowliness / exaltation. She saw humility as the true exaltation, and the structure of her little song reflects this. She perhaps prepared the song in her mind as she walked down from Nazareth to the Judaeian hills to meet Elisabeth; there is a rhyme established by the last words of the four lines in Lk. 1:52,53: *thronon* with *agathon*, and *tapeinous* with *kenous*. In all this she reached a new paradigm for humility was a concept foreign to

the first century mind. Strength, wealth and ability were to be demonstrated; to show strength by being humble was just unheard of. Only those who were forced into humble submission by the stronger were 'humble'. To clean the toilets when nobody else notices, and the host of other such opportunities for service in ecclesia life... this is the true humility, the real strength and exaltation before God.

1:53 Not only was the Lord Himself influenced by His mother. Paul and Peter allude to Mary and her words in their writings. The hymn to Jesus which Paul wrote in Phil. 2 is full of themes taken from Mary's song- the same themes of God's manifestation in His Son, humiliation and exaltation, occur there. There are several connections between the accounts of the early preaching of the Gospel in Acts, and Mary's song of praise. Her words came to influence the brethren who stood up there and preached. Perhaps Mary, who was meeting with them (Acts 1:14), sung the words to them and they all memorized it. Raymond Brown claims there are 18 words or items shared by the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:12-26) and the Magnificat [Mary's song of praise] (*The Birth Of The Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 p. 354). Mary had quoted Ps. 107:9 about how she had been filled with good things; but Zacharias quoted the next verse, Ps. 107:10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. And she should likewise influence us.

Mary felt that through her being granted the honour of bearing Jesus, the hungry had been filled (Lk. 1:53). The Lord in Lk. 6:21 alludes to all this. He speaks of how blessed [=Mary] are the hungry who will be filled, using the same three words as in Lk. 1- *blessed* was Mary, the *hungry*, who was *filled* in her stomach. He states that there is a blessedness upon all of us who believe (Jn. 20:29)- just as His mother was proclaimed blessed for her belief (Lk. 1:45). Mary had felt that God had "Filled the hungry [i.e. their stomach, cp. the womb of Mary] with the good thing [Gk.]"- Jesus (Lk. 1:53). He calls Himself this good thing, using the very same Greek word in Mt. 20:15: "I am the good one" ; Jn. 1:46; 7:12 [where the " good thing" is Messiah]. Her perception of Him became His. And so with us; if we perceive our children as future brethren, so, hopefully and prayerfully, they will be. Jesus could have sinned; He could have failed. But Mary right from His babyhood believed that He wouldn't. She believed in Him and in His successful completion of His destiny from when she first conceived Him. And surely this is a pattern for Christian mothers too.

1:54- see on Lk. 1:28,38.

1:55- see on Lk. 1:38.

She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the* seed of him"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon her 'first principles'.

1:68 - see on Ex. 3:7.

1:69 "Salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) in the sense that the promises concerning salvation were made only to Abraham and his seed. We can only have those promises made to us if we become *in* the seed, by being baptised *into* Christ (Gal. 3:22-29). Then, all that is true of the Lord Jesus becomes true of us. Thus Zecharias quoted prophecies about the seed of Abraham and David as applying to all believers (Lk. 1:69,73,74).

1:71- see on Lk. 7:19.

Clearly he understood Messiah as the One who would bring immediate relief from the Roman occupation. He'd misread, as many Jews do today, the Old Testament prophecies and types which involve two comings of Messiah, and the need for Him to firstly die the death of rejection. But all the same, we find no hint of condemnation, but rather of commendation, for this Godly man.

1:76 John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for

His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14). See on Mt. 20:23.

1:77 - see on Mt. 3:11. Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23).

Luke is the only evangelist to continue the quotation of Is. 40 to include the words "all mankind will see God's salvation". And he focuses especially upon the wonder of forgiveness (Lk. 1:77; 7:48; Acts 13:38). Only he records the parable of the prodigal (Lk. 15:11-32), and only he describes the great preaching commission as relating to "repentance and remission of sins" (Lk. 24:47).

The principles God will use in the final judgment are manifested now, and have been reflected in His previous judgments of men. In our very personal lives, there are foretastes of that future judgment. When we receive forgiveness, this gives a knowledge of the future salvation (Lk. 1:77). Indeed, whenever man meets with God, whenever His ways have contact with those of men (which so often happens in the life of the believer) there is a judgment experience; His holiness, His demands, the imperatives which lay within His very being, reveal quite naturally our failures. The Hebrew word used to describe God's 'meeting' with men is also used in the senses of 'summoning' or gathering to a trial (Ex. 30:6). And positively, the *degree to which* we have responded to Him will be revealed by our meeting with Him.

1:78 John's father had prophesied that John would "give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, because of the heart of mercy of our God" (Lk. 1:77,78 RVmg.). The fact that God has a "heart of mercy"- a lovely phrase- is His glory. It leads Him to glory in overlooking sin. And on this basis John appealed to people to repent and claim that forgiveness, thus allowing God to glory. In the light of all this, one wonders in what tone of voice John spoke. The cold printed words in our Bibles can lead us to imagine him speaking in a gruff, austere manner.

"The sunrising (AVmg.) from on high hath visited us" (Lk.1:78) through Christ's mission, fulfilling the prophecy of Mal.4:2 about Christ as the sun of righteousness in the first century, although it clearly has reference also to the greater dawning yet to come.

1:78

THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS AS A TYPE OF HIS SECOND COMING

Many of the incidents in the first coming of the Lord Jesus are intended to point us forward to events which will happen at the his second coming. Thus Zech. 9:9-11 speaks of the Lord Jesus coming to Zion with salvation, establishing his Kingdom and resurrecting the dead. This is all about his second coming, but the idea of him coming into Jerusalem with salvation is obviously applicable to his triumphant entry in the last week of his ministry (Mt. 21:5). There is clear indication in the records of Luke 1 and 2 that there were a faithful remnant in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's birth, whose attitude points forward to that of the latter-day remnant at the time of His second coming. Whilst only Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna are mentioned, we can be sure that there were others in this group - Anna "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); "many" rejoiced even at the birth of John, on the understanding that he was Christ's forerunner (Luke 1:14 - unless the "many" refers to Angels). It is possible that the shepherds, too, were in this group, which would confirm the impression that the 'remnant' were in the lower ranks of society - Zacharias a superannuated priest, Anna a servant of the temple (Luke 2:37) - the equivalent of a modern office cleaner. This connects with the 'remnant' left in the land

by Nebuchadnezzar being the poorest of the poor (2 Kings 24:15 cp. 25:11,12), and suggests a working-class Jewish 'remnant' in the last days.

There is much language used concerning the birth of Jesus which is easily applicable to His second coming. This in itself encourages us to see the record of those awaiting His first coming as typical of the last days. The birth of John and Jesus is described as God 'visiting and redeeming his people' (Luke 1:68); what better way of describing God's latter-day intervention? "The sunrising from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78 A.V. mg.) was Zacharias' comment upon God's purpose in John and Jesus, making an unmistakeable allusion to Mal. 4:2 concerning Christ's second coming being like the rising sun. Note how this sun rising is upon the righteous remnant of the last days (Mal. 4:12) - identifying Zacharias with them.

The Angels rejoiced that through Christ's birth there was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), although this will only be fully done in the Kingdom. Simeon spoke of the baby Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32), although this will only be fully true after the second coming (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). The remnant "looked for redemption (to appear) in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); they could only have figured this out from realizing that the Old Testament 'kingdom' prophecies concerning Jerusalem, which we normally associate with the second coming, had a primary fulfilment in the birth of Christ.

John the Baptist commented that he preached repentance and baptized in Israel, *so that* the Messiah might be manifest to Israel (Jn. 1:31). His work was a pattern for the Elijah ministry of the last days. It could be argued that Messiah was only manifest in the first century because of the success of John's work- for large numbers were baptized of him. Could it be that the timing of the final revelation of Messiah likewise depends upon the success of the Elijah ministry in leading Israel to repentance? And what implications are there in this, if actually *we* are the voice of that ministry...

We can now scan the record for more detailed latter-day typology:-

- The remnant were in or around Jerusalem - as it seems the latter-day faithful will also be. They looked for Messiah to appear in Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). If latter-day Jewry are persecuted to the extent that the only Jews left alive in the land are in Jerusalem (see previous studies, especially Chapter 8), then they, too, will expect Messiah to come to them in that same city. Note that the woman whose intense pleadings represent the prayers of the latter day remnant (Lk.18:2-8) "was in a city" - Jerusalem?
- They eagerly looked for the Lord's birth as a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises, that through his seed "we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve (God) without fear" (Luke 1:74). Likewise the latter-day remnant will meditate how the Abrahamic promises concerning freedom from their (Arab) enemies are so relevant to them - perhaps due to the Elijah ministry turning their hearts to the Jewish "fathers", a phrase often used about the patriarchs who received the promises (Mal. 4:6).
- Israel in the first century were under the domination of Rome, the fourth beast of Dan. 7:23. In the latter-day application of this, necessitated by the image upon which the beasts are based standing complete in the last days, the fourth beast with its horns corresponds to the Arab coalition which will then dominate Israel.
- Some of the remnant had the Spirit gift of prophecy (Luke 1:41,67; 2:26,36). The latter-day remnant may also experience this - their old men (cp. Zacharias and Simeon) and young people (cp. Mary), may have the gift of prophecy around the time of the Lord's return - "before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:28-31).
- The shepherds watching at night while the Lord was born (Luke 2:8) echoes the Passover. There is good reason to think that the second coming may be associated with Passover time. The vision

of Angels which they saw may correspond to the remnant in Jerusalem seeing a literal "sign of the (coming of the) son of man in (literal) heaven" (Mt. 24:30), composed of the Angel-cherubim. This "sign of the son of man in heaven" must be alluding back to the literal portent which the shepherds saw in the sky, pointing to the Lord's first coming. Thus there will be no need to say "See here; or see there", because the Lord's return will be so evidently public (Lk. 17:23).

- Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God" (Luke 1:6) amidst a corrupt Jewish world that refused to prepare itself for God's manifestation in Christ, despite the availability to them of God's Word, which clearly prophesied it. This recalls the description of Noah as being "righteous before God" (Gen. 7:1) in the context of the flood coming upon the world. We have earlier shown this to be full of reference to the last days.

- There is a triple emphasis on Israel praying to God in the lead up to Christ's birth (Luke 1:10,13; 2:37). We know from Joel 2:17 and many other passages that the remnant will likewise devote themselves to prayer in the last days, as will spiritual Israel.

- The appearance of Angels before Christ's birth (Luke 1:12,26) is similar to their visiting Israel under persecution during the times of the Judges, bringing the news of deliverance from their Arab enemies through a 'saviour' ('Jesus').

- The conception of John (the Elijah prophet of the first century) preceded that of Christ - he was Christ's forerunner - there is therefore a necessity for this type to be fulfilled in the literal coming of the latter-day Elijah as a prelude to Christ's manifestation to Israel.

- The "joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14) of the remnant at Christ's birth will be but a dim foretaste of the ecstasy which the embattled remnant of the last days will experience at their Lord's return.

2:2 Maybe Mary grasped the relevance of Ps. 87:6 LXX to the fact she gave birth to Messiah during a census: "In the census of the peoples, this one [Messiah] will be born there". The relevance of this verse to the Lord's birth may explain why Luke says that the census of Quirinius was part of a census of the whole world, which wasn't strictly true.

2:5 *Taxed* – Gk. 'enrolled', numbered in a census. It could be that this is recorded as a fulfillment of how Is. 53:12 had predicted that Jesus would be "numbered with the transgressors".

2:7 Jer. 14:8 was addressed to the Lord and Saviour of Israel, Jesus-Messiah: "Why are you like an alien in the land, like a traveller who stays in *lodgings*?" If Mary had made all these connections, the hurt of being told there was no room in the lodging, and having to give birth in a stable, laying her dear child in a cattle manger... would have been far less felt by her. These things would have thrilled and rejoiced her heart rather than hurt her, just as we can joyfully perceive how present sufferings are working out so analogous to a Biblical verse or character.

The whimpering, vulnerable *Son of God* was laid down in a cattle stall (Luke, the doctor who appreciated the need for hygiene, so emphasizes this: Lk. 2:7,12,16), because the other guests in that cheap hotel couldn't make space for a heavily pregnant woman (again, Luke the sometime-gyn doctor would've sensed the shame of it).

2:8 It has been observed that the choice to reveal the good news of Christ to the shepherds first of all was surprising; for these too were the poorest of the poor, deprived [along with tax collectors] of Jewish rights. They belonged to the "most despised" of all social groups. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1969) p. 304; Richard Horsley, *The Liberation Of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives In Social Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) pp. 102-106.

2:11 Did she see the link between her giving birth in a stable and laying Jesus down in a "manger" (Gk. *phatne*), perhaps with oxen and donkeys onlooking, and Is. 1:3 LXX: "The ox knows its

owner, and the donkey knows the *phatne* ("manger") of its Lord (*kyrios* as in Lk. 2:11), but Israel has not known me".

2:12- see on Mt. 18:4.

2:13 It's important to realize that praise isn't just singing or using musical instruments. In Hebrew the same word means both 'worship' and 'service' (*'abodah*). The supposition that praise = music is deeply ingrained in many minds. Thus there is the common assumption that the Angels sang to the shepherds; but in fact they *spoke* their praise (Lk. 2:13).

2:14 A major result of the existence of Jesus was unity amongst God's people. Thus the Angels sang: "...on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased" (Lk. 2:14 RV). If we are not at peace amongst ourselves, then God is not well pleased.

2:15- see on Acts 8:4.

2:19 When the shepherds came to worship, Mary pondered within herself what it all meant, as if she was now rather lacking in comprehension (Lk. 2:19). [Consider in passing the fact that Luke describes his Gospel as a compilation of eyewitness accounts. Where did he get the material from about Mary pondering things in her heart [2:19,51]? Was it from interviewing her himself? Or was her inward meditation and frozenness evident to others who on this basis told Luke?].

In Lk. 2:19 we read that Mary "kept" God's words in her, yet the Lord in one of His allusions to His dear mother says in Lk. 5:38 that we must preserve or "keep" [s.w.] the new wine of the Gospel in us. The Lord saw His mother as a pattern for us all. When He heard the comment "Blessed are the breasts which you sucked!", His comment is to draw attention rather to the spiritual side of Mary: "Blessed are they [like My dear mother] who hear the word of God and keep it". Thus He held her up as an example to them all; she shouldn't be marvelled at just because of the fact she carried the Son of God (Catholics take note) but rather because of her reflective and tenacious attitude to the word of God. Mary's song has so many Biblical allusions in it. Mary's Bible minded-ness was really quite something. The Greek word translated "ponder" (Lk. 2:19) comes from *syn*, "with", and *ballein*, "to throw", as if she combined Scripture with her experience of life, seeking to find her place in the mass of OT allusion and teaching which she was being presented with. Her every phrase has multiple allusions to Scripture, which in itself indicates a fair level of intelligence to think on so many levels simultaneously.

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months... all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them.. although by nature, in her heart and

soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

2:25 Simeon waited for "the consolation (comfort) of Israel" (Lk.2:25), referring to the Kingdom prophecy of Is.40:1,2- and saw it have a fulfilment in the first coming of the Lord.

2:29 Joseph is simply one of the clearest types of Christ. There are many echoes of Christ which seem to have no specific purpose apart from to confirm us in our enthusiasm to constantly see the spirit of Christ in this record (e.g. Gen. 46:30 = Lk. 2:29,30).

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

"The men marvelled" at Joseph's discernment. Ditto for Christ- it is emphasized (Mt. 8:27; 9:8,33; 21:20, 42; 22:22; 27:14; Lk. 2:33; Jn. 4:27; 7:15).

2:35 Mary's lack of perception caused her great pain. The way the Lord refers to her as "Woman" both in Cana was, apparently, an unusually cold way for a man to refer to his mother. He effectively rebuffed her in Cana for her lack of perception; He responds to the woman who tells Him how blessed His mother is by saying that all who hear the word of God and keep it are equally blessed. And when His mother wants to speak to Him, He says in front of the whole crowd that His mothers are all who do God's will. And the final pain must have been at the cross, where in His dying words He tells her that she is no longer His mother, but she must now be the mother of John. Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk. 2:35- the Syriac text has 'a spear') may refer to her feelings on beholding the literal piercing of her son's side- remembering that He was pierced with "the *staff* of a spear" (2 Sam. 23:7), it went in so deep. The fact water as well as blood came out is further evidence that the spear penetrated deeply. Yet there is an allusion surely to Is. 49:1,2, where Messiah's mouth is likened to a sharp, piercing sword. Note how the passage has reference to Mary: "The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword". Could it not be that Simeon foresaw how the Lord's words would pierce Mary to the quick? For in all the incidents above, she must have thought with a lump in her throat: 'But come on Jesus... I'm your *mum*... the one who knitted and mended your clothes as a child... how can you speak to me like that...?'. And as a sensitive, reflective soul she would have reflected and hurt deeply at these words.

The sword / spear that pierced the Lord pierced her heart, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed". The cross is therefore the ultimate source of self-examination. The Greek for "thoughts" means "inmost thoughts", and all 13 uses of *dialogismos* in the NT are negative- bad thoughts, vain thoughts, doubting thoughts. The five other references in Luke are all very pointedly like this (Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38). We all find self-understanding and self-examination difficult; and we find it hard to feel our sinfulness as we should. Yet the cross is the ultimate stimulus to self-examination, to conviction of sin, and then of salvation and the reality of grace and God's love. This same process happened for Mary "also". Over the years she had perhaps lost something of her initial humility, feeling that her exalted place in God's plan was due to some personal righteousness, and therefore the cross experience had to pierce her too, so that she too had the inmost thoughts of her heart revealed to herself. We have shown earlier how Mary so identified herself with her dearest Son that she felt in some way part of Messiah. Yet over the years of repetitive domestic life in Nazareth, the height of the call to be "in Christ", really part of Him and His work, must have been ground away. Yet at the cross, her soul was as it were pierced with the same sword / spear that pierced her Son. Ps. 22:20 prophesied how the Lord would suffer "the sword" on the cross, and 2 Sam. 24 had spoken of Him being filled with a spear. "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul *also*" meant that as Mary was part of Jesus, so she must also share in His sufferings too. The proud and happy mother as she stood before Simeon was so thrilled to be as it were "In Christ", connected

with Messiah. But she had to be reminded that to share in His life is to share in His death- and it was only the actual experience of the cross which brought this home to her. And so with us, brethren in Christ, and rightfully proud of the high calling and association with Him which we have... there is a darker side to our being in Christ. It involves sharing in His death, that we might share in His life. Mary's achievement of this is perhaps reflected in the way the mother of the man child [Jesus] in Rev. 12 is persecuted after the pattern of her Son Jesus, and yet survives.

As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:35). The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. See on 1 Cor. 11:32.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed* (Lk. 2:35); and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). The Lord's death is described as His washing "his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11 RV). Treading out the grapes is a Hebraism for judgment, and yet it is used here and in Is. 63:1-3 regarding the Lord's treading of the winepress alone in His death. Indeed, the Isaiah passage is clearly applicable to both the crucifixion and the final judgment of the Lord Jesus. The reason being, that in His death was the judgment of this world.

2:36 Hannah's example not only influenced Mary, but also Anna's. 'Anna' is an unusual first century name; "of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE - 200 CE whose names are known, Anna [in Luke 2] is the only one who bears this name" (Tal Ilan, 'Notes of the distribution of Jewish women's names in Palestine', Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 40 (1989) pp. 186,193). She therefore named herself this after Hannah, the Hebrew equivalent of Anna; she was inspired by Hannah's example of waiting and praying in the sanctuary for a child. For Anna, the coming of Messiah was equivalent to having her own child. Her hope for Messiah's coming was something which she felt personally. We too are awaiting the Lord's coming- but with anything of her intensity and feeling? She looked for redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:25,38), clearly alluding to the LXX of Is. 52:9: "The Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem". She saw the coming of that little baby as the redemption of God's people; she had the faith to see things yet unseen. The Hebrew for 'redemption' can imply 'with blood' - is it going too far to suggest that she perceived the need for that little baby to grow up and then shed His blood for Israel's redemption? Her father's name, Phanuel, is the Hebrew 'Peniel', meaning 'the face of God'. And 'Hannah' means 'God's grace'. Straight away we see a link to Num. 6:25: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you". The connection implies God's passionate joy at her attitude and existence. Her remaining in the temple was perhaps inspired by passages like Ps. 27:4, where David spoke of his desire to dwell in the temple all the days of his life in order to see God's beauty- which she understood in terms of His Son. And especially, Mal. 3:1, which speaks of the Lord's coming to His temple. We must ask ourselves what our Bible study and knowledge actually leads to. A study of Romans 6 may lead to baptism; but all God's word demands of us an actual and concrete response in the things of real life. She allowed the example of another woman, Hannah, to influence her, perhaps even to the point of changing her name; what of us?

2:37 Men like David, Hezekiah and Daniel appreciated that God knew already. In a sense, all that will happen has happened; so prayer is an opening up of ourselves to God, a *service* of God (Dan. 6:16; Lk. 2:37), for His glory and for our benefit, rather than a means of communicating information to Him. Therefore they opened themselves up to Him, expressing their understanding that He knew

the situation, and didn't present a long list of concrete requests to Him. Their relationship with Him went far beyond that kind of surface level. What of ours?

2:38- see on Lk. 2:36.

The loyal band of Bible students in the temple expected redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk.2:38), presumably because of the Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2 concerning Christ being manifested in Jerusalem at His second coming and Kingdom. But their first century application of these was not wrong.

2:39 Mary “performed [fulfilled] all things according to the law” in her dedication of Jesus (Lk. 2:39). In doing this, she anticipated the spirit of the cross and whole ministry of Jesus, where He performed [s.w. fulfilled] all things of the law- Lk. 18:31; Jn. 19:28; 30; Acts 13:29. These passages each use the same three words for all things, law, and fulfilled. She brought the Lord up in the way of the cross; and He continued in that path.

2:40 Hebrews always speaks of Him as “perfected”, as a verb (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28)- never with the adjective ‘perfect’. Apart from being a major problem for Trinitarian views, this simple fact sets Him up as *our* pattern, whom the Father seeks like wise ‘to perfect’. Yet the path the Lord had to take to achieve this was hard indeed. Not only did it culminate in the cross, but His growth as a young man is described by the word *prokoptein* (Lk. 2:40,52), defined by Karl Barth [*Church Dogmatics* I 2, p. 158] as meaning ‘to extend by blows, as a smith stretches metal by hammering’. Through childhood crises and the turmoil of adolescence, this is what He went through, to lead Him to the final ‘perfection’ of being able to say “I am”. Because Jesus was always showing His essential self- and this is in some ways an exhausting and almost unbearable way to live- He tended to connect easier to the real selves in His hearers. It may seem strange on first reflection to realize that the peerless Son of God could connect so easily with the hardest of sinners. Whenever we try to be righteous, we often alienate ordinary, sinful people. Yet why, then, did Jesus connect with them by being righteous? Surely because it was somehow so evident that He was not acting out a persona; He was being absolutely Himself, not acting out a part, with no hidden agendas. This was the beauty of His character; just as nature is beautiful because it simply is what it is. So self-evidently, who He was within, was who He showed Himself to be. The more we are ‘ourselves’, the more likely it is that we will connect with our contacts. People who only live out their personas create an impersonal atmosphere around them, whereas the person who lives and shows their real self encourages those around him or her to also feel themselves to be persons. I would go even further and suggest that the more we live as who we are, God Himself will become more personal to us.

2:47- see on Acts 2:7.

2:48 Mary sought Jesus “sorrowing”, using a word elsewhere used about despair and anguish for the loss of life (Lk. 16:24,25; Acts 20:38). She feared He was dead. But where, then, was her faith in the promise that He would have an eternal Kingdom...? The distraction of poverty, the demands of the other children, perhaps an unsupportive partner, self-doubt... all these ground away at her earlier spirituality and faith, just as happens to so many of us after baptism too. “Why have you done this to us?” is a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture. Unlike 12 years previously, she is now using Scripture without correct context; but she has far from totally lost her spirituality.

Mary and Joseph were “amazed” (Lk. 2:48). She shared Joseph's amazement; and the word is only used of the amazement / incomprehension of the crowds- Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 10:26. Slowly she became influenced by the world's view of her son- not totally, but partially, to the extent

that she lost that keen perception and height of spiritual ambition which she had earlier had. And so it can be for so many of us; the world comes to influence our view not only of our own children, but of all things in spiritual life.

Rebuked- a Joseph allusion (Gen. 37:10).

Mary scolds Him that his father [Joseph] and her have been seeking for Him. The surrounding world perceived Him as the carpenter's son (Mt. 13:55), the son of Joseph (Jn. 6:42). He was "as was supposed" ['reckoned legally?'] the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Even Philip perceived Messiah to be "the son of Joseph" even after he had accepted Him (Jn. 1:45). Hence Jesus gently rebuked her that He was about His true Father's business, in His true Father's house. Her description of Joseph as "thy father" is surely worthy of the Lord's rebuke. She had allowed the views of the world to influence her view of the Lord. "Is not this the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3) is paralleled in Mt. 13:55 by "the carpenter's son", and in Lk. 4:22 Joseph's son; everyone assumed they were His natural parents, the son of Mary & Joseph, and this came to influence her. Jesus told them that they should have sought Him in His true Father's house- and this may not only be a reference to the temple, but to the way in which they had assumed He was somewhere with the house / family of Joseph in the convoy; and perhaps they had gone round Joseph's relatives in Jerusalem hunting for Him.

2:49 There are Biblical examples of refusing to take guilt when others feel that it should be taken. Recall how the Lord's own parents blamed Him for 'making them anxious' by 'irresponsibly' remaining behind in the temple. The Lord refused to take any guilt, didn't apologize, and even gently rebuked them (Lk. 2:42-51). In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Even if I made you sorry with a letter, I do not regret it" (2 Cor. 7:8). He would not take guilt for their being upset with him. Likewise Absalom comforted his raped sister not to 'take it to heart', not to feel guilty about it, as it seems she was feeling that way, taking false guilt upon her (2 Sam. 13:20).

A window into the Lord's self-perception is given in the record of His behaviour in the temple at age 12. Within the psychological matrix in which the young Jesus existed, as well as within the cultural norms of first century Palestine, it was rude for a 12 year old to retort to his mother: "Didn't you know I would be about my father's business?". It appears insolent towards Joseph too. But that statement, in the Lord's case, was not a sin, nor a typically precocious childish comment- although it would've been on the lips of any other 12 year old. Instead it reflects an abnormal degree of detachment from His mother and step-father, and a remarkable statement as to how much He was Himself, how mature and strong was His sense of identity as the uniquely begotten Son of God.

A sense of compulsion was found in the Lord's whole life of service, leading up to the cross as it did (see on Mk. 14:49):

"Wist ye not that *I must be* about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49)

"And he said unto them, *I must preach* the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43)

"He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely.

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

2:50 Lk. 2:50 records that "she understood not", using the same phrase as is on the lips of the Lord in Mt. 13:13, speaking of those without who "hear not neither do they understand"; and ominously, Mary stood without and asked to see Jesus, only to be told that His real mothers were those women

sitting around Him listening to His words. In passing, note how the disciples also often "understood not" (Mt. 16:12; Mk. 6:52; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34). And yet the Lord counted them as more understanding than they were. As with Mary. She "understood not" (Lk. 2:50) the clear enough statement that He was in *His* Father's house. And the Lord rebuked her for spending so long, three days, looking elsewhere when she should have perceived quicker that He was going to be in the house of His true Father. I take His words not as a sharp rebuff but rather more of grief, that Mary had known him so poorly, sad at her loss of perception.

2:51 In Lk. 2:51 it is recorded that she "kept these sayings". It could be that she had pondered from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son.

The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it (Lk. 2:51). This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue and on the basis of Old Testament exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly.

subject unto The Lord was "subject unto" Mary (Lk. 2:51)- to train Him for the time when we would be subject to Him as we are now (1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22; 5:24;), and all the world subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 2:8). And so, wondrous thought that it is, the training of His mother has effect even now; with literally *all* subject to Him, He was prepared for this by having been subject unto His mother.

"Observed" is a Joseph allusion (Gen. 37:11).

2:52- see on Mk. 6:2; Lk. 2:19.

A Joseph allusion: "The Lord... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21).

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

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (Lk. 3:4 s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess.

1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the "Lamb of God", a phrase the Jews would've understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

3:5 John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

3:6 There was another reason behind John's appeal for repentance. It was that he perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

3:7 The ideas of fleeing wrath and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.

This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a "generation of vipers", alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn't turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn't be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones]

where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution... than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do.

The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude... ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience.

But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

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

3:8 The eagerness of the Lord for the inculcation of faith is seen in the way He foresees the likely thought processes within men. "Begin not to say within yourselves...." (Lk. 3:8), He told a generation of vipers; and He eagerly strengthened the centurion's faith when it was announced that faith was pointless, because his daughter had died.

3:9- see on Lk. 13:8; Col. 3:13.

3:11 In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have... for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the

community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

3:12 Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it.

3:13 John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job.

3:14 The nature of how demanding John was is reflected in his response to the soldiers and publicans. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding.

John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor... they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right...?

3:17 John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). But the 'fire' of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel.

3:18 The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as Jesus preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may

repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:20 Even with very sinful men, their continual sins still register in the feelings of God. The way God progressively senses the weight of accumulated sin is reflected in His description of the Amorites' iniquity filling up (Gen. 15:16); or Israel marrying Gentiles "to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). "The iniquity of Israel is bound up, his sin is kept in store" (Hos. 13:12). God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins (e.g. 2 Kings 17:2). "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. And this doesn't only apply to His people; but to all sin, committed by anyone, anywhere. Thus Herod "added yet this above all" when he imprisoned John after also sinning with another man's wife (Lk. 3:20). We have an uncanny ability to become numb to sin the more we see or do it. But not so Almighty, all righteous God. This is a feature of His nature that needs meditation.

3:23- see on Lk. 2:49.

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

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

3:38 The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogies of Jesus we find in Matthew and Luke were quite radical in this regard. For they traced the pedigree of Jesus back to God- as if He were the emperor.

4:3 The first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. "The heart of the

wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left” (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

4:8 The record of the Lord’s wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the ‘devil’ / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how “Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh (“mammon” is another personification of the flesh, similar to ‘satan’). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord’s example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? ‘You don’t want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that...drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won’t try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape’.

4:10 The Angels were given “charge concerning thee” (Jesus)- in the court of Heaven, God’s purpose was declared and His charge made clear concerning His Son (Lk. 4:10 RVmg.)

4:11 Luke 4:11 records how Jesus was reminded that the Angels would “bear (Him) up”. Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

4:16-21- see on Mk. 1:15.

4:18 Christ means ‘Messiah’, the anointed one. He was anointed in order “to preach the Gospel” (Lk. 4:18); and we too have been anointed insofar as we are in Christ, the anointed one (2 Cor. 1:21). Therefore as He was ordained a preacher of the Gospel to the world, we too share that honour (as we do all His honours, to some extent). He was anointed (‘oiled’) by God in order to give the oil of joy to His people; He shared His experience of anointing with us, and we must go out and do likewise (Is. 61:1,2 cp. Lk. 4:18).

4:21 Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfillment by believers, and therefore have their fulfillments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi’s ‘Elijah’ prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn’t, those prophecies weren’t fulfilled. When the Lord stood up and read from Isaiah, He commented that “this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Lk. 4:21). He didn’t mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of “your ears” as standing for ‘your correct perception / understanding’ in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah’s words were

ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

4:22 Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

4:25,26- see on James 5:16-18.

4:29 Jephthah had been "despised and rejected of men" during the time of Israel's suffering. In this and many other ways he is a clear type of Christ. Jephthah reminded the "elders of Gilead" who were now seeking his help, "Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?" (Jud. 11:7). The Hebrew for "expel" is also translated 'thrust out'; Jesus was 'thrust out' from his native town (Lk. 4:29) as Jephthah was from Gilead. It was "the elders" who were also responsible for Christ's rejection. He was despised as "the son of a strange woman" (Jud. 11:2) as Jesus was accused of being born out of wedlock (Jn. 8:41).

4:43- see on Acts 8:12.

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

5:5- see on Jn. 21:7.

Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) at *thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on a Walkman, have tapes of well read Scripture playing at home, analyze it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a tape of Isaiah on his Walkman if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's

cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house). There *are* a handful of Christian homes where this spirit is truly seen.

It seems to me that the Lord asks each of us to do that which is essentially difficult for us personally, something against the grain of our very nature and personal understanding of and position in life. This may explain why sometimes He asked those He cured to spread the message (perhaps the introverts, or those whose past lives had been notorious?), whilst others (perhaps the extroverts?) He asked to remain silent about what He had done. When the Lord asked Peter to go out fishing, for example, this was totally and exactly against every grain of Peter's natural self. He was a fisherman, he'd been fishing all night, he knew it was *absolutely* pointless to try again. He knew that a carpenter didn't know what a fisherman did. The Lord's request was a blow at the justifiable pride in his specialism which every working man has. If the Lord Jesus had asked let's say *Paul* to go out fishing, well, I guess he'd have obeyed with no real difficulty. But He asked Peter to do that, at that very moment, because it was a real cross for Peter to pick up. Likewise it would have seemed logical for Paul to preach to the Jews, and Peter to the Gentiles (note how the Gentiles approached Philip, from semi-Gentile Galilee, in Jn. 12:20,21). Yet in fact the Lord God used those men in the very opposite way, right against the grain of their natural abilities. He asked goldsmiths to do the manual work of building the wall of Jerusalem, bruising their sensitive fingers against lumps of rock (Neh. 3:8,31); and Barak's victorious warriors were civil servants and writers (Jud. 5:14), not military men. Paul was sent to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews, when we'd have thought that naturally speaking, they would have been far more comfortable in the reverse roles. Judas was put in charge of the money amongst the twelve; when Matthew the tax collector would presumably have been the obvious man for the job. Naaman wanted to do some great act, but was asked to do the hardest thing for him- to dip in Jordan. And Abraham was asked to do what was so evidently the hardest thing- to offer up his only, specially beloved son.

5:6- see on Acts 2:6.

5:7 It would seem that Peter as a working man had a love of his job. He left his fishing in Mark 1 to follow the Lord, but returned to it by Luke 5. Then he left it, and returned to it in the post-resurrection crisis. The Lord's provision of fish on the shore was simply saying: 'You don't need to fish any more'. He asked them to drag the nets to land, which would usually have broken them, but they didn't break. Likewise He had earlier told fisherman Peter to cast the net on the other side, when Peter knew full well which side of the boat there were likely to be fish. And a whirlwind storm had come upon Galilee which would have drowned fisherman and sailor Peter were it not for the Lord's presence. In all these things, Peter was being taught to quit the life that he loved. "Lovest thou me more than these?" was asked with the huge catch of fish lying there on the shore- a fisherman's dream. It could be that the question referred to them. 'Go and feed *my* sheep rather than worry about *your* fish'. When earlier the boats had begun to sink with too many fish, the word used for 'sinking' occurs in 1 Tim. 6:9, about believers being drowned in materialism and thereby condemning themselves (Lk. 5:7). Whether it's a career that we love, a livelihood that we simply trust as a sure means of human survival, or the spiritual pride that we love the Lord more than our brethren, all these things are demanded of us by the demanding Lord, as we seek to follow Him to the cross.

5:8- see on Jn. 21:7.

The Father seems to have wanted Peter to make the connection between preaching and recognition of personal sinfulness quite early on. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8) was followed by a commission to go preach the Gospel to Israel, just as Isaiah had been brought to the same point and then been sent on a like mission. The picture of the condemned is presented in Scripture in some detail. We are all condemned men and women before the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. If we are to be saved in that future day, we must judge / condemn ourselves now in our

self-examination (1 Cor. 11:31). This means that we ought to have their feelings in some respects; as they will have no desire to go on living in the flesh, as they will so earnestly desire entry into the Kingdom, as they will then desperately not want to go back into the world... so we should feel now, grateful that for us there is entry into the Kingdom made possible. Thus Peter asked the Lord to depart from him (Lk. 5:8), with the very same words the Lord used about what He will say to the rejected (Lk. 13:27).

Capturing the spirit of Isaiah, Peter fell down at Christ's feet: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord". But the Lord responded: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Lk. 5:8-10). So Peter's deep recognition of his sinfulness resulted in him being given a preaching commission. And in similar vein, Peter was given another commission to teach the word the first time he met Christ after his denials (Jn. 21:15-17). In response to this he stood up and preached that forgiveness of sins was possible to all those that are afar off from God (Acts 2:39). As he did so, consciously or unconsciously, part of his mind must have been back in the way that on that shameful night he followed the Lord "afar off", and far off from Him, denied Him (Mk. 14:54). Peter's vision of the unclean animals in the net taught him that those people whom he considered unclean, he was to "eat", i.e. preach to and fellowship with. When he recounts the vision, he comments [in an account that is strictly factual in all other regards and without any embellishment]: "It [the sheet with the animals] came *even to me*" (Acts 11:5). He is expressing his unworthiness at being called to the task of preaching, just as Paul likewise expressed his inadequacy.

5:10- see on Lk. 9:59; Jn. 21:2.

5:11 Peter on the shore doesn't say to the Lord that he had 'made a mistake' or cast the net on the wrong side etc.- he confesses that he is a "sinful man" altogether (Lk. 5:11). Jesus taught that sin was no longer to be seen as a list of specific actions which must be avoided in order to have a good conscience before God. The conviction of sin as God intends is far deeper than this. As the Lord makes clear, it's all about motives, what is inside the cup rather than what appears on the outside (Lk. 11:39).

5:17 The power of the Lord was present to heal the Pharisees- but they would not make use of what was potentially made available (Lk. 5:17).

5:21 The miracles of Jesus exposed the error of local views, e.g. of demons, without correcting them in so many words. Thus in Lk. 5:21 the Jews made two false statements: that Jesus was a blasphemer, and that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus did not verbally correct them; instead he did a miracle which proved the falsity of those statements. It was clearly the belief of Jesus that actions speak louder than words. He rarely denounced false ideas directly, thus he did not denounce the Mosaic law as being unable to offer salvation, but He showed by His actions, e.g. healing on the Sabbath, what the truth was.

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

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

5:30- see on Lk. 7:39.

The disciples were from very varied backgrounds; and Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

5:31 Of course we must use our freewill and repent, but the Lord in the parables of the lost coin and sheep likens us to things which *cannot* repent and are not repentant, and yet all the same are brought back by the Lord's endless searching and pastoral care. By all means compare this with Peter's comment that the Lord's exaltation was in order to give *repentance*, not just forgiveness, to God's people (Acts 5:31; 11:18 cp. 2 Tim. 2:25). This is the extent of His atonement for men; not only to enable forgiveness, but to show His matchless grace yet further in even granting *repentance* to men. In the light of this it remains open to question how much credit we can personally take for our repentance. Not all lost sinners will come back, but the Lord speaks as if He will search always, in every case, *until* they do. These hyperboles are all to teach the vast extent of His desire to win back the lost. In the light of this, who are we to start questioning whether or not a brother has actually repented, if he says he has and shows this to some extent?

Christ was once asked why He ate with sinners. He replied: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:31-32). Christ is referring to the wicked Pharisees here as "the righteous... they that are whole". Yet they were not righteous. Christ was speaking of them according to how they saw themselves.

5:32 Luke 5:32 records Jesus saying to the wicked Jews: "I came not to call the righteous...". He was implying, 'I came not to call those who believe they are righteous'. But Jesus spoke to them on their own terms, even though, technically, He was using language which was untrue. See on Lk. 19:23.

Consider how He asks Zacchaeus to eat with Him- a public sign of religious fellowship in first century Palestine. This acceptance of the man for who and where he was, inspired Zacchaeus to then start changing his life in practice- he then offered to give back what he had stolen. When quizzed as to why He ate / fellowshiped with sinners, the Lord replied that He had come to call sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:32). Think through the implications of this. He fellowshiped with those who were so weak within the ecclesia of Israel so as to bring them to repentance; His eating with them was like a doctor making a home visit. The religious attitude of the Pharisees was that one only fellowshiped someone who was repentant; whereas the Lord said that He fellowshiped with people to bring them to repentance. Note how in Lk. 19:1-10, the Lord offered salvation to sinners *before* they had repented. It's the same idea.

5:33,34 The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the shewbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the shewbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

5:34 He spoke of how that band of rough, mixed up men were filled with the joy of little bridesmaids because He was among them (Lk. 5:34). Now this is an essay in imputed righteousness. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going (Mt. 11:12). And even after reprimanding them for their slowness of heart to believe, the record graciously says that they "believed not for joy"- although joy can never hinder faith.

5:36 Jesus told this parable in the context of His eating with sinners- clothing and wine were part of the 'eating out' scene; He took whatever was around Him and made spiritual lessons out of it.

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

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapho*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibers are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

5:37 Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

Spilled- s.w. Lk. 20:20 about the blood of the new covenant being "shed". We can crucify Christ afresh (Heb. 6:6), His death can be "in vain" for us (Gal. 2:21)- if we refuse to respond and be renewed, or trust in our own works.

5:38 Preserved- Gk. preserved from loss / ruin. There is a very real sense of loss to Jesus if His blood (the new wine) is as it were poured out in vain. There will be tragic loss both to Him and to the person who refuses to be wholly renewed.

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

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very slow from a human perspective*.

The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. The picture of the new wine being "spilled" uses the same word as in Mt. 26:28 concerning the 'shedding' of Christ's blood. Again, how utterly, painfully accurate. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that

conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.

6:1- see on Mt. 26:11.

6:7 The Jewish scribes and Pharisees tried hard “that they might find an accusation against” the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:7); their false accusation of Him was especially seen at His trials. Pilate’s question to them “What accusation do you bring against this man?” (Jn. 18:29) shows the Jews as the ultimate false accusers of God’s Son. For it was because of their playing the ultimate role of the Devil, the false accuser, that the Son of God was slain. No wonder the ideas of ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’ are often associated with the Jewish system’s opposition of Christ and His people. The same Greek word for ‘accuser’ is five times used about Jewish false accusation of Paul in an attempt to hinder His work for Christ (Acts 23:30,35; 24:8; 25:16,18).

6:9- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

The Lord said that to refrain from saving a man when it was in your power to do so was effectively “to do evil... to destroy” (Lk. 6:9). This is how the Lord looks at our laziness and passivity- as active wrongdoing.

6:10 The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you.

6:19- see on Lk. 16:1.

It seems that the apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to do certain acts, and after doing them they were as it were 'drained' of the Spirit, and had to be filled up again. Thus the Lord Jesus felt that something had gone out of Him after performing miracles (Lk. 6:19; 8:46). The non-miraculous work of God through His Spirit would seem to follow a similar pattern. We are "strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man", "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering" (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11). God strengthens us deep inside to have that *hupomonè*, that patient endurance, that energy to keep on keeping on. But this strengthening is according to our effort in the appropriate spiritual exercises, and the strength given is not ultimately permanent unless we continue responding to it. and it isn't only a N.T. phenomena; even in earlier times, they that waited on the Lord had their strength renewed, they mounted up on eagle wings, they were made to walk and not faint in God's ways (Is. 40:31). As God doesn't faint or weary, so somehow those who identify their lives with His will also keep on keeping on- even now (Is. 40:31 cp. 29). David felt that his youth was renewed like the eagle's in his repeated experience of God's grace (Ps. 103:5), that his soul was restored (Ps. 23:5), and that a right spirit could be renewed by God within him (Ps. 51:10).

6:20 The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12). See on Gen. 13:10.

May I place two well known Scriptures together in your minds. “*Thine* [God’s] is the Kingdom”. And “Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom of God” (Lk. 6:20). The Lord assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken... the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will* the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we

cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they “are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom.8:18).

6:21 - see on Lk. 1:53.

6:24 Is the "woe!" in Lk. 6:24-26; 11:42-52 an imprecation ['woe to'] or a lament ['alas!']?

6:25 Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). See on Mt. 3:11.

6:29 Time and again the Sermon on the Mount / Plain seems to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor... love your enemies... to him who strikes thee on the cheek...". Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually.

6:32 Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank" (Lk. 6:32)- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters.

Lk.6:32 speaks of receiving "thank" for making the conscious effort to love the unlovable. The Greek for "thank" is 'charis', normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts.

6:35- see on Mt. 5:45.

The Lord sort to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. We must love our enemies "and lend [in whatever way] never despairing" (Lk. 6:35 RV). To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt... never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus.

6:36 Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be ye holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave... be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)- his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself.

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

6:38 As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will

mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together... shall men (angels) give into your bosom (at the judgment; ordinary men certainly don't do so in this life!). For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"- very much the language of judgment to come (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2). This association of "men" (angels) with the judgment is fitting, seeing that our guardian angel will have been with us through every up and down of life. See on Lk. 12:48.

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

6:40 Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

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

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

6:42 If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation. See on Lk. 18:10.

Consider how He spoke of the man with the splinter in His eye trying to cast the beam out of his brother's eye. He prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit". This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God's people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never offputting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

6:43 We take a third road of indifferent tolerance to far too many. We don't sort out the issues we perceive to be between us. We let the separation and cold contact drift on. Straight after teaching His men to pray, the Lord immediately added a comment about the need to forgive our brother. It's as if He was saying: 'OK, I know that part of the prayer will be hard for you. But you've got to do it'. Having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye...? For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

6:44 The Lord puts Mt. 12:33 [see note there] another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of

"corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may say to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, deaffirming them as believers, deaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade... until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words can not reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

6:46 As with many aspects of doctrine, it is often difficult for us to appreciate how radically revolutionary they were in the first century context; and in essence they should lose none of their radicalness with us. David Bosch observes: "Christians confessed Jesus as Lord of all lords- the most revolutionary political demonstration imagineable in the Roman Empire". Philip Yancey likewise: "As the church spread throughout the Roman empire, its followers took up the slogan "Christ is Lord", a direct affront to Roman authorities who required all citizens to take the oath 'Caesar [the state] is Lord'" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 246). It hurt, it cost, to recognize Him as Lord. And so it should with us. Men and women died for this; and we likewise give our lives in response to that very same knowledge. There is a tendency, which the Lord Himself brought to our

attention, of calling Him Lord but not doing what He says. To know Him as Lord in truth is axiomatically to be obedient to Him (Lk. 6:46).

The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

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

6:47 Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. Thus Lk. 6:47; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience. See on Mk. 13:35.

6:48 To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it

is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10).

The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

6:49 The collapse of time around the events of the judgment would explain this equation between the gathering and the judgment. The wicked will "immediately" feel that the house of their pseudo-spirituality has totally collapsed, as soon as the rain of judgment comes down (Lk. 6:49). The 'rain' will be a symbol of blessing for the righteous, and of judgment for the wicked. Likewise the cup of wine is another double symbol- of blessing, and of condemnation. Yet we know that there will be a *process* of condemnation- they will argue back with their Lord, expecting a reward for their good works... but underneath, "immediately" from their first knowledge of the Lord's return, there will be this sense of total collapse within them. The judgment passages which speak of the rejected apparently confidently demanding a place in the Kingdom in reward for their good works must be read with this fact as background.

The man who hears and does not appears to be building- he has the sensation of going some place in his spiritual life. He *did* dig a foundation- in sand, where it is easy to dig. But the Lord said that he built "without a foundation" (Lk. 6:49). Are we *really* hearing and doing- or just going through the motion of it, experiencing the sensation of appearing to do it?

In the parable, the flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock (v.49) is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the

refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil is running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

7:6- see on Jn. 4:53.

7:8 Like any good teacher, the Lord repeated His lessons. The disciples heard His commendation of the Centurion, who believed that just as he had men under his control, so Jesus had the whole cosmos under His control (Lk. 7:8-10); and they learnt that lesson again as they sat awestruck in the boat soon afterwards: "What manner of man is this! For he commands even the winds and water, and they obey him" (Lk. 8:25).

7:9- see on Mt. 8:10.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

7:14 The Lord spoke to the corpse of the widow's dead son as if it were already restored to life: "Young man, I say unto thee, arise" (Lk. 7:14). See on Mk. 5:41.

7:16- see on Mk. 1:2.

Juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. He touched the coffin- so that the crowd would have gasped at how unclean Jesus was, and how He had identified Himself with the unclean to the point of Himself appearing unclean. It was surely shock that made the pallbearers stop in their tracks. But then the Lord raised the dead man- and the people perceived His greatness, convinced that in the person of Jesus "God hath visited His people" (Lk. 7:14-16). His humanity and yet His greatness, His Divinity if you like, were artlessly juxtaposed together. Hence prophetic visions of the exalted Jesus in Daniel call Him "the Son of man".

7:19 Even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded in the

Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, “the prophet”, the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used, especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. He didn’t correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn’t exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

7:22- see on Mk. 6:3; Lk. 15:7.

7:24- see on Lk. 7:41.

All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise “could not be hid” in His preaching (Lk. 7:24).

7:29 The mother of a sick girl got healing for her daughter: “For this saying [of faith and understanding] go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter” (Mk. 7:29). Many weren’t healed by the disciples because they lacked the level of prayer and faith required (Mk. 9:29).

7:30 God will fulfill His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He ‘will be’ grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will... then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

7:32- see on Mt. 21:32; Mk. 1:4.

Christ’s enthusiasm for Israel’s response to the Gospel comes out again when the grace of Jesus likens Himself to a street kid in the market who really wanted to get a game going with the other kids. He offered to play funerals with them (through His appeal through John the Baptist), but they refused. He then offered to play weddings (through His Gospel of grace, joy and peace), but still they refused (Lk. 7:32). By all means connect this with another market place parable, where Christ (the servant) comes there to try to recruit labourers, on almost unbelievably good rates.

7:34- see on Mt. 11:19.

7:39 When Mary Magdalene touched Jesus in Lk. 7:39, people reasoned that Jesus wasn’t Messiah because He appeared not to know that He was being touched by a sinner. Yet this incident prepared the Lord for the time when He would be smitten and demanded to prophesy who smote Him, if He was the Christ (Lk. 22:64). At that moment, perhaps He thought back to Mary. He would have realized that that incident with her had been a living out of the spirit of the cross, and it prepared Him for the final agony.

The Lord’s response to Simon was not self-justification, but rather an enquiry as to how much Simon loved the Lord in response to the forgiveness of *his* sins (Lk. 7:39-48). And when the Pharisees criticized the disciples for mixing with sinners, the Lord’s response was to appeal to them *personally* to repent (Lk. 5:30-32). And He went further in justifying His disciples, by answering another criticism of them by the Jews with the comment that unless they changed, they would be like old bottles broken by His new wine. *They* personally had to change- and they needed to focus upon that rather than criticizing others for their possible guilt by association.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as a person will excite real passion and feeling in response. Our reactions to the tragedy of the way He was rejected, and is rejected and mocked to this day, will be like those of the woman who was a sinner whom Luke records in Lk. 7. The Lord was invited to the home of a Pharisee, who clearly had only invited Him to insult and mock Him. For the Pharisee hadn't kissed Him, nor arranged for His feet to be washed- things which simply *have* to be done to an invited guest. And so that woman becomes passionate. She feels anger and hurt for the insult and rejection made against Jesus. She does what Simon the Pharisee didn't do- kissing Him, washing His feet. Having no towel to dry His feet, she let down her hair to use as a towel- and a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in front of men. She touches the Lord's body- something deeply despised, for the Greek and Hebrew idea of 'touching' has sexual overtones (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1), the Greek word 'to touch' also meaning 'to light a fire'. The ointment she carried between her breasts denoted her as a prostitute- but she breaks it open and pours it on the Lord in repentance. Her attitude was surely: 'Yeah I'm a whore, you all know that. And yes, you're all gonna misunderstand me and think I am just madly coming on at this Jesus. OK, misunderstand me as you will, I don't care, I truly love Him as my Saviour, and there, I'm pouring out my ointment, I'm through with this broadway life, I'm repenting, in the abandon of freedom from sin I now feel, I'm giving myself wholly to Him and His cause, mock me, be shocked and disgusted in your middle class way all you like, but this is for real'. And this, it seems to me, is the response of everyone who truly comes to the Lord Jesus as a person, and feels for Him as a real person whom we have met in a real, valid encounter. The Lord responded to that woman by doing something which may not seem a big deal to us, but which was radical in 1st century culture. He criticized strongly the hospitality of His host. This just wasn't done, and still isn't. He was angry- because despite the woman's sincerity, they still labelled her as a 'sinner' (Lk. 7:39). He rebuked Simon through the parable of the two debtors, who owed 500 pence and 50 pence. As that woman went away "in peace", with her Lord passionately behind her and on her side, defending her to the world, so we too walk away from our encounters with Him.

7:40 Like David, the Lord Jesus saw through peoples' actions to the self-talk behind it. He observed the body language of the Pharisee, despising the repentant woman; Lk. 7:39 records that the man "said within himself... 'She is a sinner!'", but "Jesus *answering* said unto him..." (Lk. 7:40). The Lord perceived the man's self-talk, and responded to it. For Him, the Pharisee's unspoken words were loud and clear, and Jesus acted as if He was in a conversation with the man. He correctly read the man's silent disapproval as actually saying something, and responded to it as if in conversation. Of course we could argue that the Lord was empowered by a flash of Holy Spirit illumination to be able to read the Pharisee's mind; but it seems to me altogether more likely that it was His own sensitivity, His own perception of the other's self-talk, that enabled Him to know what was being silently said within the man's mind.

The parables of Lk. 7 and 14 were told during a meal- perhaps many of the others were, too. The Lord would have been a brilliant conversationalist, drawing out unexpected challenges and lessons from what appeared to be everyday facts. The implications of the parables are not pleasant- they would have soured some of His table conversations if they were properly perceived. And likewise with us as we read them in this age; these stories are indeed profoundly disturbing if understood properly and allowed to take their effect upon us. Yet for all their challenge, the parables of Jesus reveal how deeply familiar He was with human life in all its daily issues and complexities. He artlessly revealed how He had meditated deeply upon the issues involved in farming, the problem of weeds, how much poor men were paid for a day's work, the desperation of the beggar Lazarus, problems faced by builders when laying foundations... He was and is truly sensitive and understanding of the everyday issues of our lives, and yet draws out of them something deeply challenging and radical. In this was and is His surpassing, magnetic brilliance. But the unanswered questions in the parables aren't all there is to them.

7:41 He saw the hypocritical Pharisee Simon as being a man forgiven 50 pence, who therefore loved Him (Lk. 7:41). This shows the generous way in which the Lord reads people. In the same chapter, the Lord recognised that John the Baptist had suffered a crisis of faith. But He tells the crowd that John wasn't a reed shaken with the wind, an unstable believer (Lk. 7:24 cp. Is. 7:2), but the greatest of God's servants; He overlooked the temporary failure, and judged the overall spirit of John.

7:42- see on Lk. 7:47.

7:44 He saw Simon the proud Pharisee as having been forgiven a little, and as loving Him a little (Lk. 7:44-48). This isn't how we would have seen that man. This is surely something more than generosity of spirit, even though the Lord certainly had this. His attitude reflects a hopefulness for Simon, an earnest desire for his salvation that only saw and imagined the best.

7:45 The Lord saw a connection between the way the sinful woman kissed Him much, and the way she "loved much" (Lk. 7:45,47 RVmg.). He then told a parable about her and Simon the Pharisee. His point was that they both owed Him money and He had forgiven the debt, but He was looking for an appropriate response from them. Yet there is no evidence that Simon had repented before receiving that forgiveness.

7:46 The Lord makes a clear allusion to Ps. 23 in saying that *Mary* had anointed His head with oil, and His feet with ointment (Lk. 7:46). There, it is *God* who is said to have anointed David's head, and prepared a feast in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). The historical background for this Psalm is when David fled from Absalom, and God manifested in Barzillai prepared an unexpected feast for him, just the other side of the valley from where his enemies were. Perhaps Barzillai also anointed David's head with oil at the time. It seems the Lord saw God as now manifest in Mary-He, through her, anointed His head with oil. And she did it at a time when the Lord was sitting at a great feast. It could logically follow that it was likewise Mary who had prepared the feast for Him. And if, as we have suggested, Simon the Pharisee was her brother or father or relative, then this would make sense. The whole thing surely has the ring of truth about it. Thus the Lord saw God as personally manifested through ex-hooker Mary. This should quieten all our doubts as to whether God really could be manifested through such as us. And note that Mary would have been the one who did the cooking.

7:47 Paul seems to have seen Mary as one of his patterns when he speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than anyone, because of the depth of grace he had known (1 Tim. 1:14,15)- for Mary "loved much" because she had been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). In passing, was the Lord's comment "she loved much" an indication that He thereby knew how much she had sinned, without having the knowledge beamed into Him, because He observed how much she now loved Him? In the parable which the Lord told comparing Simon and Mary, He made the comment that it was only "When they [realized that] they had nothing wherewith to pay" (Lk. 7:42 RV) that they were forgiven. He perceived how Mary had come to that point, at His feet, weeping, of knowing that she had nothing to pay. And Paul, and us, must reach that point if we are to find the motivation to "love much" in response.

He who is forgiven much, the same will love much (Lk. 7:41-50). The purpose of the Lord's mini-parable was not that the druggies, the hookers, the murderers will love Christ more than you or me. It was to teach that according to a man's *perception* of his sin, so he will love his Lord. All too often we serve Him because we have a conscience that we should do so; and yet the service He requires is service, even the senseless service of that forgiven woman with her precious ointment, simply because we *love* Him. And that overwhelming, overflowing *love* will only come from a true sense of our desperation. By knowing our desperation, we will know the Lord, we will know the grace and fathomless mercy which is so essentially *Him*: "Ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you... not according to your wicked ways" (Ez. 20:43,44).

7:49 Those who observed Mary's first anointing of the Lord's feet *began* to say within themselves "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" (Lk. 7:49). But, presumably, they didn't verbalize it, when they easily could have done. Why not? Was it not that Mary's anointing was an unspoken testimony that indeed, Jesus had forgiven her sins?

8:1 The synoptic Gospels use the same words for the activities of both Jesus and the disciples in respect of preaching, teaching, healing etc. Theirs was a shared ministry. Thus Jesus is recorded as "*showing* the glad tidings of the Kingdom" (Lk. 8:1), but in the same context He asks a new convert to go home "and *shew* how great things God hath done" (8:39), as if he were to continue the 'showing' of Jesus.

We can too easily assume that the purpose of the Bible, or the teaching of Jesus, the doctrine of Christ, is merely and solely to impart information. We can underestimate the degree to which the immediate intention of doctrine, of Jesus, was the transformation of human life. Many of us have been educated in an environment where the aim of teaching is to bring people to know things that have no practical effect upon their lives; yet this is most decidedly not how we should approach the words of the Gospel. Our model of learning has been 'from jug to mug', i.e. there is the assumption that the teacher simply pours out their knowledge into the student's passive mental space. And then the student is tested as to the degree of retention of that knowledge. But as disciples, students, of the Lord Jesus, we are about something different. If the Lord were scheduled to give a class in one of our ecclesial halls, my sense is we would turn up with our video cameras, tape recorders, note books, pens and pencils. But when in reality He delivered the 'sermon on the mount', His listeners simply beheld a life lived, the reflection of His words in practice, "the word made flesh". He both preached *and* shewed the Gospel- in His life as well as His doctrinal teaching (Lk. 8:1). And so it should be with our teaching of others.

8:2 Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to.

Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

8:2

Joanna: A Character Study

The teaching of Jesus for today is a radical call to live and think and feel in a way that is counter-cultural; i.e., that radically contradicts the prevailing culture within which we live. The lives we are to live are, however, a continuation of the spirit of those men and women who followed Him around Palestine 2000 years ago. They, too, were counter-cultural in their following of Him; they too walked out against the wind of prevailing wisdom and the expectations of those around them.

An Inversion Of Values

When we turn to study Joanna, we find ourselves right up against an example of this. Lk. 8:3 implies that the women who followed Jesus, and Joanna is named as one of these, basically supplied the funds and material backing for His mission. Male disciples had left their homes and families to manage economically without them, whilst they followed the Lord around Palestine. They evidently were generally poor. Yet their expenses were being met by a few wealthy women. Generally, the man was seen as the economic supporter of the woman, and this situation turned all that on its head. It must have been hard for those men to accept the ministrations of Joanna for them. It was almost a sociological impossibility that wealthy women should support illiterate men in such an itinerant lifestyle. But this was just the kind of inversion of values which Jesus sought to inculcate in the new community which He forged. Further, the wealthy simply didn't mix with the lower classes; it was unthinkable for a woman to go travelling around with a group of lower class men ⁽¹⁾, and women such as former prostitutes. It could only have been the compelling personality of Jesus which led Joanna to do something as scandalous as she did.

Joanna is introduced as “the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza” (Lk. 8:3). Yet as a married woman the right to dispose of her goods lay not with her but with her husband; and it’s unlikely that a man of such great social rank as Chuza would have allowed his wife to use his wealth like this. Thus if Joanna was married at this time, she “braved public condemnation by leaving [her] husband to follow Jesus” ⁽²⁾. The call of Christ is no less radical in our day, even if the scandal of it is articulated differently. Younger women who had wealthy families were still under the authority of their families, especially their father or uncles, until such time as they married. It is hard to understand, therefore, how Joanna got the right to use wealth in the way that she did. Perhaps she simply left her husband and insisted on taking some of their wealth with her. Perhaps he was supportive; but at such an early stage in the Lord’s ministry, this seems to me unlikely. And it’s equally unlikely that Herod’s right hand man would have allowed his wife to go wandering around the country with a crowd of working men. And it would have been a most atypical 1st century marriage if the wife was allowed to spend the husband’s money like this at her own initiative. So I discount this possibility. Even if a woman made money from her own business, the money would be under the control of her husband. So we are left with the question, from where did Joanna get her money?

Joanna’s Marriage

The more likely option comes from an awareness of the practice of *ketubba*. This was a sum of money promised by the husband to the wife in case of divorce; it was part of the marriage contract ⁽³⁾. With this money she could attract a second partner if the husband divorced her ⁽⁴⁾. And this, I submit, is what happened with Joanna. Perhaps for the cause of Christ, her husband divorced her; and instead of using her money to attract a second partner, she instead spent it on the true passion of her life- the cause of Jesus and His men. There is evidence that if her husband died, she still was not free to use the money that might come to her independently; his family and her male relatives had a major say in the matter ⁽⁵⁾. The Mishnah says that a wife cannot inherit anything from her husband, since otherwise his ‘property’ in any sense might be alienated from the man’s family (*B. Bat.* 8.1). So it would seem that the only way a woman had large funds at her disposal would be if she were married to a wealthy man, who divorced her and gave her the *ketubbah*. Hence the significance of the way Lk. 8:3 introduces her as having been the wife of a wealthy man, and yet also in a position to financially support the ministry of Jesus.

Joanna had once been married to Herod’s “steward”. She would have lived with her husband in Herod’s court in Tiberias, not far from Nazareth. She would have heard of Jesus right at the start of His ministry; Lk. 8:2 comments how the Lord healed women of ‘demons’, and the possibility is that Joanna was one of those people, and perhaps her illness was another reason why Chuza divorced her. When Herod invited his “courtiers and officers and chief men of Galilee” to the birthday party at which he beheaded John (Mk. 6:21), this would almost certainly have included Chuza. Manaen

was a *suntrofos* of Herod- a courtier (Acts 13:1), and he later became a disciple too. And one wonders about the 'Herodion' of Rom. 16:11- was he another of Herod's courtiers, also from the palace in Tiberias? We can only speculate as to whether Joanna converted these two. And then there was the "royal official" of Capernaum who was converted by the Lord's healing (Jn. 4:46-53); he too would have been one of Herod's courtiers. There, in the heart of the despised court at Tiberias, an ecclesia developed! This was the very group known as the "Herodians" who so persecuted the Lord (Mk. 3:6; 12:13; Mt. 22:16). It's rather like a Christian church developing in the drug dens of New York or cities controlled by Moslem fanatics such as Mecca or Kandahar. The point is, all things are possible. The personality of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel can penetrate anything. And further, one marvels at the wide range of people welded together by allegiance to the Lord. Their differences were significant and major. Only the power of His personality and the Truth that is in Him overcame them.

The Bond Of Fellowship

Being associated with Chuza and Herod's court would have placed Joanna in a category of people that were very unpopular to ordinary Jews- for she would have been allied to the ruling class who so cruelly taxed and impoverished the ordinary people. Herod's "steward" was basically the chief thug who made sure that the heavy taxations were paid by the populace. The disciples were thus being supported by a woman from the class they had naturally hated. It must also be recognized that Tiberias was a new city, built by Herod on a Jewish cemetery despite their protests. It had only been built about 10 years at the time of Jesus' ministry. Tiberias was one of the "aggressive acts of Romanization by Antipas" ⁽⁶⁾; the result was that the people of Galilee hated those who lived there, especially the courtiers. Yet one of those women courtiers was to travel with those Galilean fishermen and give up her financial security to support them! The city had been built from funds raised by years of excessive taxation of the people who lived around it. "The décor on the Herodian palace in Tiberias [which included depictions of animals despite the Torah's prohibitions] symbolized the alien culture that had suddenly intruded upon the Galilean landscape along with the "in-your-face" city built so visibly from revenues regularly taken from the threshing floors and olive presses of Galilean villages by officers [e.g. Chuza- D.H.] who lived lavishly near the palace" ⁽⁷⁾.

Worse still, Joanna is a strong Jewish name; she had as it were betrayed her people by siding with the Gentile conquerors, and had perhaps married one of them. The band of people around Jesus were thus as diverse as could possibly be. They had every possible tension and background difference and resentment between them, just as the present ecclesia does. Men like Simon the Zealot had been fighting this very class, probably trying to assassinate Joanna's [former?] husband. And we pause to reflect upon the composition of our ecclesias and community. Our extreme diversity matches the diversity of those whom Jesus gathered around Him when He first began to build His ecclesia. The Lord came to save all [types of] people; and hence there is this strange and compelling diversity and unity, so extraordinary, so unusual, that the Lord said that it alone had the power to convert the world.

Reversal Of Status

And so Joanna stepped out from Herod's court, over to the ranks of the Galilean poor. For her, conversion was radical. Not only did she give up her financial security, she gave up her social standing, and walked out so totally against the wind, like Moses walking out of Pharaoh's court to suffer affliction with God's people. Like him, she likely had to do it alone. In this, she is our pattern. Not only for those who feel they are all too caught up in the courts of Herod, but for those who find a true unity with their brethren almost impossible. She would have eagerly memorized the Lord's parables, and have perhaps nervously joined in the Lord's display of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in village after village which He visited. And there is no reason to think that the 70 who were sent out in pairs were all male; Luke's account of this in Lk. 10 has been prefaced by the explanation in Lk. 8:2,3 that the Lord had many female disciples too. In any case, Joanna would

have spoken to the women they met at wells, retold the parables of the Lord to groups of women in the villages in which they stayed. And she would have known the pain of rejection, the hurt of being rejected for who you once were rather than being accepted for who you now are.

We read that Joanna “provided for them out of [her] own resources” (Lk. 8:3). ‘Provided’ translates the Greek *diakoneo*. It has been commented that the word “refers almost exclusively to the menial labour of women and slaves, performed for the people of higher rank on whom they were economically dependent”⁽⁸⁾. And now you see the wonder of it all. The others were economically dependent upon Joanna; but she served them as if she was the one dependent upon them. She would’ve been used to Galileans serving her; but now she served them. She perhaps more than most had heard and learnt and obeyed in hard, concrete reality the Lord’s teaching: “The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over them are called Benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For which is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth” (Lk. 22:25-27). The radicality of the Lord’s teaching about the utter reversal of status for those in Him had been mastered and practiced by this extraordinary woman. When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He made the very actions which were understood as the duty of women and slaves to be emblematic of the leaders in His community. It was through this utter reversal of status that the Lord removed the distinctions between slaves and free, male and female, rich and poor within His community. And if we are truly His people, we will seriously and practically aspire to this spirit. Joanna crossed the huge gulf between aristocratic lady and humble serving woman, inspired surely by the example of the Lord with whom she walked. Her example leaves us a piercing challenge to follow.

Joanna In Later Life

But Joanna’s story doesn’t end here. Her name occurs again in the form of ‘Junia’ in Rom. 16:7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives [i.e. fellow Jews] and fellow prisoners, who are prominent among the apostles and were in Christ before me”. The AV’s “Junias” seems to be rooted in a desire not to have a woman seen as an apostle. Junia was a common Roman woman’s name, the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Joanna’. The Latin pronunciation of ‘Junia’ and the Hebrew ‘Yohannah’ would have been very close indeed. It would seem, therefore, that Joanna moved to Rome, changed her name to a Latin form, and married Andronicus, a Jewish apostle, who like her was an early convert- “in Christ” before Paul’s conversion⁽⁹⁾. Given her background in the Roman court at Tiberias, Joanna would have been an ideal missionary to Rome; and thus she went, and was imprisoned. It could well be that ‘Junia’ was the Latin name by which she would have been known even in Tiberias. Note how there were other missionaries who changed their Hebrew names into the Latin forms when they went on mission work into the Roman world: Silas became Silvanus, Saul became Paulus, Joseph Barsabbas became Justus (Acts 1:23); and hence we read of “John, whose other [Latin] name was Mark” (Acts 12:12,25).

The Prominence Of Joanna

The Greek translated “prominent” means ‘marked out, distinguished, outstanding, prominent’. She was all of those words; there really was something exceptional about this sister. And we need not be phased by her being called an “apostle”, for Paul uses the word in a nontechnical sense to refer simply to a messenger of the ecclesias (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The prominence of Joanna is perhaps reflected in the chiasmic structure of Lk. 24:9,10. Notice how the first three lines each have a parallel in the last three lines- e.g. a) = a1). But the centerpiece is Joanna. Why, unless she was worthy of special mention? Work it out for yourself:

- a) They *told* all *these things* to the eleven [*‘the apostles’*],
- b) and to all the rest [*‘others’*].
- c) Now they were *Mary Magdalene*,

d) and Joanna,

c1) and *Mary* the mother of James:

b1) and the *other* women with them

a1) *told these things unto the apostles*".

Note that the great commission to preach is given to "the eleven and those with him" (Lk. 24:33)⁽¹⁰⁾, i.e. the women, including Joanna. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of "the eleven and the women"- the same two groups. She would have known that she as a woman had no credibility as a witness in her society; and yet she was bidden go witness. And she did, it seems, as far as Rome- to the ends of her world. This surely is an inspiring challenge to all who feel hopelessly unqualified to witness; it is our very lack of qualification which seems to make the Lord chose us. To have accompanied the eleven throughout the Lord's ministry was a qualification to be His authoritative witness (Acts 1:21,22); and Joanna fulfilled that requirement, having been with the Lord from the beginning (Lk. 8:3) right up to the crucifixion (Lk. 24:9,10). Note how Paul argues that he is an apostle because he has seen Jesus the Lord; yet his words clearly allude to the way Mary simply said: "I have seen the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1; Jn. 20:18). It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women.

One evident reason for Joanna's prominence was that when the male disciples fled, it was Joanna and Mary who stood by the Lord during His crucifixion, knowing full well that they faced death by crucifixion for showing such solidarity with the victim. The importance of Joanna and the other women as witnesses lies in the fact that it was they who had seen Jesus buried, and therefore could vouch for the fact that the empty tomb was in fact the very tomb in which Jesus had been buried. This piece of evidence becomes more crucial the more one reflects upon it. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

Compelling Witnesses

The choice of women as the witnesses was made of course by God Almighty. Yet at that time, women were considered to be gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy in religious matters. Celsus, a pagan despiser of Christianity, commented in mockery: "After death he rose again...But who saw this? A hysterical female...deluded by the same sorcery"⁽¹¹⁾. Yet it was females who were chosen by God as the primary witnesses; for He wanted to confirm His Son's desire to turn human society upside down through the body of His Son. The servant was to become the leader; the marginalized at the centre of things from God's perspective. And so it is today. A toothless old sister who doesn't know English converts hundreds in Kazakhstan; the divorced and remarried 'loser' is seen as great in God's eyes; the obscure old brother in isolation touches the mind of Christ as few have ever done. And of course, some men *didn't* believe the women. The disciples didn't; Peter has to go to the tomb to see for himself, after dismissing the women's testimony as madness. In doing so, he was running parallel with Manoh, who according

to a widely known Jewish midrash on the Judges record, wouldn't believe his wife's relaying of the message from the Angel because it was from a woman. The parallel is so exact! Surely Peter later reflected upon it.

The travelers on the road to Emmaus reported to the Lord what the women had told them about the empty tomb. They basically told Him that the women were right about the empty tomb, but were wrong in thinking Jesus had risen- because *the men* hadn't seen Him. And what is the Lord's response? He could have said 'O foolish men for not believing *all* that the women told you!'. But instead He says: "O how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe *all* that *the prophets* have told you!" (Lk. 24:22-25). The Lord cleverly parallels the women with the revered male prophets of Israel. He is teaching that in His new community, the witness of the women, the disbelieved, the marginalized, the ignored, the insignificant...was going to be as earth shattering as the word of God Himself. In writing this, I am not a raving feminist. I am seeking to inspire all of us who struggle with our dysfunction and inadequacies, to realize that we too can rise up and witness as the Lord intended; and it is through *us* that the Lord delights to work! So, let us rise up...

Notes

- (1) J.M. Arlandson, *Women, Class and Society in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997) p. 130.
- (2) J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 318,319.
- (3) Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women's History From Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 144-146.
- (4) S.J.D. Cohen, *The Jewish Family In Antiquity* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1993) pp. 133-151.
- (5) N. Lewis, *The Documents From The Bar Kochba Period In The Cave Of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989) p.80.
- (6) Sean Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) p. 147.
- (7) R.A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996) p. 57.
- (8) L. Schotroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters* (London: S.C.M., 1995) p. 205.
- (9) This kind of speculation is foreign to some Bible readers. Yet the Biblical records are highly abbreviated, reduced to essentials, leaving the inessentials to be supplied by the reader / hearer. Ancient peoples were well used to doing this; modern readers are accustomed to novels or accounts which supply every detail, or to films whose visuality fills in such gaps. But, to me at least, the very nature of the Biblical narratives is different; they invite interpretation and 'filling in the gaps'.
- (10) Note how these references to Joanna, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10, all occur within Luke's writings. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women.
- (11) Quoted in H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1965) p. 109.

8:3 It is worth noting, though, that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus (Lk. 8:3); and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500

drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

8:5 The reason for the way side growth being so short lived was that the seed was "trodden down" (Lk. 8:5). This is a Biblical idiom for disdain and contempt (Jud. 5:21; Is. 14:19; 18:7; 28:3; Dan. 8:13; Mic. 7:10). A half hearted response to the word, is effectively to tread it down in contempt. Yet such is the word's power that even a partial response to it results in some growth- although in the final analysis, even this is unacceptable.

Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred. The same Greek words are used about treading underfoot the seed of the Gospel, and treading underfoot the Son of God (Lk. 8:5; Heb. 10:29). Our knowledge of Him and living in Him are the essence of our witness. He is essentially our witness.

The fowls taking away the unfruitful plant is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn.15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry, fruitfulness due to the word and purging recur. In Jn.15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. Thus Lk.8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven".

8:8 The Lord so wanted their response. "As he said these things, he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8 RV; Jn. 7:37). The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others.

Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that hath ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anticlimax of v. 9, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in v. 10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God".

There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

8:8,9 Our Lord's enthusiasm for us to interpret the sower parable for ourselves comes out well in Lk.8:8: "When he had said these things (the parable with the interpretation), he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear". The disciples' response "What *might* (indicating intellectual desperation?) this parable be?" (Lk.8:9) would have been a cutting anti-climax for the Lord after his impassioned plea.

8:11 "The seed is the word of God" (Lk.8:11), i.e. the word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt.13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems that Jesus is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom.4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled.

The seed is the word (Lk. 8:11); and "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

8:12 The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

8:14- see on Lk. 15:31.

The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fulness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40).

We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

8:15- see on Lk. 10:37.

Paul tells the Hebrews and Romans to have the patient, fruit-bearing characteristics of the good ground (Lk. 8:15 = Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36).

The word/ seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. Thus connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

8:16- see on Lk. 6:47.

We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this.

8:17 Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light (Lk. 8:17 RV)- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank.

The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life.

8:18- see on Lk. 13:28.

8:21 "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21), refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith.

8:25- see on Lk. 7:8.

They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27).

The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness. After having been awed by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

8:27 There are many incidents where evidently the disciples were with Jesus, yet the focus of the record is entirely upon Him, so awed were they by the magnitude of His personality, and so selfless were they (Lk. 8:27; 10:38-41; Jn. 11:15,20-57). They are appealing for others to believe on the basis that they are recounting the story of how they heard Jesus, and eventually, very slowly and falteringly, had also come to believe.

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

8:31- see on Acts 16:16.

8:39 Mary's praise that "He hath done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids a man go home" and shew how great things God hath done unto thee".

There are some things in Scripture which are recorded in such a way as to promote meditation, and therefore they will always be ambiguous in terms of the actual interpretation which is sustainable. We can't *always* say "This word means X, this phrase means Y, therefore this verse means interpretation Z; and if you don't agree with that, you don't really accept the Bible". Because it is possible to say that about the interpretation of basic doctrine doesn't mean that we can adopt this attitude to the interpretation of every Bible passage. The record of the crucifixion is a good example of this. Or consider how it is recorded that some of those healed by the Lord *didn't* afterwards do what He said: one preached to his whole city rather than to his family (Lk. 8:39); another didn't obey the Lord's plea to not tell anyone else (Mk. 1:45). How are we to read these responses? Rank disobedience? Misguided zeal? Zeal in doing over and above what they were asked? You may have your ideas, and it is right that we should meditate upon these things and discuss them. But I suggest that ultimately they are left 'hanging' for the very purpose of promoting meditation and personal application, rather than being statements which shout for an obvious interpretation.

8:42- see on Lk. 15:31.

The Lord's rush to heal her was interrupted by a woman, whom He addressed [unusually] as "daughter". She had been sick for 12 years. And she was healed because of her faith. To the unspiritual man, this would have been nothing but an irritating interruption, to be sworn about under the breath. But to the spiritual man, there was ample encouragement here for faith; for another beloved daughter lay sick, and she was 12 years old, and she likewise could be healed by faith... The Lord's question: "Who touched me?" was therefore also a rhetorical device to spur faith in Jairus and his family. Who? Another "daughter", 12 years afflicted... It is only by our spiritual laziness in

not providing that freewill input, that desire to understand, that crying for the knowledge of God which is in His word (Prov. 2:3-5), that this marvellous equation will fail. What greater motivation could each of us want in inspiring us to a total commitment to the word, rising early and staying up late to find that knowledge of God to overcome the sin which we hate? If we can only continue to desire to make the effort, to bruise the flesh more through that glorious word of God, then this spiral of growth will catch us up with ever increasing speed.

8:48 The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Thy faith hath made thee whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

8:49 When we read that "there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master" (Lk. 8:49), we naturally ask: *who* was this "one" who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master". The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later.

8:50 Do not fear *but* believe (Lk. 8:50) shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

8:51 Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

8:55 The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55).

8:56- see on Lk. 9:44.

The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone

that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category.

9:4 The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip “from house to house” (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

9:11 The Lord cured “them that had need of healing” (Lk. 9:11), possibly implying that some posed as being sick, and yet the Lord could discern whose need was genuine. How hard His life must have been, in that hard land. And how hard it *is* for Him, in this hard world.

To not offend others we must “receive” them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, “He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom” (Lk. 9:11). He didn’t just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. “He *received* them”. Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord’s body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

9:20 In Lk. 9:18-20, the Lord Jesus asks His men: “Whom say the people that I am?”. Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples’ sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: “But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God”. Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and “the Son of God” (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: “Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things...and be slain, and be raised...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me... For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to “Tell no man” by saying that “The Son of man must suffer...”. I submit that “Tell no man...” is almost hyperbole; surely He means ‘For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?’. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: “Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven”. We are not to turn a blind eye to others’ misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to

remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

9:23- see on Mt. 10:38.

In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross.

"Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins.

We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people.

Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?'".

9:23-25 The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

9:24,25- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

9:25 Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV).

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!:
or - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

9:26- see on Rev. 19:10.

If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

9:31- see on 2 Pet. 1:15.

9:32 In Gethsemane, the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:34 Having warned against materialism, the Lord bids His men to "rather seek ye the Kingdom of God... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:31,32) in the place of seeking for material things. The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34). See on Mt. 6:9.

9:40,41 When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" (Lk. 9:40,41), again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world". See on Jn. 7:33.

9:44 It is helpful to consider in more detail the Lord's prophecies of this moment of handing over. He said that He would be, in the future, delivered up (Lk. 9:44); but the parallel Mk. 9:31 records Him saying: "I *am* delivered up". And Lk. 24:7 says that at this time, He told them that He *must be* delivered up. It is possible that He said all three things in one sentence, such was His emphasis: "I must be delivered up, I will be delivered up, in fact I am now being delivered up". He saw the future experience of the cross as being fulfilled in His daily experience of life.

The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*... He said... let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even

though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message. See on Jn. 8:28.

9:45 The Lord's teaching about the cross was "hid from them" (Lk. 9:45), much to the Lord's distress. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hid from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This is a picture of the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are.

The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3).

9:48- see on Mt. 18:4.

9:51 The Lord "set his face" to go up to Jerusalem and die there (Lk. 9:51), but in doing so the record alludes to the way Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem in judgment (2 Kings 12:17). The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment.

He set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the final sacrifice which would be there (Lk. 9:51). He hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30).

9:54 Time and again, the Lord responded to requests for *Him* to do something by reminding those who asked of *their* responsibilities- e.g. 'Bring fire down on these guys! You have the Spirit, go on, do it, you surely can!' was responded to with a reminder that *you* don't appreciate what Spirit *you* have (Lk. 9:54,55). 'Send the people away... No, *you* feed them' (Lk. 9:12,13). 'Save us from this storm, Jesus, you miracle man!... Where is *your* faith?' (Lk. 8:24,25).

9:54,55 The incident in 2 Kings 1:10 of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of *His* Spirit (Lk. 9:54,55). And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. The Lord's comment that He had not come to *destroy* men's *lives* but to *save* them (Lk. 9:56) must surely be connected with what He has just said: Whosoever will *save* his *life* shall *lose* [s.w. *destroy*] it and vice versa (Lk. 9:24,25). The three words *save*, *life*, *lose* / *destroy* are all the same. There is surely a connection of thought here. But what is the Lord saying through it? The disciples like Elijah would have had their prayers heard- the fire of destruction could have come. But the Lord says that they don't know the type of spirit they are of. His Spirit is one of saving and not destruction. Men *destroy themselves* by seeking to save themselves without Him. This is why the Lord could say that He Himself judged / condemned no man- each rejected man will have condemned himself. The same point is actually made within the Elijah story too. In 1 Kings 18:28 the prophets of Baal worshipped *after their manner*- a Hebrew word normally translated 296 times "judgment"; they judged / condemned themselves, rather than needing Elijah to do so. And the word translated "cut" essentially means to gather. They gathered themselves together to condemnation and poured out their own blood. "Knives and lancets" is a phrase normally translated "swords and spears". They lived out judgment upon themselves rather than Elijah needing to condemn them. Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to destroy / lose their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life *loses* / *destroys* it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will *save* it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / destroy / lose themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to save not destroy; to save the lost / destroyed (Lk.

6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke). But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the Spirit, the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. If thy brother sin against thee, the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... See on Lk. 12:49-54.

9:58 When the Lord spoke of the Son of man having nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58), He surely had His mind upon how His dear mother had told Him that when He was born, there was no place to lay Him, and His dear head had to be laid in an animal's feeding trough.

The Lord used language which challenged people. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). All three synoptics record how He summarily ordered His weary disciples to feed a crowd numbering thousands in a desert, when they had no food (Mt. 14:16; Mk. 6:37; Lk. 9:13). He criticises the man who earnestly wished to follow Him, but first had to attend his father's funeral. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt. 8:22) was a shocking, even coarse figure to use- 'let the dead bodies drag one more dead body into their grave'. And then He went on to speak and show His matchless, endless love. Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles, and invitation to drink His blood). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights.

He expressed Himself to the Jews in ways which were almost provocative (consider His Sabbath day miracles). He intended to shake them. He seems to have used hyperbole in order to make the point concerning the high standard of commitment He expects. Thus He spoke of cutting off the limbs that offend. He told those who were interested in following Him that He had nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58). That may have been true that night, but the ministering women surely saw to it that this was not the case with Him most nights. The man who wanted to first attend his father's funeral was told that this wasn't good enough; although Abraham and Joseph did this. The man who wanted to go and say farewell to his family was told the same; although Elisha did this (Lk. 9:60,61). The Lord is surely saying that the commitment of such Old Testament giants was to be

less than what He expected of those for whom He was to give His all. It isn't that He won't *save* a man who (in the parable) puts his father's funeral before the Lord's demands. But He expects the *ultimate* level of commitment from us. Likewise His Father had asked Abraham to offer his dearest: Isaac. This is the Father and Son with whom we have to do. His parables of Mt. 25 make the point that the rejected will be surprised at how hard He turns out to be: they didn't expect Him to judge sins of omission so seriously. Likewise the man who held on to his talent of the Truth seemed surprised when the Lord said that He expected more. The foolish virgins were likewise shocked to be told that actually they didn't know their Lord at all.

9:59 Following Christ, which is to carry His cross, is paralleled by Him with preaching His Kingdom (Lk. 9:59,60). To live out the essence of the cross, in daily self-control, unconditional kindness and forgiveness, patience with those who provoke us... this is the real witness (Lk. 9:23-26). If we don't preach, we aren't following Him. And if we do follow Him, it's axiomatic that we therefore preach Him. "From henceforth thou shalt catch men. And... they forsook all, and followed him" (Lk. 5:10,11) definitely parallels preaching with following the Lord. Following after Him is the way to be fishers of men (Mk. 1:17), and yet following Jesus is so often understood by Him as a call to carrying the cross. A focus on Him and the life of His cross leads to a catching of men for Him in a quite natural way.

Once the Lord asked a man on the way to his father's funeral to immediately follow Him, and quit going to the funeral as he intended (Lk. 9:59). And He criticized the man for not doing this. Another who wanted to first "bid farewell" to his family was likewise criticized (Lk. 9:61). Even Elisha bid farewell to his family before following Elijah, and Elijah allowed him to do this (1 Kings 19:20)- but the Lord Jesus was more demanding. He described the disciples as a "perverse generation" because they didn't have enough faith to work a miracle (Lk. 9:41).

9:60 "Leave the dead to bury their dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:60) would have been more shocking to first century ears than it is even to ours. For to bury his father was the most elemental duty of a Jewish son- "in Jewish custom it came before other fundamental religious responsibilities like reciting the Shema". And the urgency about the preacher was to elicit a like urgency in the response of their hearers.

The principle of Nazariteship (explained in Num. 6) encouraged the average Israelite, regardless of his tribe, to in some way aspire to the High Priesthood. He could grow his hair long to imitate the High Priestly mitre, and he could chose to have the same commands concerning defilement by the dead and eating vine-products apply to him, as applied to the High Priest. The Lord applied this to all His followers, when He told the man who wished to bury his father to *not* do so, but engage instead in His work (Lk. 9:59,60). This would have sent the Jewish mind back to Lev. 21:1-11, where the High Priest could not be distracted from his service even by the death of his father.

9:61 The urgency of the call to preach is taught by the way that the Lord called men to go preaching at the most inconvenient times for them. The Lord even insisted that a man not fulfil his most basic Jewish duty- to bury his father (Lk. 9:61)- but rather go and preach the Gospel *immediately*. The poignancy of all this becomes the deeper when we realize that in first century Palestine, burial took place on the day of death. The son had just that day lost his father, and was willing to miss the traditional six days of mourning to go preach for the Lord. But no, the Lord wanted him to go *there and then, immediately*. No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

9:62 It is amazing that with the clear command echoing in his ears, "neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed" (Gen.19:17), Lot could ask leave to live in Zoar, a small city of the plain, and not go to the mountain. He clearly failed to appreciate the reality and seriousness of the Angel's coming- and this will certainly be a temptation to us in that moment when the typology of Lot is fulfilled in us. The only way to guard against this is by consciously

living our lives now in awareness of the fact that now we have been called to leave the world and its ways, and therefore our whole life now should have the spirit which we will have when we leave this world when the Angel comes. This is confirmed by an oblique allusion which our Lord makes to this Angelic command "Look not behind thee", in Lk.9:62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God". The context shows that starting to plough represents the start of our new life in response to the Gospel call- but the allusion to the Angel's words to Lot show that we should live our whole lives in response to that call as if we are on the way to the judgment, having been called away by the Angel.

The Lord spoke of following Him as being like a man ploughing by keeping his eye constantly and unswervingly on an end point- and that point is Him as a person (Lk. 9:61,62). The account of Peter starting to drown exemplifies all this- when he took his gaze off the Lord personally, in order to notice how the wind was so strongly blowing some object [perhaps back on the boat], then his walk to Jesus started to come to an end (Mt. 14:30).

All the Gospels present the crucifixion and resurrection as the climax of their presentation of the Gospel. Luke's record is studded with references to the Lord's progress on that final journey up to Jerusalem; events took place "as they went in the way" (Lk. 9:57-62), as if they were incidental to the main aim of the record, which was to describe the final coming of the Lord to Jerusalem and death (Lk. 13:22).

10:1 According to some texts, Luke records that the Lord sent out 72 preachers (Lk. 10:1). The Jews understood that there were 72 nations in the world, based on the LXX of Gen. 10. Surely Luke's point is that they went only to the Jews, thus highlighting the gap between the disciples' understanding at the time, and the Lord's further reaching intention of a mission to the Gentiles.

The Lord sent out the 70 "before his face into every city whither he himself would come". They were heralds of His presence; and He goes on in this context to tell them that they were "*as* lambs among wolves"- i.e. they were like Him, *the* lamb- and that therefore "he that rejecteth you rejecteth me" (Lk. 10:1,3,16 RV). Yet significantly, having told the 70 to proclaim His face to the cities where He would come, we find the comment: "Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few [i.e. only 70]: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways..." (:2). Could this not mean that He would have travelled more extensively around Israel in His ministry than He did, but He was limited in the places He witnessed in by whether there were enough heralds to go there in advance and prepare the way? The dearth of workers meant that places He otherwise would have visited, He didn't- for it seems that He had a policy of only Himself working in areas where His men had broken the ground. And is there not some worrying relevance of all this for our work in *this* day, in *this* hard land...?

10:2 The Lord had to comment that the harvest was great, but the labourers [i.e. the disciples] were few or weak [Lk. 10:2 Gk.]. And yet He delegated so much to them- authority, the power of miracles, the Gospel itself (Lk. 9:1-6), despite their weakness, and despite the fact much harvest was spoilt or not harvested by their weakness. They were His representatives to the world (Lk. 10:16)- and yet they still didn't know how to pray (Lk. 11:1). We marvel at the way the Lord used them, and yet we end up realizing with a similar amazement that the same Lord has entrusted His Gospel to us, with all our weakness and dysfunction.

The Hebrew writer asked his brethren to pray for him "that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:19). The amount of prayer seems significant. The Lord Himself seems to have asked the disciples to add their prayers to His in asking the Father to send forth more labourers into the over-ripe, unharvested fields (Lk. 10:2), which, by implication, He alone couldn't satisfactorily gather.

10:3 As He was the lamb of God sent forth for the salvation of men, so those in Him are sent forth with that same Gospel, as lambs (Lk. 10:3).

10:4 As we read the preaching of Jesus, one cannot but be impressed by the gravity of His message. He never spoke of His message, of His person and His Kingdom, in a take-it-or-leave-it way, as though it didn't matter how His hearers responded. And we ought to preach as He preached. He realized that how His hearers responded would determine the structure of their whole lives and what their eternal destiny would be. He urged His preachers to exchange no greetings on the road as they pressed on to take His Gospel to others (Lk. 10:4). This would have been seen as most unusual and even offensive in first century Palestine. The people would have had their attention arrested by this—these preachers of the man from Nazareth had an urgency about them, a sense of utmost priority in the work they were about. They were to be known as men in an urgent hurry. They were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (Lk. 10:4 cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the Lord's ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

10:5 He raised everything to an altogether higher level. It was, for example, customary for Semitic peoples to greet each other [as it is today] with the words 'shalom!' or 'salaam!' ['peace']. But there was little real meaning in those words. The Lord said that His peace, His 'shalom', He gives to us, not as the [Jewish] world gave it. Likewise He told His disciples to say "Peace be to this house" (Lk. 10:5) when they entered a home. Yet this was the standard greeting. What He surely meant was that they were to say it with meaning.

10:7- see on Lk. 9:4.

Preaching is all about relationships. The Lord commanded to not go from house to house but rather build up a base in one home (Lk. 10:7). I take this to mean that He saw the importance of relationship building in preaching, rather than a surface level contact with many people of the type achieved in more public addresses.

Preaching is essentially about building relationships, not platform evangelism. The Lord taught that His preachers were not to go "from house to house" but rather to remain within an acceptive household and make that their base (Lk. 10:7). In modern terms, I think we could interpret this as meaning: 'Focus on building relationships; don't build up a shallow relationship with a lot of people, but rather try to get deep with one household'.

10:8- see on 1 Cor. 9:22; 10:27.

10:12 Jer.20:16 has a graphic description of the people of Sodom screaming out in anguish, both mental and physical, as the judgments of God fell upon them: "The cry in the morning (when the judgments began, Gen.19:23,24), and the shouting at noontide". This is in reality a picture of the rejected in the last days.

10:13- see on Lk. 19:42.

10:14 The Lord taught His preachers that if people rejected their message, *in that day* when they did this, "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city". But He repeats Himself later on: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the judgment* than for you" (Lk. 10:12,14 RV). "In that day" clearly refers to the day on which the preacher's message was rejected. But that day was effectively their judgment day.

10:15 As He sent the 70 away on their preaching mission, the Lord commented that Capernaum was exalted to heaven, and yet at the judgment would be thrust down to hell; and yet when they returned, He said that He had seen Satan falling from heaven to earth (Lk. 10:15,18), in anticipation

of how it will at judgment day (Rev. 12). The connection is not co-incidental. He was countering the disciples' joy at the superficial response by saying that He has seen it another way; He had seen the Satan of the Jewish system already condemned, hurled from heaven to earth, by their rejection of the Gospel preached.

10:18

Satan as Lightning

Comments

1. No sinful being can be tolerated in God's presence in Heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5:4–5; Hab. 1:13)
2. Jesus is using parabolic language – “as lightning fall from heaven”, so this “Satan” fell. Lightning comes from heaven in the sense of the sky, not as in the dwelling place of God.
3. Any attempt to link this with the prince of this world being cast out is difficult, because that happened at Christ's death (N.B. “now” in Jn.12:31), whereas this falling of Satan occurred during His ministry.
4. According to popular thought, “Satan” is supposed to have fallen from heaven in Eden, so that he was on the earth at Job's time, yet Jesus is described as seeing this occurring at His time. Weymouth adds a marginal note on Lk. 10:18 in his translation of the Bible: “The thought is not that of Milton's rebel angel banished for ever from the abode of bliss”.
5. If an evil being and his host of followers fell down on to earth literally, why did only Jesus see it and not the disciples? Why is there no other record of this strange event?
6. Falling from heaven is figurative of losing authority, e.g. it is used about the demise of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. See also Lamentations 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:53.

Suggested Explanations

1. The apostles had just cured many people (Lk. 10:17) and were blinded by their great physical power over disease (v. 20). The real cause of illness and disease is our sin prone nature. That sin is the ultimate reason for illness is stressed in Matthew 9:12 and 12:11, where a sheep gone astray, a clear symbol of a sinner (Mt. 18:13), is equated with a sick man. The principle is summed up in Matthew 9:5 “Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?”. Thus Jesus said, “I beheld Satan fall”, i.e. “In My view the great thing was that the power of sin was being overcome”.
2. There must be a connection with v. 15: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell”. Is Jesus implying that “Satan”, the ways of the flesh, which were so well exemplified in Capernaum, were being overcome? Notice that Capernaum was “exalted” in Jewish eyes. “Satan” often referring to the Jewish, maybe Jesus is equating Capernaum with “Satan” and commenting how the sin which was at the basis of this system was being overcome by the preaching of the Gospel.

10:19- see on Mk. 16:18; Jn. 8:44.

10:20 Lk. 10:20 implies that their elation at being able to pull off miracles was wrong, or at best immature; rather should they have rejoiced that their names were written in Heaven.

10:21- see on Lk.1:47; 9:45.

10:23- see on Lk. 7:9.

10:25 When the lawyer asked Jesus what he must “do to inherit eternal life”, the Lord could have lectured him on salvation being by grace rather than works (Lk. 10:25). But He doesn't; instead He tells the parable of the good Samaritan, running with the lawyer's misunderstanding for a while [as

His gracious manner was]. The essential basis of inheriting eternal life is of course faith, but the Lord's answer to the question shows that we can safely conclude: 'Faith must be shown in our care for the salvation of this world if it is real faith'.

10:25-27 In Lk. 10:25-27, the Lord recited some simple, well known facts of Biblical history: it was to a Gentile, not to anybody in Israel, that Elisha was sent to cure leprosy. But the Lord's doing so raised such a howl of protest that the people thrust Him out of the city and tried to do the Son of God to death there and then. The point is, meditating upon well known facts can really cut us to the quick, and powerfully motivate us. Yet like those people until that moment, we can know these facts and do nothing about them, not *feeling* anything.

10:28 We have eternal life insofar as the life that Jesus lived and lives, He will eternally live. If we live that life, we are living the essence of the life which we will eternally live. The lawyer asked the Lord what good thing he must do "to inherit eternal life". The Lord replied that he must properly love his God and his neighbour: "this do, and thou shalt live". By living a life based on this, he would be living the life which he would eternally live (Lk. 10:25,28). And thus the Lord responds to the query about inheriting eternal life by changing the emphasis of the question- He replies by speaking of the life we should be living now.

That God is one is not just a numerical description. If there is only one God, He therefore demands our *all*. Because He is the One God, He demands all our worship; and because He is One, He therefore treats all His people the same, regardless, e.g., of their nationality (Rom. 3:30). All true worshippers of the one God, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in that the one God offers salvation to them on the same basis. The fact there is only one Lord Jesus implies the same for Him (Rom. 10:12). Paul saw these implications in the doctrine of the unity of God. But that doctrine needs reflecting on before we come to grasp these conclusions. Christ taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:27,28: "*this* do...". If God is one, then our brother bears the one Name of God, and so to love God is to love our brother (cp. 1 Jn. 4:21). And because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother.

10:30

The Good Samaritan

Salvation in prospect

We've read how the lawyer asked Jesus what he should do "to inherit eternal life" (Lk.10:25), and in a sense we ask the same question. But we mustn't be quite like him, in thinking that if we physically *do* certain things, then we will at some future point be given eternal life as a kind of payment; and nor should we think that the eternity of the Kingdom life is the most important aspect of our salvation. Let's look over to Lk.18:18, where "A certain ruler asked him" the very same question: What he should do to inherit eternal life. Christ's response was that if he kept the commandments in the right spirit, he would "have treasure in heaven". When the man found this impossible, Christ commented how hard it was for the rich to "enter into the kingdom of God" (Lk.18:24). So there is a parallel here between inheriting eternal life, having treasure in heaven, and entering the Kingdom. We are told that now is the time, in this life, for us to lay up treasure in Heaven (Mt.6:20). So here and now it is possible to have treasure in Heaven, to have eternal life in prospect. In a sense we now have eternal life (1 Jn.5:11,13), in a sense we are now in the process of entering into the Kingdom. We have been translated, here and now, into the Kingdom (Col.1:13). The very same Greek

construction used in Col.1:13 occurs in Acts 14:22, where Paul says that through much tribulation we enter into the Kingdom; in other words, entry into the Kingdom is an ongoing process, and we experience this on account of the effect of our trials. Entering the Kingdom is used to describe our response to the Gospel in Lk.16:16: "The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it". Unless we receive the Gospel of the kingdom as a child, we will not enter it; i.e. respond fully to that Gospel (Lk.18:17).

In prospect we have been saved, we are now in Christ, and therefore the great salvation which he was given is therefore counted to all those who are in him. We shy away from the positive promises that we really can start to enter the Kingdom now, that we do now have eternal life in prospect. But this shying away is surely an indication of our lack of faith; our desperate unwillingness to believe so fully and deeply that our salvation really is so wonderfully assured (1). That eternal life dwells in us insofar as the eternal spirit of Christ is in us (2). And so as we face up to the sureness of these promises, we earnestly want to know what we must *do* to inherit this eternal life, to have this great treasure of assured salvation laid up for us now in Heaven. Of course we are saved by our faith, not our works (Tit.3:5-7); yet our faith, if it is real, will inevitably be shown in practical ways. So with all this in mind, we can come down to that parable of the good Samaritan. That parable is the Lord's answer to this vital question.

The preface to the good Samaritan parable is there in v.27: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself... *this do, and thou shalt live* (eternally)" (Lk.10:27,28). To define this statement more closely, Christ told the good Samaritan parable. He concludes it by saying: "Go and *do* thou likewise" (Lk.10:37); he is referring back to v.28, where Christ commands the man "*this do*", i.e. loving God with all the heart, soul etc. So the example of the good Samaritan is a practical epitome of loving God with all the heart, soul etc. To love our neighbour as ourself is to love God with all the heart and soul and strength and mind. Therefore the good Samaritan needs to represent us.

Samaritan Saviour

And yet when we analyze this good Samaritan parable, it becomes clear that we are also aptly represented by the wounded man; it is the Lord Jesus who is the good Samaritan. The Law of Moses, symbolized by the priest and Levite, came near to man's stricken condition, and had a close look at it. Lk.10:32 (Young's Literal) brings this out: "Having been about the place, having come and seen...", the Levite passed on by. The Jews regarded Christ as a Samaritan, so they would have immediately understood the Samaritan of the parable to represent Jesus (Jn.8:48). The good Samaritan having compassion on the man and being moved to do something about him has echoes of the Lord's compassion on the multitudes (v.33). His promise to come again after two days (he gave two pence, and a penny a day was a fair rate, Mt.20:2) is a clear connection with the Lord's promise to come again (after 2000 years from his departure?).

Until the good Samaritan's return, the man was kept in the inn, with everything that was needed lavishly provided. Surely the inn is symbolic of the ecclesia (3); in the ecclesia there should be a common sense of spiritual improvement, of growing in health, of remembering our extraordinary deliverance, realizing our weakness, looking forward to seeing the Samaritan again to praise him for the wonder of it all. This ought to characterize our gathering this morning, not just *partially*, but very fully .

He "bound up his wounds", alluding to the manner in which Christ was to bind up the broken hearted (Is.61:1). He cured those mental wounds by pouring in oil and wine, symbols of his word and his blood respectively. So the brutal beating up of that man, leaving him half dead, refers to the

broken-heartedness which the sin of this world and our own natures inflicts upon us. Picture the scene on that Jericho road, the body covered in blood and dust, massive bruises swelling up, flies buzzing around on the congealed blood, face in the dust, frightened donkey neighing among the scrub somewhere. That is the very picture of our broken heartedness, the broken heartedness which Christ came to heal. The physical grossness of those wounds is a picture of our mental state. Yet the flesh deceives us that there is nothing really that wrong with our minds, with our natures. Yet there *is*, and we need to come to terms with it more and more completely, to realize our deep mental need for Christ's healing. Once we do this, we will be able to see the need, the urgent need, for his healing of our *minds* through his spirit, his perfect, clean mind, being in us. And how were those wounds healed? How are our mental wounds healed? By the Son of God tearing up his own garments to bandage up the wounds (how else did he do it?), and healing us with his blood and his word.

The description of the stricken man being "stripped" of his clothing uses the very same word, rarely used in the NT, to describe the 'stripping' of the Lord Jesus at the time of His death (Mt. 27:28,21; Mk. 15:20). Likewise the robbers 'left him' (Lk. 10:30), in the same as the Lord was 'left' alone by the disciples to face the end alone (Mk. 14:50 s.w.). The robbers "wounded him" (Lk. 10:30), a phrase which translates two Greek words, 'to lay upon' and 'stripes'. The cross was 'laid upon' Jesus (Lk. 23:26 s.w.); and we are familiar with the idea of the Lord being 'wounded' and receiving 'stripes' in His final sufferings (Is. 53:5). The connection is surely that in the process of His death, the Lord came to know the feelings of the stripped and stricken people whom He came to save. No wonder He can powerfully "have compassion" upon us. And it's been pointed out elsewhere that the 'two pennies' paid by the Samaritan are the equivalent of the half shekel atonement money under the Mosaic Law, whereby a man could be redeemed. Our redeemer is of course the Lord Jesus. The redemption was 'paid' in His blood- which implies His putting us on *His* beast of burden and carrying us to the inn, where He paid the money, is a picture of His final sufferings which lead up to the actual shedding of His blood.

"He brought him to the inn" can also be translated "He led it [the donkey] to the inn". In this case, the Samaritan is acting as a servant, for it is the master who rides on the donkey and the servant who walks on foot, leading it there. Remember how Haman has to lead the horse on which Mordecai rides (Esther 6:7-11). All this speaks of how the Lord took upon Himself the form of a servant in order to lead us to salvation- when at the time we could do nothing, and had no awareness of the huge grace being shown to us. The Samaritan was of course making himself vulnerable to attack by robbers by doing this. But think through it some more. There was an eye-for-eye vengeance syndrome alive and well at that time. If a Samaritan turned up with a wounded Jew, it would look for all the world like *he* was responsible for the damage. It would be the first time a Samaritan was known to have done such an act of kindness. And he risks himself all the more, by staying at the inn, leaving, and then returning there, thus willing to face the inevitable suspicion that *he* had attacked the man, or was somehow involved in the incident. This risking of His own salvation was what the cross was all about. The parable gives a rare window into the Lord's self-perception on this point. And so for us- we may stay up all night serving someone's need, only to make ourselves irritable and impatient and more prone to sin ourselves the next day. And in any case, it's my experience that no good deed goes unpunished; we have to pay various prices for it in this life. In all these things we are living out the spirit of the Samaritan saviour.

"Do likewise..."

So there's ample evidence that the despised Samaritan of this parable refers to the Lord Jesus. He was 'neighbour' to stricken humanity, he came near to us, binding up our broken hearts, and carried us to the haven of the ecclesia. "Go thou and do likewise" is therefore a real challenge to us: to have the same dedication for others' salvation as Christ had. His zeal to achieve God's plan of redemption

should be ours. Remember how the good Samaritan parable is an exposition of how to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind (v.27). Every fibre of the Lord's mind and body was bent *for us*, for bringing about God's plan of redemption. He loved us, his neighbour, as himself. Because of this it is impossible to separate Christ from the work He came to do, i.e. our redemption (4). The point of the good Samaritan parable is to teach us that his same devotion to the work of conquering sin should be seen in us; our concern for the salvation of others should be as great as that for our own. We need to be totally filled with the idea of bringing about God's glory, of seeing the conquest of sin achieved through Christ. So all our strength, our mind, will be given over to the conquest of sin in ourselves, to the spreading of the Gospel to others, and to the binding up of the broken hearts of our brethren.

One of the many Old Testament quarries for this good Samaritan parable is found in 2 Chron.28:15 (5). Here we read how Israel attacked Judah whilst Judah were apostate, and took them captives. But then they realized their own shortcomings, and the fact that Judah really were their brethren; then they "clothed all that were naked among (the captives taken from Judah), and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho...to their brethren". Now there is allusion after allusion to this scene in the Samaritan parable. Surely our Lord had his eye on this incident as he devised that parable. The point he was making as surely this: 'In trying to follow my example of total love for your brethren, your spiritual neighbours, remember your own shortcomings, and what the Lord has done for you by His grace; and then go and reflect this to your brethren'.

The opportunities in our days for expressing this love of our brethren, with all our mind and strength, are just so numerous. Letter writing, preaching, organizing meetings, visits, above all fervent prayer for their salvation. If we are really pouring out all our heart and soul into the salvation of our brethren, after the pattern of Christ on the cross, our worldly careers will mean so little, our every practical decision will be coloured by our commitments to the body of Christ; where and how we live, what hours we work, hobbies (if any!), holidays (if any!)... our very soul, every aspect of our life, must be affected by our loving our neighbour, and thereby our God, with our whole soul and mind and physical strength.

As we behold the agony of our Lord Jesus, we really see our example. We see a man driven to the physical limits of his humanity, not in striving to achieve salvation by works, but in ministering God's wondrous grace to others. 'Gethsemane, can we forget?' we sing, as if it was so unthinkable that we should. But of course we do, hour by hour, day by day even. We really need to seriously get down to remembering his agony, the intensity of his struggle, more frequently and more deeply. This is surely what we need exhortation about. We are bound together by the fact that we all fail to do this as we should. I tend to visualize him with stooping shoulders, graying hair, hair line well receded, lined forehead reflecting that tremendous mental torture he experienced, quietly spoken, and with eyes which spoke a message of commitment which we have never seen in any other. Of course, we don't know exactly, neither is it ultimately significant. But if we *love* the Lord Jesus, if we truly have a *relationship* with him, if we really focus on his example of sacrifice on the cross, that sacrifice of body and mind which went on throughout his life, then surely it's inevitable that we start to think of him physically, as a friend, a reality, a glorious example. So I've opened my heart to you there, that's how I see him in his life and in his agony, as the moonlight reveals him to us, kneeling in Gethsemane.

Total empathy

But outside the reverie, we are walking on down that Jericho road, Christ's example really is ours. "Be going on, and do likewise" Christ concluded (v.37 YLT). Verse 38 appropriately continues: "Now it came to pass, *as they went*", in the same way as the Samaritan Saviour "as he journeyed"

(v.33) showed such energetic compassion, with all his heart and strength, to the stricken man. We must be able to use our own realization of our own desperate need for Christ's grace to motivate us to zealously devote ourselves to ministering to others. Our lack of zeal in this is largely due to our own failure to appreciate our own need, and the degree to which this has been satisfied by Christ. Christ knew (and knows) the feelings of the stricken man. As the man was stripped and wounded, so identical language is used about the sufferings of Christ on the cross (Mt.27:28,29; Lk.20:12; Zech.13:6). As his would-be neighbours passed him by on the other side, so the neighbours of Christ stood aloof from his stricken body on the cross (Ps.38:11 AVmg.). Through this he can fully enter into our broken hearts, into our intense spiritual loneliness without him (if only we would realize it) and therefore he will come alongside us with a heart of true compassion. So because of his sufferings which we now behold, he can so truly, so truly and exactly, empathize with our spiritual state.

So here we are as it were in the inn, thinking back to our salvation by that suffering Samaritan, the strangeness and yet the glorious *wonder* of it all. I'm sure Christ meant us to fill in the unspoken details in his parable. Of course the saved man would have re-lived time and again his wondrous salvation, how he had come to with the eyes of that man peering earnestly into his, the laying on the ass, and the slow journey to the inn. As Israel remembered their Passover deliverance through the Passover feast, so we lie here on our sickbed in the inn, as it were, and remember our great salvation.

All Of Us

The wounded man is all of us- "a certain man" (Lk. 10:30) is a phrase more usually translated 'any man', 'whomsoever' etc. The idea of journeying downwards from Jerusalem to Jericho has some definite OT connections, not least with wicked King Zedekiah, who ignored repeated prophetic pleas to repent and fled from Jerusalem to Jericho, only to be overtaken on the way by the Babylonians and sent to Babylon to condemnation (2 Kings 25:4). 'You're every one a Zedekiah', is the implication- but we've been saved from out of that condemnation by the Samaritan's grace. Another allusion is to the incident in 2 Chron. 28:15, where the captured enemies of Israel are marched from Jerusalem to Jericho, and yet by grace they are given clothes, food and water. In all these allusions, Jesus is radically reversing all the roles. The true people of God are the repentant enemies of the people of God, the "thieves" who spoil the people of God are the Jewish elders (Hos. 6:1,29), the Divine Saviour is not a Jew but a Samaritan etc.

The helplessness of the injured man is a fine picture of our weakness. We can only accept salvation; there is nothing we can *do* to earn it. Hence the Lord warned those who *seek to save* their own lives (Lk. 17:33)- He uses the same two words to explain how *He* is the one who seeks and saves (Lk. 19:10). Acceptance of salvation is perhaps what faith is all about in its barest essence.

It's easy to think that the focus of the parable is upon being like the good Samaritan; but the focus equally is upon seeing ourselves in the wounded man. The Lord's answers to questions nearly always seem to provide a simple answer to them, and yet more subtly turn them upon their head, and redefine the terms. The parable was told in response to the question "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?". One answer appears to be: 'Recognize you're the injured man. Accept the Good Samaritan's salvation; for the Law which you so love can't save you'. Indeed if read the other way around, the Lord's answer would appear to be 'If you want eternal life, you must *do* lots of good works, after the pattern of the good Samaritan'. But this would contradict the whole message of salvation by pure grace which was central to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that the parable is often interpreted that way- and it's actually the very opposite of how the Lord wished us to read it. No matter how much good we *do* to people along the way, this cannot give us the life eternal.

Who is my neighbour?

The Samaritan parable appears to be an example of the way the Lord left His parables open to multiple interpretations and reflections, all of which express aspects of the many truths He was expressing to us. We need to reflect who the 'neighbour' actually is. The parable is told in extension of the Lord's approval of the statement that to love God is to love our neighbour, and vice versa (Lk. 10:27). The Lord was explaining that what we have to 'do' to get eternal life is to perceive that *God* is our neighbour. This is and was a challenging idea. As challenging and provocative as when a black sister in southern USA said to me once 'Ya know, God's ma nigger'. She meant, 'God's my buddy, my close one'. The turning point of the parable is in its' end stress [as so often in these stories of the Lord]: "Which of these three... was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?" (Lk. 10:36). Obviously, the neighbour was the Samaritan, whom we have shown to be symbolic of God and His Son. *This* is the answer to the question of the lawyer: 'And who is my neighbour?'. Answer: God / Jesus. The lawyer was wondering to whom he should do his good deeds. So he asks 'Who is my neighbour?'. He misunderstood the whole thing, as people do today. The Lord was turning the question around. Who is your neighbour? God / Jesus is your neighbour. You are lying there stricken. Your fellow lawyers and legalists / Priests / Levites can't help you. To receive eternal life, you must let God be your neighbour. *This* is the work of God, to believe on the one whom He sent (Jn. 6:29). This was the Lord's response to a similar question about what good works ought to be done. And the Samaritans were despised and rejected... yet the Lord chose them as a symbol of Himself. It's easy to under-estimate just how much the Jews despised Samaritans- "The Samaritans were publically cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life"(6). We see the sheer bravery of the Lord in framing the parable as He did. He doesn't chose to speak of a good Jew helping a stricken Samaritan; it's the other way around. The watchful student will find up to 12 allusions in the Good Samaritan parable back to Hosea 6:1-10- which portray the Jews as the robbers, and God as the Samaritan saviour. It is none less than Yahweh Himself who "will bind us up... revive us... raise us up... come to us"- all the very things which the Samaritan did. In all this was a huge challenge to the Lord's audience- as to whether they would accept His grace. "Oil and wine are forbidden objects if they emanate from a Samaritan"(7)- hence the challenge to the Jews in accepting the Lord's teaching. We in our turn struggle with the extent and purity of His grace.

But of course, we are intended to be the Good Samaritan too- in that we are to manifest and replicate the saving work of Jesus in our lives and in our interactions with people. There are details in the parables that need to be thought about, the story reconstructed. The Samaritan 'happened' to have "oil and wine" with him, i.e. medicaments for a wounded man (the wine would have been an antiseptic). And he was travelling alone, when people usually travelled in convoys. And the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they wouldn't even talk with them on the street (Jn. 4:9). So perhaps the Lord intended us to figure that the Samaritan was actually going to help one of his fellow Samaritans who needed attention, but on the way, he met one of another race in even greater need, and changed his plans in order to save him. In all this we have an exquisite example of the self-revelation of Jesus in His own parables- for He saw Himself as the Samaritan. And for us too, the call to save often comes when we are on our way to do something else, at the most inconvenient moment, to people we would never have considered would need nor accept our help towards salvation.

Notes

(1) See "The Problem Of Certainty" in *Beyond Bible Basics* for a discussion of this.

(2) See "The Promise Of The Spirit".

(3) But in this case, who is the inn-keeper? Ecclesial eldership? The 'Comforter' Angel which super-intends the body of Christ? Or just an irrelevant part of the story? All of these solutions have their problems!

(4) This is a point frequently made by Robert Roberts in his debate with J.J.Andrew and in his book *The Blood Of Christ* .

(5) Another will be found in Hos. 6:1,2,9, which seems to equate the Jewish priesthood with the thieves which attacked the man. This was also Christ's estimation of them (Mt.21:13; Jn.10:1). This allusion would have been especially relevant in the first century context. Another connection will be found in 2 Kings 25:4.

(6) W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables In The Light Of Their Jewish Background* (London: SPCK, 1936) p. 102.

(7) J.D.M. Derrett, *Law In The New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 220.

10:30 The parable of the good Samaritan features Jesus as the Samaritan helping the stricken man, representative of us all. However, the parable is followed immediately by the account of the Lord visiting the Bethany home of Martha and Mary. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went via Bethany. The home where the sick man was taken was surely intended to be understood as that of Martha and Mary. The attacked man is called "a certain man", and then we read straight on that the Lord was entertained by "a certain woman", Martha (Lk. 10:30,38). The Samaritan "as he journeyed" came to the stricken man; and yet "as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village..." (Lk. 10:33,38). The Samaritan Jesus 'cared for him'; and yet Martha unkindly challenges the Lord 'Don't you care...?' (Lk. 10:35,40). The similarities aren't just co-incidence. Surely the Lord is teaching that whether or not Martha perceives it, she and Mary are actually the wounded man of the parable, and He is taking care of them, not vice versa as Martha thought, in the teaching He was giving them in their home. He was spiritually pouring in oil and wine. And yet Martha and Mary, especially in Martha's incomprehension of the Lord's spiritual and saving care for her, are set up as types of all of us who are saved and cared for in Christ.

10:32 The radical nature of the Lord Jesus is reflected in His teaching style. His parables work around what I have elsewhere called "elements of unreality". They involve a clash of the familiar, the comfortable, the normal, with the strange and unreal and radical. The parables are now so well known that their radical nature has been almost buried under the avalanche of familiarity. The parables begin by getting the hearers sympathetic and onboard with the story line- and then, in a flick of the tail, the whole punch line is turned round against their expectations, with radical demands. Take the good Samaritan. The story of a man travelling the Jerusalem-Jericho road alone would've elicited sympathy and identity with the hearers- yes, that road *is* awfully dangerous. And then the priest and Levite pass by and don't help. That was realistic-"priests and levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple". The common people were anticlerical, and yes, they could just imagine the priest and Levite passing by. "Typical!" would've been their comment. They're all set up to expect the Messianic Jewish working class hero to stride in to the rescue. But... it's a despised Samaritan who stops and gives saving help. They had expected a Jewish Saviour- and Jesus, the teller of the parable, claimed to be just that. But... in the story, He's represented by a Samaritan. Remember that Samaritans and Jews had no dealings, and people were amazed that Jesus would even speak with the Samaritan woman at the well. Even in desperation, a Jew wouldn't have wanted to be helped by a Samaritan. You had to be utterly desperate to accept such help. Moments earlier, the audience had been identifying with the injured Jewish man. But... were they really *that* desperate, did they appreciate their desperation to that extent, to keep "in" the story, and accept that that desperate man was really them? They wanted to be able to identify with the hero. But no, they had to first of all identify with the wounded, dying, desperate Jew. And only then were they bidden "Go and do likewise"- 'be like the Samaritan'. The Lord's initial audience would have been left with knitted eyebrows and deep introspection at the end of it. The whole thing was too challenging for many. They quit the parable, quit identifying with the story... just as we can when it gets too demanding. It's a tragedy that this amazing story, crafted in such a radically demanding way, has been reduced to merely 'Be a good neighbour to the guy next door, so long as it doesn't demand too much of you'-

which is what the story has come to mean for the majority of professed Christians today. That of itself indicates a discomfort with the radical nature of the demands.

It's the same with Nathan's parable to David. It elicited David's sympathy- and then it was turned back on David: "You are the man!". But he didn't quit the parable. He acted on it, as we have to. The parable of the self-righteous older son is just the same. The parable's story line leads us to expect that the wayward son repents and is accepted back by his father. But then right at the end, the whole thing takes a biting twist. We suddenly realize that the prodigal son and the need to forgive your wayward son isn't the point of the story- for that's something which comes naturally to any father and family. The whole point is that the son who played safe, who stayed home and behaved himself... *he* is the one who ends up outside of the family's joy because of his self-righteousness. *He* ends up the villain, the lost son. Again, there'd have been knotted brows and an exit from identity with the story line. And the way generations of Christians have described the story as "the parable of the lost / prodigal son" shows how they [we] too have so often missed the essentially radical point of the story.

10:33 The Samaritan "was moved with compassion" by the man's (spiritual) state (Lk. 10:33 R.V.). This is the same phrase as used concerning how Christ "was moved with compassion" by the multitudes. The connection with the good Samaritan parable would invite us to read the Lord's compassion as fundamentally *spiritual*. The reason for the miracles was to confirm the spoken word (Mk. 16:20), to lead men to see the wisdom of the message they were validating (Mk. 6:2). Are there any examples of Christ doing miracles for reasons unconnected with preaching? They often (always?) had symbolic meaning; and were designed to inculcate faith (Jn. 20:31) and repentance (Mt. 11:21). And in any case, His miracles were largely to benefit the Covenant people, or those closely associated with them. The apostles didn't do mass benefit miracles (e.g. feeding thousands of people) to back up their preaching in the Gentile world; even though they had the power to do "greater works" than did the Lord (Jn. 14:12). 'Charitable' giving ought to be *associated* with preaching, surely, if we are to follow the example of Christ's compassion with the multitudes. In practice, the work of providing welfare and conducting fresh preaching is done by the same brethren in the mission field.

The Lord Jesus "knew what was in man", not only by direct revelation from the Father and the Old Testament word, but also from His own observation of our own nature, both in Himself and the surrounding world. The sensitivity of Jesus is reflected in this realization which He reflects. As the Samaritan came near to the wounded man (the ecclesia), realized the extent of his problem (the ravages of sin) and was thereby moved with compassion, so Christ was motivated by His consideration of our position (Lk. 10:33,34); the Lord realized His humanity more and more, and progressively humbled Himself, achieving a progressively fuller identity with us by so doing, until He crowned it all by His death (Phil. 2:6-8). The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). See on Lk. 14:9.

10:34 The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work...? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially... And yet we are left to reflect upon this. See on Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:32.

10:35 The parable of the good Samaritan explains how Christ took compassion on the stricken spiritual state of us His people, picked us up, made Himself vulnerable to attack by placing the man on His donkey, and caused us to be fully healed. The Samaritan was less vulnerable than the robbed man, on account of having a donkey. But he made himself even more vulnerable than the robbed man had been, in order to take him to the inn. The picture of the wounded man straddled over the donkey and the Samaritan walking patiently alongside shows what easy prey they would have been. The whole process of the man's redemption by this Samaritan is an account of the cross of Christ (not least the pouring in of wine and oil). The implication is that through seeking to save us, Christ made Himself more vulnerable than He would have been if He sought only His own salvation. And the Samaritan's speed of progress was more than halved; he had to walk rather than ride, keeping the wounded man balanced on the donkey. This parable seems to reveal that Christ realized at least in some abstract sense that His concern for us in some ways made it more difficult for Him; although the reality was that the motivation for His victory was largely due to His sense of responsibility for us. The idea of him taking care for the man is expressed in the language of Ex. 21:19, which says that if a man wounds another, "he shall pay... and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed". This somewhat odd allusion (at first sight) surely indicates that the Lord took upon Himself the full blame for our stricken condition, presumably in the sense that as the second Adam He took upon Himself the guilt of Adam. This is why there are so many connections between His death and the effects of Adam's sin (e.g. the crown of *thorns*, the Garden etc.). The way Christ compared Himself to a Samaritan, half Jew and half Gentile, shows that especially on the cross, this is how He felt. He was mindful of both Jewish and Gentile aspects of His future body as He died. The Jews (and His own brothers, Ps. 69:8) treated Him as half Gentile (from a Roman soldier, the Midrash claims).

10:36 The parable of the good Samaritan needs careful reflection before we see in it a command to concentrate on giving to the world. It is used as Biblical evidence for a social gospel. The Samaritan was "neighbour unto him that fell among thieves" (Lk. 10:36)- i.e. the story shows how he fulfilled the command to love our neighbour. We have shown above that this command refers to love for those related to the Covenant. The Samaritan represented Christ. The mugged man was those He came to save; not the world generally, for they have not all accepted His healing. We must go and do likewise; in showing the love of Christ to the world. But we have earlier defined that love as being paramountly *spiritual*, and relating to the work of the cross. The parable was teaching the inability of the Law to save man *spiritually*, not materially.

10:37 Like most Jews, He would have prayed the *shema* ("The Lord our God is one") upon rising and going to bed- just as He had a garment like that of the Pharisees, with the traditional tassles hanging from its edge (Mt. 9:20; 23:5). Yet He thought about what He prayed. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, He replied that it was the fact that God is one. He saw the unity of God as a commandment that elicited action; and He says [note His grammar] that this plus the command to love our neighbour is the [singular] great commandment (Mk. 12:31). And He again combines these two commandments in Lk. 10:27,37, saying that to love God with all our heart is parallel with loving our neighbour and showing mercy to him. He quoted two commandments as one, so deeply had He perceived that we can't claim to love God without loving our brother. How had He worked that out? Perhaps by daily reflecting upon what to many was merely a ritual saying of words. And we too read and have pass our lips, ideas which can work radical transformation in us *if only we will put meaning into the words* and reflect upon them. He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

A feature we need to bear in mind is the almost constant stress on the end of the story as the part which makes the main point which the Lord is seeking to get over. Likewise the emphasis is often upon the last person mentioned in the story, the last action, the last words. Think of the parable of the prodigal; or how the Samaritan, the last man on the scene, is the example for us. "Go and do

likewise" (Lk. 10:37) invites us to go forth and be like the Lord Jesus in bringing salvation to others. Or the man who buried his talent and did nothing with it; the crux of the story is that indifference to our potential is *so* awful. The parable of the sower focuses in the end on the good seed which brings a great harvest. The fact so much of the seed is lost is in itself an element of unreality- but the focus is on the fact that some seed brings forth wonderfully. And isn't this just the encouragement every preacher needs? That despite all the hard hearts, the initial responses that come to nothing, all is worth it because *someone* responds truly.

10:38 The disciples literally did give up most of what they had and follow the Lord. And yet there were evidently others who responded to His teaching without doing this- Peter's family (Mk. 1:29); Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38); Simon the leper Mk. 14:3). They made use of the Lord's concessions to human weakness.

10:38-41- see on Lk. 8:27.

10:40- see on Lk. 8:14.

10:42 Martha was "anxious and troubled about many things" (Lk. 10:42 RV), but the Lord perceived that Mary was anxious and troubled about the "one thing" that was "needful"- and the context demands we understand this "one thing" as hearing the Lord's words. For her, as she sat there at His feet, it was an anxious and troubling experience. To hear the Lord's words is in this sense a troubling experience. Whilst we are saved by grace, the extent of the imperative within the Lord's teaching is without doubt 'troubling' to the sensitive believer in Him. For we cannot hear Him without perceiving the enormous imperative which there is within those words for the transformation of our human lives in practice. See on Phil. 4:6. The one thing that was needful is surely to be connected by the incident, also recorded by Luke, where the Lord tells the rich young man that he lacks "the one thing" (Lk. 18:22)- which in his case, was to give his wealth away. Yet Mary did this, when she poured out her life savings on the Lord's feet. Sitting at His feet, hearing His words, led her to anoint those feet. She chose "the one thing", of anxiously hearing His words, the lines in her forehead showing in intense concentration. And yet that learning of Him issued in something practical- she gave her life to Him in practice, by giving all she had to those feet. The rich young man lacked the one thing- for he was not then ready to give his life's wealth to the Lord. Moving the spotlight onto ourselves, we can hear, and yet do nothing. We can read our Bibles without the intensity of devotion which Mary had, and without there being any direct translation of what we hear and read into practice. We can be as the rich young man, intellectually impressed, and yet totally failing to accept the tremendous practical demands behind the most simple, basic teachings of the Lord.

Local Jewish culture stressed that the place of the woman was about domestic matters rather than spiritual ones. Yet in the incident of Martha and Mary, Christ commended Mary for neglecting her domestic duties in order to concern herself with spiritual development (Lk.10:38-42). She sat at his feet, as if a student at the feet of a rabbi. When we read that Mary sat at the Lord's feet (Lk. 10:39), it's easy to forget that to sit at the feet of a Rabbi [and the Lord was called 'Rabbi'] meant to be a disciple of that Rabbi. And women... couldn't be disciples of a Rabbi. It was all radical stuff.

11:2 The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father". Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers. "Give us this day our daily bread" may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

It has been pointed out that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom. "'Your kingdom come!' is

therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated". And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

His teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence... it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members... now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

11:4 Those "indebted" to us [Lk. 11:4] are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us... and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if *we* forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much... then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people... by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.

Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon". See on Mt. 27:46.

11:5 Lk. 11:5,6 presents a telling parable. A man finds a friend comes to him at midnight, wanting food. So he goes to his friend, notwithstanding the inconvenient hour, and asks for some loaves, but actually he's given whatever he wants. His want, his will, was to find sustenance for his friend / brother. And therefore his friend gives abundantly above all he asks or thinks, indeed, whatever he wants is provided. The promise of boundless response to prayer is therefore true, in the context of seeking to help others. This parable comes straight after 'the Lord's prayer'. In the parallel record, the prayer is followed by a reminder that we must forgive our brother, if we are to be forgiven (Mt. 6:14,15). So perhaps the friend coming to the man at midnight starving hungry, represents a brother sinning against us. Our response must be to go to the Father in prayer and seek forgiveness / spiritual food for our brother. And in that context, we will be given whatever we desire. Note that banging on the shut door is elsewhere a symbol of asking for forgiveness (Lk. 13:24,25; Mt. 25:10).

The parable of the man coming to his friend at midnight and asking for loaves (Lk. 11:5-13) occurred in the context of the Lord's teaching about forgiveness (see the parallel Gospels). Yet the terms of the parable are replete with reference to the Lord's return and judgment:

11:5 At midnight- Christ comes "at midnight" in other parables (cp. Mk. 13:35)

11:7 Door now shut- the door is shut on those rejected, never to be opened (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25)

11:9 Knocking on the door in prayer, and the door is opened- the rejected knock on the door but it isn't opened.

Now, in this life, we knock on the door, knowing we are condemned, needing forgiveness, living out the situation of the rejected at the last day. But *now*, the door is opened. We are granted as much forgiveness as we need, which we accept shamefacedly and awkwardly, as the man receiving loaves at midnight for the visitor [note how Nathan describes David's lust for Bathsheba as a visitor arriving needing feeding].

The parable of the friend at midnight uses an element of unreality, but in a reverse way. The Lord paints the picture of a guest coming to a person who has no bread, and so they go and disturb their neighbour at midnight, asking for bread (Lk. 11:5-8). The Middle Eastern peasant who appreciated the huge burden of responsibility to give food to a visitor would say that no, he couldn't possibly imagine that the person who was asked for food would say 'No'. He would not only give bread, but whatever was needed. And so it is with God. It's unthinkable, as unthinkable as it is in a Palestinian village to not be hospitable, that our Father will not answer a prayer for resources with which to help others. This has been my own experience time and again. And further, the villager would respond not just because it is his neighbour asking him, but because he realizes that the responsibility to entertain the needy person actually falls upon the whole community. And God too sees our requests for others as partly His personal and communal responsibility. However let it be noted that the poor neighbour asks only for bread- for the very bare minimum with which to provide for the need of another. And the richer neighbour responds with far more. Again, a pattern for our own prayers for resources with which to help others.

11:6

The Parable of The Three Friends

The Lord told a parable about three friends. One friend, presumably very poor, arrives at midnight at the doorstep of friend number two. Perhaps those not from an Eastern background can never understand the pressing urgency of the hospitality culture; you *must* feed the visitor. It just has to be done. But he is poor, and he doesn't have any bread. So, he goes to his richer friend, friend number three, and wakes him up, disturbing the whole household, to ask him to give him some bread with which to entertain the first friend. Because of his "importunity", the rich friend gave to him. The Greek translated "importunity" means lack of shamefacedness, lack of reverence. The Greek word is *an-aideia*: without *aidos*. What does *aidos* mean? It is used twice in the New Testament: in 1 Tim.

2:9 "shamefacedness", and in Heb. 12:28 "serve God acceptably with *reverence*". The man (who the Lord invites us to see as representing us) comes to the rich friend (cp. God) *wit out* this reverence. Now of course we should serve our God with appropriate reverence. But there ought to be times when we as it were rush to God, because He is our father and our friend, without that formality which our worship of Him might more usually include. Contrary to the ideas of popular religion, God is not merely something to be worshipped; He is Father and friend, the one to run to in time of urgent need *when that need arises from the requirements of His people and His work*.

The Lord will one day come to *us* at midnight, and the unworthy will not open to Him (Song 5). And He right now stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). The rejected will know what it is like to stand knocking at the Lords shut door and be unanswered (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25). He surely intended us to make such links within His teachings. The message is quite clear- those who cant be bothered to respond to the knocking of others, who refuse to feel for others in their desperation... these are the ones who will then come to know just how that feels, as in ultimate spiritual desperation *they* hammer at the Lords door. From this it surely follows that in our response to the desperation of others, we are working out our own eternal destiny. We are deciding whether or not the Lord will respond *to us*, as we lay there prostrate before Him at judgment, knowing our desperation whilst at the same time believing and hoping in His love and response. When we see others in their needs, the sister who cant get to meeting because nobody will baby-sit for her once in a while, the brother who just needs someone to talk to, someone to listen, an evening of someone's time, the man over there who is so lost in his Catholicism, that guy so addicted to his dreams of personal wealth, the woman back there hooked on dope, the single father with two spastic children, the grandmother left to bring up three children on a tiny pension in one room with broken windows and severe winters, the refugees streaming over that border day after day... we are confronted with these pictures daily.

They are knocking at our door, at midnight. And we would rather not be disturbed. We would rather acknowledge their status as our friends, our brothers and sisters, but make excuses as to why here and now we cant respond. To tell the friend that, well, give him bread tomorrow...this was quite inappropriate. It could have been argued that they didn't *need* bread right then. They could wait till morning. But the friend appreciated the *shame* and the *awkwardness* of his friend...his heart felt for him, and he responded. It isn't just dire material need we should feel for, therefore; but feel for others in the sheer humanity of their life situations, and have a heart willing to try to give them all they need in them.

Paul's writings are packed with allusions back to the Lords parables. In his reference to the tale of the three friends, Paul seems to have understood just as we have done. Rom. 16:1,2 comments that the ecclesia should welcome "Phoebe our sister receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she *hath need* of you: for she hath been a succourer of many" . "Hath need" is the same Greek word as in Lk. 11:8- the friend gave whatever *was needed* to the friend who arrived from his journey. And Paul says this should be done for Phoebe because she lived a life of giving out to others needs.

The friend who came on his journey with "nothing" (Lk. 11:6) is intended by the Lord to be understood primarily as referring to the disciples whom He had sent out on their journey with nothing ("take nothing for your journey", Lk. 9:3). When He told them to "eat such things as are set before you" (Lk. 10:8), He didn't just mean 'Don't be picky about your food'. He used the same word in Lk. 11:6 to describe how the faithful friend "set [food] before" his visitor. As they travelled around, the disciples were to be received in the way He was describing. Those in that early brotherhood of believers who received and supported them were to do so knowing that these brethren were in their turn responding to human need, and they could be fellow-helpers in the Gospel's work by showing hospitality. John says just the same: "Because that for his names sake they went forth [alluding to the great commission to go into all the world], taking nothing *of the*

Gentiles [i.e. the unbelievers]. *We* therefore ought to help receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth" (3 Jn. 7,8).

The knocking on the door is specifically a symbol of prayer. If we see our brothers need, even if we can do nothing physically to help (and so often, we cant); we will *pray* earnestly for them. If we truly feel for them, we will pray for them. The friend troubles his friend for help (Lk. 18:7), just as in another parable about prayer the desperate widow "troubles" the judge for a response (Lk. 18:5). "From within" (11:7) is always used in the Bible about the inner man, rather than meaning indoors. The Greek word occurs twice in the same context: "your *inward part*... that which is *within*" (11:39,40). Inside himself, he spoke to his friend: "Trouble me not". Yet that satan within him, that desire to be selfish, was overcome by his realization of his friends need, and *why* it had arisen. And if we have this same emboldened conscience to overcome our innate selfishness and ask of our Father *for the sake of others*, then we will see the work of the ministry will be provided by Him- that is His sober promise. Jn. 15:16 is one of John's versions of the great preaching commission: "I chose you and appointed you, that ye should *go* and bear fruit... whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you". The promise of support and help and answered prayer is again held out- in the context of preaching and ministering to the Gospel.

11:6 Does the 'traveller' needing sustenance of Lk. 11:6 refer to our sinful tendencies, in the light of 2 Sam. 12:4?

Heb. 5:2 describes those in sin whom the Lord saved as "out of the way". The same idea is found in Lk. 11:6 AVmg., where the man "out of his way" comes knocking on the Lord's door. The image of the shut door is that of rejection; but here the door is opened, and the man given "as much as he needs" of forgiveness and acceptance.

11:7,8 Luke 11:7,8 gives further insight into how prayer is heard- the householder, God, is in His house (Heaven) with the door shut and his children with him in bed, and in order to get up- corresponding to God answering our prayer in the parable- the *whole* household, the children of God (a description of the Angels- Luke 20:35,36 etc.), have to be roused. Thus all the Angels are conscious of one specific action on our behalf. See on Lk. 15:6.

The man who knocks is answered, the Lord taught (Lk. 11:7-9). He may have meant that all true prayer is answered in its essence, rather than its particularities. But for our purposes we note that the first knocks weren't heard. Only by continual knocking was the request responded to. And so "knock, and it shall be opened" doesn't just mean 'ask for something and you'll get it'. The first knocks produced nothing. It surely means 'Keep on and on knocking, driven to your utmost desperation and intreaty; *this* is what I call knocking'.

11:8 The poor neighbour asks with "importunity" (Lk. 11:8)- with shamelessness. He is confident of being heard and has no shame or hesitation to his request because he knows he really does have nothing to give the visitor. This is of course the prerequisite for prayer which will be heard. The Lord drives the point home that whoever asks in this way, receives. And yet the Lord addresses this comment to those who although "evil", knew how to give gifts to their kids. Surely the Lord was speaking to the Pharisees present, who prayed regularly. Perhaps He is saying that they had never really prayed the prayer of earnest desire, motivated by others' needs.

11:9 Jesus likens requesting things from God to a man asking a favour of his friend at midnight (Lk. 11:5,9). We are to see God as *our friend* to whom like Abraham, we respectfully and rather awkwardly present ourselves. And He sees us as *His* friends. There's a wonderful mutuality between a man and his God.

11:10 Passages like Lk. 11:10 teach that every one who seeks in prayer, receives. This just isn't true in terms of the words of our actual requests being answered. But once we understand that God sees

the spirit behind our words and answers this rather than the specific request, then these promises become more realistically believable.

11:13- see on Mt. 7:11.

Quite simply, we have to believe that prayer changes things. God can change the course of a nation's destiny, or even in a sense the whole course of the universe, because some finite, ignorant, sinful human being has the neck to fervently ask Him to. We are encouraged by the Lord to persist in prayer (Lk. 11:5-13). Elijah had to pray for rain seven times before the cloud came. Daniel prayed 21 days before an answer came. Why doesn't God answer immediately? Is it not simply because He sees it is for our good to develop this habit of knocking on Heaven's door with the same request?

11:17 A divided house is the characteristic of Satan's house or kingdom, and it will fall- just as the house built on sand fell at the day of judgment (Lk. 11:17,18).

11:18 We are familiar with the personification of sin as a man called 'Satan', the enemy. This symbolic man is in fact the antithesis of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we follow this theme through Scripture, it becomes apparent that we are just at the tip of an iceberg. This symbolic man has a kingdom and almost every attribute of the Lord Jesus and *His* Divine Kingdom of righteousness. Consider the similarities:

Satan has a Kingdom (Lk. 11:18)

The power and glory of which have been *delivered* to him by God, and which he can give to whomsoever he will (Lk. 4:6)

Angels (Mt. 25:41; 2 Cor. 12:7 Gk.)

The power of death (Heb. 2:14 cp. Hos. 13:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:6)

Power to condemn men (1 Tim. 3:6)

A judgment seat and system of rewards based on that of Christ (Mt. 6:1 cp. 2,16)

Condemned sinners are invited to the 'feast' of God's judgments and given suitable wedding clothes (Zeph. 1:7,8) in parody of the Kingdom (Mt. 22:2,3)

Is a father (Jn. 8:44)

Has children (Acts 13:10; 1 Jn. 3:10 cp. Heb. 2:13)

And a wisdom that is opposed to God's wisdom (James 3:15-17)

Armour (Lk. 11:22)

Power (Acts 26:18)

Spiritual "depths" (Rev. 2:24, s.w. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)

Seed which he sows (Mt. 13:39)

A throne (Rev. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:4)

A mystery (2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 2:24)

"Power... signs and... wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13)

Stands at the right hand of men (Ps. 109:6 cp. 109:31; 16:8; 110:1)

Is likened to lightening (Lk. 10:18 cp. 17:24)

Puts things in men's hearts (Jn. 13:2 cp. 2 Cor. 8:16)

He is a son who will be "revealed" (2 Thess. 2:4), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:30, same Gk.)

He is "he that cometh" (2 Cor. 11:4), a phrase so often used about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:19,20; Jn. 7:27,31)

He will be "revealed *in his time*" (2 Thess. 2:6), as Christ will be (Lk. 17:24)

"The god of this world" who emits a bright light into the hearts of men (2 Cor. 4:4 cp. 6)

Enthroned in God's temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

He has "works" (1 Jn. 3:8)

Figuratively comes down from heaven to earth in the last days (Rev. 12:12)

Has bread and wine of wickedness (Prov. 4:17)

His followers "hold" Christ, as the true disciples do (same words in Col. 2:9; Mt. 28:19 cp. Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57)

Will be 'apocalypsed' as Christ will be (2 Thess. 2:8).

11:19- see on Rev. 16:15.

“By whom do your sons cast them [demons] out?” (Lk. 11:19) shows the Lord assuming for a moment that there were demons, and that the Jews could cast them out. He doesn't directly challenge them on their false miracles, their exaggerated reports of healings, nor on the non-existence of demons. He takes them from where they are and seeks to lead them to truth.

11:20 A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that “the finger of God” and “the spirit of God” are parallel - God in action is His spirit. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps. 33:6).

11:21 The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of “a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court” (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being “stronger than he” through the cross was therefore indeed strong. See on Lk. 13:9.

11:22 The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk.

13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12). We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe.

It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death.

There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

Grasping this extensive theme helps explain the deep sense of paradox which is central to all serious self-examination. We are counted righteous, we are given spiritual gifts of righteousness now, and our self-examination reveals this to us; but we are expected to develop them (according to the parable of the pounds). Yet we also see that we are pathetically bound by our Satan, somehow held back from that life of righteousness which we would fain achieve. All these things were deeply

foreseen and appreciated by the Lord when He constructed this parable of binding Satan. Christ in His own life has overcome Satan, and has graciously shared the various aspects of righteousness with the whole of His body. This is the very idea of the body of Christ; between us, over time, we will approximate to the perfect reflection of our Lord. We have each been given different aspects to develop, different parts of His personality. This explains the difference in emphasis which can be observed within the different parts of the present body, and also in the history of the body over time.

When we as a community finally grow up into Him, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), the whole process of Christ-manifestation (and thereby God manifestation) will be complete. This means that the speed of spiritual development in the latter day body of Christ will determine the exact date of the Lord's return. We are (hopefully and prayerfully) just adding the final touches to the full reflection of the Lord's body. The aspects of Christ which we as a community need to develop in these last days are presumably aspects which earlier generations were unable or not called to achieve. For example, it was simply impossible for earlier generations to do much to achieve the unity of the body. Now, with the possibility of the whole world-wide family being in close contact with each other, with the breakdown of distance and language barriers, it is a real possibility that the body should be one in a manner which was simply impossible to previous generations.

11:23 The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment.

11:28 Paul Wynn has spotted the following connections:

<i>REVELATION 1</i>	<i>LUKE 11</i>
<i>Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein. (v.3)</i>	<i>Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. (v.28)</i>
<i>Seven spirits (angels) before the throne. (v.4)</i>	<i>Contrast – seven unclean spirits invited into the house. (v.24-26)</i>
<i>The resurrected Christ – I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. (v.12-19)</i>	<i>The sign of Jonah the prophet. (v.29-32)</i>
<i>The seven golden candlesticks. (v.12,13,20)</i>	<i>The parable of the lighted candlestick. (v.33-36)</i>

The lesson for us is that the Lord even in His Heavenly glory alluded to his dear mother's attitude, and held her up as the pattern for all His people. She had an eternal influence upon Him. Even in His Heavenly glory, the incidents of that day in Lk. 11, and the example of His mother, remained with Him. This is surely a tremendous incentive to parents- their influence on their children may be a factor in how their children will eternally be. The Lord was alluding to how His mother had "kept" God's word in her heart in devout meditation (Lk. 2:51). He didn't say 'Blessed is *she* because *she*

heard the word and kept it'. Rather, "blessed are *they*". He was surely saying: 'Don't just dumbly admire my mother, with some kind of distant, spectator admiration; she is the pattern for *all* of you. Follow her, make her the pattern of *your* life with respect to God's word, rather than just gasp at her example'.

11:32 The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment (Luke 11:32), and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall "discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18).

11:33- see on Lk. 8:16.

11:35- see on 1 Cor. 4:4.

11:36 The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a candle that has been lit and displayed publicly, giving light to us. He then continues that imagery in some rather difficult words. He says that in our lives, the eye is "the light of the body"- a good eye lets light and vision in, thus totally and fundamentally affecting how we are inside us, as persons. But if the eye is faulty, then there is darkness within. But when the eye is good and functioning, the whole person is "full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle gives you light" (Lk. 11:33-36). But earlier, He's defined Himself as the candle which gives light. He seems to be saying that our "eye", our perception of Him, is vital. And this is exactly the context of this passage- He's been lamenting how Israel haven't perceived Him for who He is. If we perceive Him rightly, if our "eye" is good, then our whole body will be filled with the light which comes from Him. But it all depends upon our image / perception of / eye for Jesus. Hence the vital and ultimate importance of understanding and perceiving Him correctly. The subject we're now studying actually couldn't be more important; for the correct perception of Him will fill our whole lives with light, totally affect our internal world-views, granting us an ability to understand and make sense of all around us and within us in the light of the person of Jesus. And if we don't perceive Him aright, our inner lives will be dark and formless, whatever external trappings of culture and knowledge we may have.

11:41 In Lk. 16:9, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is *so* important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. He made the point in so many words in Lk. 11:41: "Give alms of such things as ye have (i.e. regardless of how small); and, behold, all things are clean unto you". Paul seems to have these words in mind when says that to the pure, all things are pure (Tit. 1:15)- as if he saw the epitome of purity as being in giving what we have. "The ransom of a man's life are his riches" (Prov. 13:8) likewise suggests that our attitude to riches is one of the things that decides our eternal destiny.

12:1 The disciples were overly influenced by the Pharisees. They were worried that the Pharisees were not happy with the Lord's teaching (Mt. 15:12). He had to warn them *above all* of the danger of the influence [yeast] of the Pharisees (Lk. 12:1). And yet they still misunderstood Him- they thought He was talking about literal bread (Mk. 8:15,16).

And He encouraged others to likewise 'be themselves'. He spoke much of not being a *hupokrites*, an actor. Those who follow Him are not to act a part before others, as if all the world's a stage, being what others want in the audience of the world of eyes that surround us, acting as an actor does, merely to please others. He continued the image when He warned of not doing things "to be seen [Gk. *theathenai*] of men". Don't let them be a mere theatre audience to you- be yourself, living life in the constant presence of God's eyes, not man's. This was a major theme with the Lord. Paul likewise teaches us that every man should "be as he is" (1 Cor. 7:26 RV). Jesus taught His men "first of all", i.e. most importantly, to beware of hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). This was a cardinal point in Christ's

manifesto. We must ask whether it has this place in our discipleship. It can be that the ecclesial audience is a kind of theatre, showing gratitude for the pleasing entertainment of the speakers. Yet the opposite should be true- God is the audience, we are living bared lives before His gaze.

The Lord taught that hypocrisy was like leaven- once it begins in a community of believers, it so easily spreads and engulfs all (Lk. 12:1-3). In this context He went on to say that “there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed... whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light”. It is so easy, and we have all done this, to say something about somebody, and ask our hearer not to repeat it. But even in this life, as well as at judgment day, what is spoken in the ear comes out on the housetops. In discussion about fellowship matters, divorce etc. we can so easily say one thing to one group of brethren and something quite different to another. But this, the Lord taught, is hypocrisy. Let us decide our principles and live and speak by them, in humility and sensitivity and simplicity. Because all will be revealed, both in this life and in the coming day of judgment, we ought to be without such hypocrisy.

The Lord taught His followers “first”, or ‘most of all’, to beware of hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). For us, all the world is *not* to be a stage, and we are *not* to be merely actors upon that stage. Hypocrisy is that living out of a persona, acting, rather than being the person God created us to be. In the Lord Jesus men saw the word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). There was perfect congruence between the person He presented Himself as, and the person He essentially was. This was why He could so easily touch the true person in others. And I think this is the meaning of the otherwise enigmatic insistence that the Cherubim’s faces, their appearances, and ‘themselves’ were all one (Ez. 10:22). The Russian [Synodal] version translates this: ‘Their view, was who they themselves were’. So often in our encounters with others there is no real dialogue, rather a conflict of monologues. This is why so many a debate between a Christian and a Mormon, e.g., has come to nothing; for perhaps both of them are merely showing one of their personas.

12:2- see on Mt. 10:27.

Whatever we have spoken in darkness will be revealed for all to hear and know (Lk. 12:2,3)- our words will as it were be cited back to us before others in that day. The Lord says this in the context of warning us not to have the leaven of hypocrisy in the matter of our words- there's no point in saying one thing to one person and something different to someone else, because our words will be gone through at the judgment and will be open for everyone to hear. We should live, He implies, as if we are now before the judgment; speaking things we wouldn't be ashamed for anyone to hear. Note in passing how he says that hypocrisy in our words is like leaven, that corrupts and spreads within an individual and a community. Once somebody starts being hypocritical with their words, someone else does. Even every word of murmuring against each other will be judged; and hence, James points out, it is bizarre that we should be doing this with the judge standing before the door (James 5:9).

12:3 The Lord said that whatever we say “in the ear in closets will be proclaimed upon the housetops” (Lk. 12:3). The reference to “closets” takes us back to Mt. 6:6, where He uses the same word to speak of how we should pray in closets and then we will be openly rewarded by the Father. The ‘open reward’ is clearly in the Kingdom (Mt. 6:4,18; Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). Could this not be saying, then, that in the Kingdom, the answers to the prayers we are *now* making will be openly proclaimed to all from the housetops? Hence there is an awesome connection between our feeble words of prayer now, and the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work... for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "*every*". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out

taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. However, these verses must be considered in conjunction with those which speak of God's 'forgetting' of bad deeds on account of how people later chose to live. However, this need not mean that they are erased from God's infinite knowledge; all too often we perceive God's memory as a vast memory bank which can have our sins erased from it. But His knowledge knows no such bounds of human perception; yet He is willing not to hold those things against us, and to therefore count us as having never committed them.

Ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3). Note how Paul read the Lord's words here in this way – for he surely alludes here when he speaks of how “the hidden things of darkness” are “the counsels of the hearts” which will be revealed at His return (1 Cor. 4:5). The implications of this are awesome. The thoughts and intents of our hearts in this life will be eternally open and manifest in the eternal light of God's Kingdom. In that day, our brethren will see every one of our hidden thoughts. To live now according to the principle ‘I can think what I like, but I won't act like it, for the sake of appearances to others’ is therefore foolish. Who we are now in our hearts is whom we shall ultimately be revealed to be. So we may as well get on and act according to how we really think; for throughout eternity, what we think now will be manifest to everyone, seeing that a man *is* as he thinks in his heart.

12:6- see on Mt. 10:29.

The sparrows are represented in the presence of God (Lk. 12:6 Gk.); even animals have their representative Angels there. This is ‘how’ in one sense a personal God sees and knows all things; because His Spirit / Angels are in His presence reporting all things to Him. At least this is how we are invited to perceive it. The sparrows aren't forgotten in the presence of God, and we are of more value than many sparrows (Lk. 12:6,7); Matthew has: ‘Your Father feeds the sparrows; are you not of more value [same Greek as in Luke] than many sparrows?’ ; ‘no sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing... you are of more value than many sparrows’ (Mt. 6:26; 10:29,31). The sparrows being in God's presence is paralleled with His feeding them [Gk. ‘to bring them up’] and being aware of what is happening to them on earth. God feeds / raises the sparrows through His Angelic messengers.

12:8- see on Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:8; 1 Tim. 5:21.

So close are Christ and the Angels and such His respect and love for them, that it seems that Jesus will even feel ashamed or embarrassed before them when He comes to consider one of the unworthy at the day of judgement- Luke 12:8 implies that the same feeling of embarrassment and shame which the unworthy have now when backing out of preaching will be felt by Jesus when He looks on them at the judgement. And it is quite possible that one of the things which motivated our Lord to continue hanging on the cross was the thought of praising God in the midst of the Angels at His ascension: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation (of Angels?): I will pay my vows before them that fear Him".

But in the same way as the Angels minister condemnation, they also joyfully give eternal life to their faithful charges, on Christ's command at the judgement- "him shall the Son of man also confess before the Angels of God" (Luke 12:8). This is perhaps the fact alluded to in 2 Cor. 10:18: "not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth (at the judgement)". To be commended implies to be commended *to* somebody- the Angels?

12:9 The Lord Jesus in the last day will confess, or witness to in a legal sense, for His people "before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8,9); and yet He uses the same language to describe how right now, He confesses us in Heaven in the presence of His Father (Mt. 10:32). Thus when we witness- or don't witness- to our relationship with Him, the Lord Jesus either confesses or denies knowledge of us before His Father. Right now. And this, therefore, is a foretaste of the final judgment. And we

face these foretastes day by day in human life, as we encounter the choices of confessing or denying our Lord.

Lk. 12:9 says that whoever denies the Lord before men will be denied before the Angels. Two words are used here, the first weaker than the second. If we deny Jesus, He will utterly deny us before the Angels- what we do now on earth is even more strongly reflected in Heaven and at judgment day. The Heavenly response to our words and actions is out of proportion to our words. This surely inspires us in our daily words and decisions.

12:13 Lk. 12:13-21 records how a man asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him more fairly. The Lord replies by asking the man to think again about *who* had given Jesus authority- for if indeed God really had given Jesus authority, then the man ought *himself* to fear the judgment of Jesus- for as the Lord goes on to show in the parable of the rich fool, He has the power to reject those who are materialistic, exactly because He has such authority from God. The Lord is pushing the man to look at himself and think of himself at the end of his life and before the final day of judgment; and to cease paying a mere lipservice respect to the authority of Jesus, but to take this for real, realizing what it means for his own personal responsibility.

12:13-21 Have a Kingdom perspective. In Lk. 12:13-21 we encounter the Lord being asked to get involved in a conflict between two brothers over an inheritance. The Lord's response was to tell the parable of the rich fool- a parable which ought to be seriously worrying for every one of us, rich or poor. He put the immediate argument between the brothers in the perspective of eternity; the eternity we may miss because we got too distracted with the immediate argument of the moment. And the Lord's basic message in this case was: "Be rich toward God. Give Him whatever you have". This cut right across the issues of life's unfairness, missing out on wealth, not getting our share of respect... to the essential question which should have made both brothers feel uncomfortable. Had they, have we, given all they had to the Lord's cause? We may lack the quick thinking or penetrating analysis required to make this kind of fast response when confronted by others' conflicts. But we can surely analyze our own conflicts, at our own pace, in the light of eternity; and regain perspective, even if our opponent fails to do this. We need to cut to the essence of why we are feeling as we are; pray for God to help you in this, for accurate self-examination is so hard. If we don't connect and engage with the core issues, then even if the immediate problem [e.g. the argument about the inheritance] is resolved, then other issues will still then arise. It will only be a matter of time. The more we focus on resolving just one conflict, the more we will realize that in fact we are dealing with a tangled web of multiple conflicts. We cannot change others, but we can come to understand ourselves, and to define and engage with the essential issues which we personally face in the whole conflict.

12:15- see on Lk. 17:32.

12:16 The aorist could imply that the ground was about to bring forth plentifully. The way the man talks about building bigger barns in order to store his "goods" suggests he is fantasizing about wealth, about actually getting a large harvest and turning it into goods; to spend time and labour demolishing existing barns and building greater when the intensity of harvest is upon him is foolish, and suggests an unreal fantasy about wealth rather than reality. Likewise his assumption that his harvest would be so huge that he could live from it for the rest of his life.

12:17 Jesus pinpointed the crucial importance of self-talk in His parable of the rich fool, who said to himself that he had many goods, and discussed with his own "soul" the need for greater barns etc. (Lk. 12:17-19). If we at least realize that our self-talk is potentially our greatest adversary ['Satan'], then we will find the strength to move towards genuine spiritual mindedness, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

12:18 The Greek phrase for bestowing / gathering into barns is to be found in Mt. 3:12; 13:30; Lk. 3:17- every time in the context of gathering God's people into God's Kingdom. This is what he should have been doing with his time and wealth. The barn represents the Kingdom. The man should've sought the things of God's Kingdom or barn, rather than his own, trying to build his own fake Kingdom here on earth (: 31).

Solomon's obsession with building the temple and his own houses shows a massive attraction towards material things. Ecc. 2 chronicles how he crazily tried to accumulate every branch of material possession. Solomon figuratively chastised the people with whips in the form of the excessive tax he raised in order to build store cities (1 Kings 9:15,19), in which to store all his accumulation. Surely this is behind the Lord's parable of the rich fool, devoid of wisdom in practice, who built ever bigger barns because of his lack of understanding about the future Kingdom. The Hebrew for "*store cities*" (2 Chron.8:6) is also translated "to heap up", strengthening the connection with the rich fool (Lk. 12:15-28). That parable stresses the self-centredness of the fool- just circle all the occurrences of the word "I". A similar over-use of personal pronouns in Ecc.2:4-8 makes the same point. Ecc.2:26 records how Solomon reflected that the sinner "heaped up" treasures- using the same word as for his "*store cities*". He saw his error, but wasn't bothered to do anything about it.

The rich fool reasoned that because he had had a big harvest, he would build bigger barns and relax, because he had enough to last him "many years" (Lk. 12:18,19). The unreal element here is that a harvest doesn't last many years, especially in a Middle Eastern climate with no way of effectively preserving it. And the lesson, on reflection, is obvious. Riches don't last for ever, he who earns big wages puts them into a bag with holes in... and yet there is the genuine conviction that they will last much longer than they do. Another unreal element here is that the rich man is described as speaking *with himself*. It's hard for some cultures to appreciate how Middle Eastern culture is a collective affair. Decisions are taken through much discussion with other people. Likewise, the rich man plans out how to enjoy his wealth *alone*. There is no speech to his family; he invites *himself* to rejoice with *himself*. But all these unreal elements about this man signpost to us the loneliness, insulation and selfishness which is brought about by excess wealth and the increase of investments. It's so relevant to the 21st century. By the way, there's a word play going on here. The man whose land brings forth many things (*eu-phoreo*) and therefore wants to be merry (*eu-phraino*) is actually a fool- *aphron*- an *a-phron* person, a person without those things. All those things were "required" of him, as a loan is required. They weren't really his. And as so often, the parable is left hanging, with no actual response from the man. We have to imagine where the man's mind turned, what he thought... and take the lesson.

12:19- see on 1 Cor. 15:32.

For each aspect of true spirituality, there is a fake counterpart; an appearance of peace when a man has no peace with God; a semblance of prayer and Bible study when actually these are performed as exercises devoid of meaning. The pseudo-believer takes "ease" (Lk. 12:19) in his materialism; and yet this is the same word used about the true "rest" which the Lord gives in His ecclesia (Mt. 11:28). If we allow ourselves to be caught up in this, then we are effectively having our part in the spirit of antiChrist. There will not only be a fake Jesus, but there is already within our natures a shadow spirituality, which apes the real thing, and thereby seeks to persuade us that we can take the crown without the cross. In this lies the colossal practical relevance of this theme to the serious believer.

12:20- Gk. / RVmg. "They shall require of thee"- i.e. the Angels, to whom we shall give account at the day of judgment (:9). A similar, related Greek word is in :48- as God has given much to us, so "they"- the Angels- will require of us during the judgment process. But the exact same Greek word translated "required" occurs only in Lk. 6:30- we should give to others and not 'ask again' of them. The connection teaches that insofar as we 'require' of others, so it will be 'required' of us. If we forgive freely without demanding repentance, so God will treat us; if we 'require again' of others in

this life, so God will of us. In a sense our lives are required of us when we die in that our next conscious moment will be the judgment.

12:20 Provided- s.w. "prepared" in v. 47. We must prepare ourselves, our character and personality; we provide or prepare by being generous to others, v. 33.

Because we do not have an immortal soul that is somehow recycled into us through reincarnation, our soul / life is given to us by God. In the parable of the rich fool, the Lord says that in the day of his death, his soul was "required" of him (Lk. 12:20). The Greek word for 'required' means 'to ask back, to request to be given again'. The fact we have life [a 'soul'] makes us responsible to God; and at the judgment we will be asked to give that life back to Him with an account. And, as the parable shows, this utterly precludes a focus upon material acquisition. The Lord goes on to say that therefore we should take no anxious thought about what our soul will eat or wear- because our soul / life is in fact God's soul / life, and He will care for it until He takes it back to Himself (Lk. 12:22). The soul is greater than food and clothes (Lk. 12:23 Gk.). The wonder that we are alive, with God's life in us, should be far greater to us than what we feed or clothe it with. Because we can't take that life out of ourselves until God does, nor can we give it to another person, nor can we make our body / soul grow taller, *therefore* we should not take anxious thought for the material things related to it, which are all peripheral compared to the wonder of the fact that we have life from God: "why take ye thought for the rest [Gk. 'the things that are left over / extraneous']?" (Lk. 12:26). And to drive the point home, we are bidden "consider" (s.w. 'discover') the birds and plants, who are simply content with the life God has given them. This was the Lord's way of doing what Solomon did in Ecc. 3:17-20- showing that man and plants and animals are all possessed of the same God-given spirit / life. As Gen. 2:7; Ecc. 12:7 make clear, the spirit / life is given by God to our bodies; it doesn't come from anywhere else. There is no reincarnation. And this is no painless Bible fact; it demands that we live lives that are *His*, and not lived out as if our spirit / life / soul is *ours*. The fact that God "holdeth our soul in life", a reference to Gen. 2:7, means that David wanted to "make the voice of his praise to be heard" (Ps. 66:8,9). This was the meaning of the basic facts of creation for David!

The man who built greater barns realized on the night of his death that all his laid up treasures could not be his after his death (Lk. 12:20). And yet this is couched in the very language of Ecclesiastes. We can come to that attitude and understanding right now; and if we don't, we will come to it on our deathbeds or at judgment day. The parable of the pounds may be intended to describe our dealing with wealth. This is how it would have appeared to the Lord's first hearers.

12:21 Without in any way seeking to teach justification by works, it is also true that there are Bible passages which imply that there will be a reckoning up of a man's good works at the last day. The rich fool should have been "rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21); he should have hoarded up spiritual wealth and fruit against his last day rather than material things. Yet this of course will not have been consciously done; yet the judgment process will reveal the good works of the righteous to them and others.

12:22 The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (Lk. 14:33). Their claim to have left literally all and followed Him (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. To follow Him meant taking up a cross (Lk. 14:27).

12:23 When the Lord taught that "the life is more than the food" which we worry about today (Lk. 12:23 RV), and "the body [which we shall receive] is more than the raiment", He surely means that our hope of eternal life, *the* life, the only real and ultimate life worth having, should eclipse our worries about today's problems of survival. Not worrying about food, drink and clothing, which God will provide, is likely an allusion to His provision for Israel during their wilderness journey to the promised land. And in this context the Lord encourage us: "Seek ye the Kingdom of God, and

all these things shall be added unto you... fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 12:31,32). If it is God's pleasure to give us the Kingdom, then surely He will give us all basic necessities until that time comes. Our certainty of being there thus greatly relieves us from earthly cares, compared to the person who has no such hope.

12:28 The Lord tells the disciples that they are "of little faith" if they don't perceive and live by what He is teaching about God's care for the flowers. The 'faith' is surely faith in the simple fact that God lavishes His loving care upon us, just because, like a flower, we are here as His creation, in His eternal purpose.

All flesh is as grass, and yet the Lord speaks as if God treats us as better than the grass "which is today in the field and tomorrow is cast into the oven" (Lk. 12:28).

12:32- see on 2 Cor. 8:9.

The pleasure or will of our loving Father is that we should share His Kingdom (Lk. 12:32), and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross of Jesus (Is. 53:10). God isn't indifferent. He wants us to be there. That's why He gave His Son to die. It's as simple as that. The deepest longings we feel in our earthly lives, as parents, as lovers, are mere flickers of the hungering desire God feels for us. It is a desire that cost Him His very own crucified son.

The Lord Himself knew our basic tendency to disbelieve the certainty of our salvation when He comforted us: "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom".

He spoke of us all as a little flock, fearing it is *not* the Father's pleasure / will to give us the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32). In doing so, He was as ever drawing on the language of the OT. Joshua-Jesus encouraged Israel that Yahweh delighted / willed that they should enter the land (Num. 14:8); but instead, they were too caught up with doubts... doubt about salvation, about what they could eat and drink day by day, and the giants in the land. This is the very context in which the Lord was speaking- fearing "the nations of the world", doubting where food and clothes would come from, just as Israel did (Lk. 12:22-29). Yet the pleasure / will of Yahweh is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross (Is. 53:10).

Lk. 12:32 teaches that we should not fear or worry about our lack of material things, because God is eager to give us His Kingdom. The certainty of salvation which we may have ought to mean that worry about all human things of this life becomes irrelevant.

12:33 He warns the crowd not to everlastingly worry about where the next meal was coming from; and then in that very context, tells *them* to sell what they have (Lk. 12:29-33). He wasn't just talking to the rich. He was telling the desperately poor to forsake what little they had, so as to seek His Kingdom. He probably didn't mean them to take His words dead literally (cp. cutting off the offending hand or foot); what He surely meant was: 'Resign, in your mind, the possession of everything you have, concern yourselves rather with the needs of others and entering my Kingdom'. No wonder those crowds turned round and soon bayed for His blood. See on Mt. 6:19.

12:35-39 Luke 12:35-39 speaks of the Master coming at night and then sharing the Passover meal with those who are "watching". Israel were told to 'watch' throughout that first Passover night (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), eating the meal with loins girded. Our Lord matches this with "let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" (v. 35), referring to the virgins parable. Israel eating that meal together, huddled around the slain lamb, the oil burning lamps revealing their tense faces, is therefore a picture of what the new Israel should be like just prior to their deliverance.

12:36- see on Lk. 17:31.

How we respond to Jesus now is how we will respond at His return. Those who open to Him immediately will be saved (Lk. 12:36). The wise virgins go immediately and are thereby accepted, whereas the foolish delay their response. The implication is surely that those who are ready to drop

all and go when He knocks, will be saved. Our reaction in that split second of knowing 'He's back!' will determine our eternal destiny; it will effectively be our self-judgment. And yet in this life too, the figure of the Lord knocking at our door is used to describe our response to Jesus in this life (Rev. 3:20). If there is no immediacy of response now, there will not be then.

The faithful watching for Christ's return are described as men waiting for their master to *return* from a wedding (Lk. 12:36). But Christ's coming is also described as His coming *to* the wedding to marry the faithful. Why "return from"?

12:37 Passover night was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42 RV mg.), strongly suggesting watching in prayer" (Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Cor. 11:27?). Similarly those who are found "watching" at the Lord's midnight coming (cp. that of the Passover angel) will be found acceptable (Lk. 12:37). The picture of Israel in their family units huddled together around the Lamb, desperately focusing their attention on that saving blood, watching and praying, examining themselves- this is us, right now. For there can be no serious doubt that the second coming is almost upon our generation.

The Lord's self-crucifixion spirit was seen not only in His life and then finally in His death and subsequent life; but who He was in His mortal life, He will *eternally* be. He is the same yesterday as today and as for ever. He will dress Himself to serve us, as a servant, in His future Kingdom (Lk. 12:37 NIV), reminiscent of how at the last supper and on the cross He in principle did the same (Phil. 2:7). Thus the spirit of the cross must be a way of life, and this feature of our characters will be seen in the Kingdom too.

The Lord's exalted view of the disciples is reflected in how He washed their feet. To wash the feet of guests was more menial than we might imagine. It was normal to provide water for the guest to wash his own feet. The Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 21:2 taught that a Jewish slave should never be required to wash his Master's feet. But as a sign of extreme devotion and respect, some disciples of the most respected rabbis would wash their feet. Yet the Lord Jesus, having reminded them that He was indeed their Lord and Master, does this to them. And according to Lk. 12:37, He will do this again to us in His Kingdom, in that He will then tie a cloth around Him and come forth and serve us. It would seem the Lord was referring back to this prophecy when He tied a cloth around Him and washed the disciples' feet. This was how highly He thought of them; and that incident was an enacted prophecy of the attitude He will have to *us*, whom the 12 symbolize, even in the glory of His Kingdom. He surely totally redefined the nature of Lordship and respect.

The Master is so delighted that his servants are watching for Him that He immediately sits down and gets a meal ready for them, doing the serving Himself (Lk. 12:37). There is an arresting element of unreality here. Would a Master really do this, at such an unlikely time at night, would he really serve himself, and would he really be so glad that the servants were waiting up for him? But these elements of unreality serve to teach the lessons: that the Lord will have unspeakable joy at His return because of our expectancy of the second coming, and He will surprise us by His glee and enthusiasm for us. See on 2 Tim. 4:8.

The master makes the servants "recline at table" (Lk. 12:35-38); they are made to feel like the Master, by the Master Himself! This is what it means to be "in Christ". There's a kind of out of scale inappropriacy about the idea that if the Master comes and finds the servants awake, then He will gird Himself and serve them. Of course they ought to be awake! But it's as if He is so especially impressed by this fact. And we who live awaiting His return need to take note. And the idea of the master serving is of course the idea behind the description of the cross in Phil. 2:6,7. We should have the same awkward sense of wonder at the cross as we have when we recline at the breaking of bread. This implies that those who serve the emblems are in fact manifesting the Lord Jesus, and are actually of far greater significance than the president or the speaker. See on Lk. 13:7.

Our attitude to the second coming decides whether we will be in the Kingdom. In this sense we are judging ourselves, right now; we are formulating the outcome of the judgment seat by our attitude now towards the second coming. The proof for this lies in a group of passages which suggest that everyone who truly loves the return of his Lord will be in the Kingdom. Of course, a true love of His coming is only possible if we hold correct doctrine, and if our faith and behaviour is mature enough to be able to look with quiet joy and confidence towards that day. Thus our Lord said that all those whom He finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast (Lk. 12:37). And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with Him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord?

The foolish virgins knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance. At the second coming, the Lord knocked on their door, and they didn't answer immediately (Lk. 12:37). They had decided their own fate by their dillatory response.

Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, he will "make us" sit down at a table, and he will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come*, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. See on Lk. 18:17.

The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. It is wrong to think that the Lord was only humble in His ministry, but will return with almost bitter indignation. This is not so. He girded Himself and served His men in the days of His flesh (Jn. 13:4); and He will do *exactly* the same again, in the glory of His Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). That same essential humility of God and Jesus will be with Him; He won't have changed. It is His fundamental, eternal characteristic. The fear of God lest Israel would not attain the promised land ("lest peradventure...", Ex. 13:17) shows His humility, in being so concerned for the salvation of petty man; and that characteristic likewise will be His, right up to and through and beyond the day of judgment.

The Lord who will judge us knows us each individually. The question arises, 'Why would *all* the servants stay awake in order to open the door (Lk. 12:37)? Why not just the night watchman? The answer is that there is a totally unique and special personal relationship between this Master and *all* His servants.

12:38 We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the Truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). Yet Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience.

12:41- see on Mk. 13:34; Lk. 13:1.

12:42- see on 1 Tim. 3:15.

Our Lord uttered a difficult saying in Lk.12:42: "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household... he will make him ruler over all that he hath". We each individually have this promise of being made ruler over *all* that Jesus has. The "all things" refers to the believers; a concordance study of these two words gives fair testimony to this. The *ecclesia* is the body of Christ, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph.1:22,23). Let us pause to exult in this fact; that Jesus *exists* for no one else except the believers. Each of us is promised by Him that He will make us ruler over "all that he hath", i.e. all the saints. We will each rule over each other because we will each be so closely identified with the Lord Jesus; yet in another sense there will be a hierarchy of spiritual glory in the Kingdom.

"Let patience have her perfect work... let brotherly love continue" sound as if we must allow the process of righteousness inspired by spiritual acts of love and patience. We can obstruct that process (James 1:4; Heb. 13:1). One aspect of spirituality leads to another. Thus the Lord commends the one who is watching for His coming, and then speaks of how those who are to be accepted at His coming are those busy preparing spiritual food for their brethren (Lk. 12:39,42). The implication is that he who is watching, truly watching, for the return will be busy about the brotherhood's needs.

12:46 Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8).

The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The Lord used almost identical words earlier in His ministry, but with the conclusion that such a servant would be appointed his portion with *the unbelievers* (Lk. 12:46). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

12:48- see on Dt. 29:21.

"A fool's mouth is [will be] his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [i.e. condemnation at the judgment, Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6). By our words we may be *shouting out for condemnation*.

Lk. 12:49 speaks of how the Lord wished that the fire He came to kindle had already been kindled. This may be an allusion to a common Latin saying at the time: *Nemo accendit nisi ipse ardet*, 'No one can kindle another unless he himself burns'. In this case Jesus is likening Himself to a fire which ignites others; and yet He so wished that someone else had earlier come and been Messiah. Some of the Messianic passages describe Him being amazed that there had been no man, and He Himself therefore dressed for action and did the Messianic duty. It is an essay in His humility that He should have held such a view. It also reflects how there had been previous opportunities for Messiah to come.

The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4).

12:48 Speaking of the principle of responsibility upon which our judgment will be conducted, the Lord hints at Angelic involvement in the judgment: "to whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48). See on Lk. 6:38.

12:49,50 The disciples wanted to bring fire down as Elijah had done, to consume their opponents. The Lord replies that His spirit is different; they didn't know His Spirit, without which, Paul says, "we are none of his". And yet still He patiently bore with them. However, He also says that He has come to send fire on the earth at the last day (Lk. 12:49)- an evident reference to Elijah. We could read the Lord's treatment of the disciples' request as saying 'The time to act like Elijah will come- but it's not now'. Likewise His comment that He came to bring division rather than peace: "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Lk. 12:51). Elijah was renowned as the prophet who would turn the fathers to the children and bring peace in the land (Mal. 4:6; Ecclus. 48:10). The Lord may be saying: 'You think, like some of the Jews, that I am a re-incarnation of John the Baptist, the Elijah prophet. I'm not. I'm the Messiah Himself. My spirit is different'. In that very context, the Lord stressed that He had a baptism to undergo, rather than to dispense to others as had John (Lk. 12:50). Perhaps the immaturity of the disciples was so great that they, former disciples of John, somehow believed that Jesus had turned into a re-incarnation of John. In this case, they would have been caught up in the surrounding world's view of Jesus- for there was much speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist *redivivus*. The way John in his gospel labours the point that John the Baptist "was not that light", i.e. Messiah (Jn. 1:8), perhaps is John's recognition that finally, they got it right. You can imagine him preaching in those early days: 'After John's death we thought at times that Jesus was some sort of reincarnation of John. But Peter got it right, and now, I'm just making it clear also what the truth was. He wasn't John the Baptist *redivivus* as so many thought. We were caught up a bit in that thinking; but we were wrong'.

12:49-54 The idea of fire from Heaven in Lk. 12:49-54 is associated by the Lord with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be received up, and he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Thy son liveth" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

The Lord Jesus spoke of how "I am come to send fire on earth [after the pattern of Elisha against apostate Israel]... I am come to give... division" (Lk. 12:49,51). He parallels the fire of condemnation with division. And yet He says that this figurative fire is "already kindled". If we are divided willingly, of our creation, then we stand self-condemned. This is how serious this matter is. I fear, really fear, that in the day of final account it may be that a brother or sister has lived separately from the world, believed all the right things, and yet his or her divisiveness means that they are condemned together with the immoral and the worldly.

12:49 The Lord Jesus speaks of how He personally will send fire on the land of Israel (Lk. 12:49), and yet in Revelation it is the Angels who pour out fire upon the land- He is directly manifested through their work.

12:50 The cross was to Christ a baptism He was being baptized with, it was only accomplished in His physical death; the process was ongoing (Lk. 12:50). He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22).

The Lord's fear of death was, it seems to me, to a far greater extent than what even we experience- doubtless because He knew all that was tied up with *His* death and how much depended upon it. He

spoke of how "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50). See on Heb. 5:7.

12:51 The Lord taught that an inevitable by-product of His Gospel was that He would send division, often within families (Lk. 12:51-53). To be unwillingly caught up in a divided house / family is not, therefore, a sin or a sign of our personal condemnation. There must be schisms amongst us, that they might make manifest who the faithful are, by their attitude to them.

12:52 Salvation, as Robert Roberts so frequently said, is an individual matter. It is not a collective affair. Compare two passages within the Lord's teaching, which each use the same Greek words: "I am come to give... division. From henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three [i.e. sometimes they would be 2:3 and other times 3:2- there would be a series of disagreements over various issues]... a house divided against a house falleth" (Lk. 12:52,52 cp. Lk. 11:17). What are we to make of this? Every divided house or Kingdom will "fall", i.e. be condemned at judgment day (s.w. Mt. 7:27; Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). And yet Jesus inevitably divides 'houses'. Surely the Lord is teaching that every Kingdom and family will fall, because it will be divided, and therefore the only hope of salvation is purely individual. This was radical thinking in first century Palestine, where the destiny of the extended family was held to be uniform; i.e., you would end up in the last day wherever your extended family did. But the Lord is cutting through all this, and teaching that salvation is a personal matter. No single extended family will, as a unit, avoid being divided by the result of the judgment. The Lord's teaching surely has some relevance to some Christian cultures which can likewise give the impression that large, well established Christian families will almost automatically all be saved.

12:54 The Lord taught that our focus upon Him and His return should affect how we feel about others, even our enemies. Lk. 12:54-59 continues a theme of living appropriately to a belief that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Lord pictures us as walking to meet our judge, along with our adversary. And His parable assumes that we will automatically be found in the wrong, the case will go against us; and so therefore we better make peace with our adversary and drop the case. We are walking towards the day of judgment, our meeting with our Judge. The bottom line is that we should not be walking to judgment day carrying with us a case against our brother. Drop it, whatever it is. At least, in our hearts. It's simply impossible to live at peace with all- Paul spoke from much personal experience of living at peace with others inasmuch as it depends upon us: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Again, this doesn't mean that abuse shouldn't be challenged and exposed. It should be. But we as sinners shouldn't be walking to judgment day carrying with us the weight of a case against our brother.

12:57 The Lord warned the Jews that they were not discerning the signs of their times as they ought to- i.e. they were not paying heed to the imminence of the day of the Lord which was to come in AD70, and neither were they perceiving that Israel's king was in fact amongst them. He went straight on to tell them a parable about the need to agree with our brother, because they were on their way to judgment. He links these two themes, of their not discerning the signs of the times and their disagreement with their brother, with the question: "And why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" (Lk. 12:56-59). He seems to be saying that their discernment of the signs of the times was to be connected with their discernment of the need for love and forgiveness of their brother. The same basic link is found in Heb. 10:25, where we are exhorted to meet together and encourage one another "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". See on Mt. 5:25.

12:58 - see on Lk. 6:47.

The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren. This would suggest that

the Lord foresaw that getting along with our brethren would be a major part in the development process of His people; and as they draw closer to the day of meeting with Him, the more urgent is the need to settle their disputes, as He will be unsympathetic towards them. The Lord prefaces this parable by appealing for His people to 'judge righteously' because His judgment is about to come (Lk. 12:57 Gk.). By forgiving our brother and reconciling with him, we are judging righteously; we are in essence deciding our own judgment which is to be revealed at the Lord's return- see on Mt. 13:47.

13:1 In Lk. 13:1-10 the people tell Jesus how terrible is Pilate for killing some Galileans, and how judged those individuals were by God. He answers that *all* humanity are under danger of eternal judgment and they needed to start worrying about themselves rather than worrying about God's justice [or otherwise] with those Galileans. And the Lord follows this up with the parable of the unfruitful tree which by rights should be cut down, but He was urgently pleading for more time in order that it might bring forth fruit. In other words, the Lord's audience were to realize the intense urgency of *their* position rather than worrying about the justice of others' judgment. Their personal situation was *so* urgent, they really were to worry about bringing forth fruit, rather than being sidetracked by the issues connected with the suffering and possible judgment of *others*. It's not that these matters don't have importance; it was simply that those asking those questions of Jesus were in such a personally urgent position that they just had to get that right. And this seems to me most relevant to those who will not get personally themselves right with God because of their complaint about His justice with others. And Luke's record develops the theme yet further. In Lk. 13:23 we read of Him being asked the perennial question- why will only few be saved? His answer is simply to speak of the utter horror of personal rejection by the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment- knocking on the door, thinking this is your old friend's house, to be told "I never knew you". The idea is clearly to worry about the future which *we* may personally miss rather than debating the unsearchable issues of why, apparently, few will be saved. Same again with Peter's question as to whether the Lord's predictions of condemnation refer to the disciples or to the unbelieving world (Lk. 12:41)- the Lord's response was simply to speak about the need to personally be always prepared for the Lord's coming. And so it is with us- don't worry about who may be condemned, worry about your own personal readiness and how you will respond in that split second moment when we know for sure 'He's back!'.

13:1-5 Urgent response in view of coming judgment is a repeated theme in the teaching of Jesus. His servants are to wait in hourly anticipation of His return (Mk. 13:34-36; Lk. 12:36-38); the day of reckoning is even now at hand, all our guilt will be uncovered, and we should act now before it is too late (Lk. 16:1-8). We are as a guilty man about to be hauled to court, whose only way out is to make peace with his offended brother (Mt. 5:25,26). Unless we repent, a great tower is about to fall upon us (Lk. 13:1-5). Jesus saw Divine judgment as something imminent, something which is essentially happening now, and therefore day by day we need to live accordingly. He insisted that any supposition that life will simply carry on as it is... was a fatal delusion. He piercingly dismantles our natural human assumption that life can be broadly maintained as it is or simply adapted a little. There is an urgent need to *change* and to keep on being *transformed* in the new life in Him. So the urgency of response is because the Lord is coming back soon, but also because He is right now our constant and insistent judge. Our generation particularly ought to have a sense of urgency. For I will go on record as saying that I do truly believe the Lord may very well come in our time. He is near, even at the doors. Written in our lives, as a neon sign in the black of our human lives, should be the simple reality: *Jesus Is Coming*.

13:7 The relationship between servants and master in the parables is also at times somewhat unreal. It's hard for us to imagine how slaves belonged to their masters and had to do their will and not their own. Yet in the parable of Lk. 13:7,8, the servant is commanded by his master to cut down the fig tree. Not only does the servant take a lot of initiative in saying that no, he will dig around it and try desperately to get it to give fruit; but, he says, if even that fails, then *you*, the Master, will have

to cut it down... when he, the servant, had been ordered to do it by his master! This servant [the Lord Jesus] obviously has a most unusual relationship with the Master. He suggests things on his own initiative, and even passes the job of cutting off Israel back to God, as if He would rather not do it. And it's in a way the same with us. See on Lk. 12:37; 14:22.

Lk. 13:7,8 teaches that after the three years of His ministry, during Christ's final six months, God suggested to Christ that the nation of Israel be cut down (this is but one example of the private intercourses between Father and Son). The Lord knew when He must die soon; He had already steadfastly set His face to go to die at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). It seems to me that He knew He would be killed by the Jews in a few months time. But He asks the Father to spare Israel for at least another year- as if to show that He knew they wouldn't accept Him even after His death, but He's saying to God: 'Give them a chance even after they kill me'. Those who think further along the lines suggested by the parable will see that in reality, Israel were not cut down by God for another 37 years. The implication is that this was due to Christ's pleading with God during those years for patience to be shown to the nation who rejected and crucified Him. The element of unreality in the story reflects the grace of Jesus- for it was unthinkable for a servant to argue back with his master, asking not to do what he had been ordered to do.

13:8 Lk. 13:8 records how Christ of His own volition asked the Father not to destroy Israel at the time He planned, but to give them longer to repent. This was exactly the spirit of Moses' pleas for Israel. But this is not the same as 'relaying' the words of human prayers to God. This is undoubtedly how many of us conceive of Christ's intercessory role for us; but is this actually what Scripture teaches? Many of the relevant Scriptures which speak of Christ's activity for us before the Lord God are not in this context; they suggest that He of His own will prays to the Father on our behalf concerning things which are on His agenda for us, not ours. If we confess Christ before men, i.e. reveal Him to them, He will confess us, reveal us favourably, in the court of Heaven, before the Father and the Angels (Lk. 12:8).

Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

So often, the parables [as well as the Lord's teaching generally] appear to be Him almost talking to Himself. The Lord spoke of how it was His Father's plan to cut down the Jewish fig tree; but He asked His Father if it could remain for another year, until He had dug around it and spread dung by it (Lk. 13:8)- and *then* it could be destroyed, if there was still no fruit. The Lord Jesus was thinking here of His crucifixion- for this was the reason for the final cutting down of the Jewish fig tree. To dig was the work of a slave- recall how the disgraced steward felt ashamed to dig (Lk. 16:3). And to spread dung was the work of the very lowest slave. And yet this was how the Lord foresaw His death- becoming as the lowest slave. Yet His hope in doing this was that Israel would bear spiritual fruit. This, then, is to be the motivational effect upon us of meditating upon the Lord's ultimate servanthood in His death- spiritual fruit in *our* lives just *has* to be elicited by it, lest we too will be cut down.

He sent His servants the prophets to find the fruit- but they were beaten and murdered. He finally sent His Son, reasoning that "*surely* they will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37). But they murdered Him. I have suggested elsewhere that this language can only suggest that God in some sense limited His omniscience and omnipotence in order to fully enter into our dimensions; and hence His experience of dashed hope and deep disappointment. Amazing as the Father's hopefulness was, His Son's was even greater. This Father who had had all this experience of simply not getting any fruit, asked His vinedresser (the Lord Jesus) to cut down the tree of Israel, as for the three years of Christ's ministry He had sought fruit from them and not found any; and further, this tree was 'cumbering the ground', taking away nutrients which He could have given to another (Gentile) tree.

But His servant argues back with Him; the servant asks to be allowed to dig and dung around the tree; and then, he says, 'You can cut it down, although you asked *me* to do this job'. This was quite unusual for a servant to talk like this; but it's an insight into the way the Lord Jesus was even more hopeful than His longsuffering Father. The Lord was prepared to dig around the tree- and digging was the lowest, most shameful occupation (Lk. 16:3). Further, He would shovel dung, making Him unclean and despised of men. He *so* wanted fruit on Israel. This describes the intense effort of the Lord Jesus during the last six months of His ministry. His attitude was summarized when shortly before He died, He came hungry to a fig tree, expecting to find just the immature beginnings of fruit there, which He would gladly have eaten. But that particular tree had nothing on it. His deep hunger and willingness to eat anything reflected His willingness to find some spirituality from Israel. But He "found none", just as there was "not found" any of those Jews He healed who would glorify God (Lk. 17:18 s.w. Lk. 13:6). This longsuffering, patient, passionate desire for spiritual fruit in the Lord Jesus is presented as being even stronger than it was in His Father. No wonder John the Baptist misunderstood the extent of Christ's grace- he proclaimed that Jesus already had the axe aimed at the bottom of the trees (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), and was about to fell them. The situation truly demanded this- but actually the Lord Jesus waited three years for fruit, and when it didn't come, even then He pleaded with the Father not to fell the tree but let Him dig and dung it... We must factor all this into our understanding of Mt. 7:19, where the Lord apparently in a bland, matter-of-fact manner teaches that the tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be hewn down and burnt. This burning is ultimately at the judgment day; but all our lives He is earnestly seeking to develop spiritual fruit upon us; as in the parable of the sower, only those who produce totally nothing will be rejected. Of course our fruit must be the fruit that abides- the changes in personality which are permanent, the converts who remain, the forgiveness which is maintained on a felt level, the generosity never later regretted... But if there's even something of this, then it seems this is what the Lord is so eagerly seeking. Earlier, Israel were the vine and the Lord Jesus the vinedresser (Lk. 13:7). But now *we* are the vine, and God Himself the vinedresser (Jn. 15:1). We are in good hands; and the Father and Son who through Biblical history showed themselves so sensitive to spiritual fruit are the very same ones who will meet us in the last day.

13:9 In the parable of Lk. 13:8,9, the Lord portrays Himself as even reasoning with God, who had decreed the Jewish tree be cut down in the third year of His ministry. He as it were persuades God to allow His efforts to continue for another six months, in desperate hope against hope that there would be some fruit of repentance. We, to a man and to a woman, would have given up on Israel, and would have somehow been gratified that the Father wanted to treat them like this. I would have turned to the Gentiles a long time before the Lord and Paul did.

The amazing extent and power of the Lord Jesus is further brought out in the story of the worker in the vineyard who can almost direct His boss- the Father- not to cut down the barren fig tree of Israel until it has more chance to bear spiritual fruit- "if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Lk. 13:9). Speaking to crowds of day labourers and farm workers, this would have struck them as strange- that this worker had such power over his boss. See on Lk. 11:21.

13:11 Bullinger has some interesting comments upon the woman with an unclean "spirit of infirmity" (Lk. 13:11) that resulted in her being unable to lift herself up straight. "The negative is *me*, not *ou*; and is therefore subjective. She *felt as if* she could not do so... it appears, therefore, to have been a *nervous disorder*; and had to do with her *pneuma*" or mind. And yet she is described as having been 'bound by Satan'. The 'Satan' or adversary to her standing upright was her own mindset. And it was this spirit or mindset "of infirmity" from which the Lord released her. Here we clearly see the connection between 'spirits' and mental disorder or dysfunction; for 'spirit' in Scripture so often refers to the psychological mindset of a person.

13:15 The Lord described His healing of her as losing her from a bond in order to lead her away to the water of life (Lk. 13:15)- this is the very cameo of all the redeemed in Rev. 7:17.

13:18 The small seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom can produce a mighty tree in the Kingdom (Lk. 13:18,19). It is easy to under-estimate the power of that seed- the Lord's parable seems to be making that point. I would seriously suggest that *all* of us ought to regularly study the basic doctrines of our One Faith for ourselves, personally. The writer told the Hebrews that he would have to lay *again* the foundation teachings of the Gospel, in order to renew them *again* unto repentance (Heb. 6:1-4).

Jesus was highly sensitive to the gender division. He did not just ignore it. The parable of the mustard seed which a man planted is followed by that of the leaven which a woman hid in the meal (Lk.13:18-21). Likewise in Lk.15:3-10 Jesus speaks firstly of the joy of a man finding a lost sheep, and then of the joy of a woman on finding a lost dowry coin. He spoke of the lilies of the field which do not physically exert themselves in labour, as men must do, but also who do not spin (women's work). Christ spoke of the second coming as finding two men in the field and two women grinding at the mill. This parallelism of attention between men and women can be profitably followed through the Gospel records: Lk. 8:14,15 cp. Lk. 8:16,17; Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8; Lk. 4:24-27; Mt. 24:43-51 cp. 25:1-13; 24:40,41; Mt. 13:31-33 cp. Lk. 13:18-21. This approach contrasts sharply with the male-centred teaching approach of the contemporary rabbis and other religious leaders. Thus his parables were consciously designed to appeal to both men and women. Luke particularly seems to rejoice in observing how the Lord treated men and women in parallel. Both Martha and the male ruler lack one thing (Lk. 10:41,42 cp. 18:22); there are two parables on answered prayer for men and women (Lk. 11:5-8 cp. 18:1-8); the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South are paired (Lk. 11:29-32); justice is for both male and female servants (Lk. 12:45,46); both men and women would be divided (Lk. 12:51-53); a woman and a man are both healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-16; 14:1-6); a 'daughter of Abraham' and a 'son of Abraham' are healed (Lk. 13:16; 19:9); the woman loses a coin, a man loses a sheep (Lk. 15:4-10). Indeed, a profitable study could be made of how the Old Testament prophets liken God to both male and female figures in tandem- e.g. "The Lord goes forth as a mighty man... I will cry out like a woman in travail" (Is. 42:13,14).

13:19- see on Lk. 6:47.

The parables reveal how the Lord was so sensitive to us. He realized that his audience thought in pictures; and so He turned concepts and ideas into imaginable pictures in a truly masterful way. He wanted to radically change people; and He realized that the way to do this was not by a catechism, not by pages or hours of intellectual, abstract droning, but by helping them to relate real, imaginable life to the things of His Kingdom. Truly did W.H. Auden reflect: " You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences". The way the Lord Jesus constructed and taught His parables was indeed an art form, of exquisite beauty. He took ordinary, homely stories and introduced into them the elements of unreality which we will explore in this study. By being so normal, He created the possibility of participation in the minds of His hearers; because they could relate to the very normalcy of the stories. And so when the unreal elements are perceived- e.g. the mustard seed becomes not just a bush but a huge tree- there is an element of surprise and joy. Out of, and indeed right within, the most ordinary things of life, there await for the believer the surprise and joy of 'the Gospel of the Kingdom' intersecting with their ordinary lives.

13:20 The good news of God's Kingdom, in both its present and future aspects, is like yeast which works away *from the inside* of a man and *inevitably, by its very nature* makes a fundamental change (Lk. 13:20,21). Because whoever really believes the doctrines of the One Faith and lives the life which they naturally bring forth, really will be saved. Therefore we will have a sense of true unity with our brethren who believe as we do, whatever human barriers there may be between us. Therefore "the Faith" is linked with unity between believers (Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27).

13:23- see on Lk. 13:1.

Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

13:24 The idea of *striving* to enter the Kingdom, the need for such agonizing effort (Lk. 13:24), meant an awful lot to Paul (1 Cor. 9:25; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). It's fashionable these days to focus upon the certainty of our redemption in Christ and to ignore the warnings about apostasy. In Paul we see a brother who brought these two strands together; because his mind was so Christ and Gospels-centred. He personalized those Gospels, he must have kept thinking to himself 'Now this applies to *me*... it really does...'. What a brother. What an active mind, a mind which he knew had Christ living in it.

The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door (Lk. 13:23,24).

"*Many*" of those who call Christ their Lord and who regularly break bread in his presence, where two or three others are gathered believing they are in his name, will find they are rejected, *and they just won't be able to understand why on earth they were rejected* (Lk. 13:24-27 cp. Mt. 18:20). Anyone who thinks the majority of believers must surely make it through to salvation needs to think again. Please God, we will- but "many" (the Greek can mean, but not always, 'the majority') will be in for this inexplicable (to them) rejection, when they were sure they'd lived a good Christian life.

Those with spiritual problems are prone to reason that when judgment day comes, they will be able to just shrug their shoulders and walk away from their Lord to eventual death. However, there is every reason to think that the rejected will come to their spiritual senses then, and plead to be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Many will seek to enter into the Kingdom at the judgment but will not be able; and so we should strive now to enter into it (Lk. 13:24). The implication is that if we strive to enter in now, we will enter in then. Everyone will so earnestly seek to enter the Kingdom in the last day, and the urgency of that coming day should be ours today. Ezekiel's prophecies so often make the point that experiencing God's judgments leads men to *know* Him; thus at the day of judgment, the rejected will knock at the door of the Kingdom, knowing that they know Christ- to be told that although they may now know him, he doesn't know them. Thus the pain of rejection will be acutely mental rather than physical. Ezekiel is told to judge Israel, i.e. "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (Ez. 20:4). This is what condemnation will result in- a recognition of sin for what it is. "According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they [the ways and doings] judge thee" (Ez. 24:14). It will be self-condemnation, but they will then *realize* this in terrible detail.

13:25 We are Christ to our brethren. The "master of the house" is representative of Jesus in Lk. 13:25; and yet we are to be the "master of the house" in spiritually feeding our brethren (Mt. 24:43,45 RV). It is through us that He ministers to His household.

13:27- see on Mt. 25:36.

The rejected will be told: "Depart from me" (Lk. 13:27); and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. The foolish virgins go, or depart, to buy oil- using

the same word with which they are told by their Lord to depart from Him (Mt. 25:9,41). They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

13:28 The rejected will see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28); as if somehow they see themselves from outside of themselves. What spirituality they thought they had they will see as it were taken away from them (Lk. 8:18 AV mg.). This will be the result of the judgment process. They will be convinced by the judgment process of all the ungodly deeds which they had not previously been convicted of, e.g. their hard words against their brethren (Jude 15). 1 Cor. 11:32 may also be a reference to the educative effect of judgment: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". The world's condemnation will be at the second coming; the judgment and chastening to which Paul refers must therefore be that of the last day. However, in the context he is making the point that our self-examination at the memorial meeting and our response to the chastening hand of God in our present life is in fact a foretaste of that final judgment experience.

The Pharisees will be thrust out of the Kingdom at judgment (Lk.13:28), implying that in a sense they were part of it before its establishment.

13:34 "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel" (Ps. 147:2) is alluded to by the Lord in Lk. 13:34, where He how He would fain have gathered together the children of Jerusalem, "but ye would not". The words of the Psalm speak as if this is what the Lord God is going to do. But Jesus understood it as being impossible of fulfilment if the outcast children would not allow themselves to be gathered. Likewise the statement that the Lord will build up Jerusalem was made in a restoration context; but again, it was dependent upon the Jews' obedience for its fulfilment. God was and is potentially ready to work with us.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is perhaps most clearly seen in His attitude to Israel. So many of the parables refer in some way to the love of God and Christ for Israel; and their love for rebellious, indifferent Israel is the supreme example of pure grace. He felt towards them as a hen for her chicks (Lk. 13:34). Here again is an element of unreality; a hen whose very own chicks won't be gathered under her wings. This seems to go right against nature; the pain of the rejected parent was there in the experience of the Lord. He wasn't just passively enduring the polemics of the Pharisees; they were His chicks, He really wanted them under His wings (cp. Israel dwelling under the wings of the cherubim). We must ever remember this when we read the records of Him arguing with them and exposing their hypocrisy. He wasn't just throwing back their questions, playing the game and winning, just surviving from day to day with them. He was trying to gather them, and their rejection of His words really hurt Him. Their reproach broke His heart; He didn't just brazenly endure it as we might the ravings of a drunken man (Ps. 69:20).

13:35 At the day of judgment, nobody will be passive and indifferent. Everyone will want to be accepted. All of us who come there will see there is only one way we want. Self-examination will be the order of the day. The virgins will knock on the door and plead for it to be opened. The first century Jews will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They will want to be on Messiah's side then. None of us will be vacillating between total commitment and the lazy drifting of our human nature. And our judgment seat is going on now, today. "This splitting of the decision between only two alternatives may seem an over-simplification: we fondly think of ourselves as faced with a continuous range of possibility over which to decide, but in the ultimate that range may be broken down into a number of discrete two-way choices, each one a decision between good and evil" (Ralph Lovelock).

14:5 God Himself has an urgency for human salvation; the Lord drew a parallel between the man who rushed out to save his animal on the Sabbath, and His waiving of the Sabbath in order to save

others. Indeed, the way He did His miracles on the Sabbath rather than waiting shows His sense of urgency; not a day could be wasted for the sake of human scruples. "Which of you shall have a son fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up?" (Lk. 14:5 RV). Wells weren't that wide. Only a small child would fall down one. We can imagine the tragic situation in the home. "Benny's fallen down the well!". And everyone would go running. They wouldn't wait until the Saturday evening. Nor would they worry the slightest about infringing the letter of the law. And so, the Lord explained, that little boy was like the sick men and women, sick both physically and spiritually, whom He saw around Him. There was an *urgency* which He felt about them. And so there should be with us too. We can realize that this world is evil and vain; and yet we can still fail to perceive the tragedy of it all, and the urgency of our task to save at least some. The Father of the prodigal told the servants: "Bring forth *quickly* the best robe" (Lk. 15:22 RV). The indebted man was told to sit down *quickly* and have his debt reduced (Lk. 16:6). There is an urgency in the mediation of mercy towards others.

The Lord's enthusiasm for the salvation of first century Israel (and us too) comes out in Lk. 14:5 RSV, where He likens the *urgency* of His mission to that of a man whose son has fallen down a well. He simply *must* get there, regardless of the Sabbath rules. And this, says the Lord, is His all out urgency to save men. We have all fallen down the pit from whence we must be rescued (Zech. 9:11). As we distribute leaflets, place our adverts, talk to our contacts, strive in our own character development towards salvation; this is the verve of the Lord Jesus to save us. It is only the hardness of the human heart that can stand in the way of the mighty enthusiasm of the Son of God for our redemption. Hence the sense of hurt, sadness and frustration to the Master when men refuse His efforts, as typified in the story of the wonderful banquet that was inexplicably spurned by the intended guests (Lk. 14:16). In passing, note the connection of pulling a man out of a pit with Joseph and Jeremiah, types of the Lord's resurrection (cp. Ps. 40:2). When a man is pulled out of the pit at baptism, he is sharing the experience of the resurrected Lord. And the Lord is naturally so urgent that men should share that experience which He suffered so much for.

14:8,9 The Lord teaches that if we're invited to a feast, we should take the lowest place, genuinely assuming the others present are more honourable than us; and we take our place at that table awaiting the coming of the host (Lk. 14:8). Our attitudes to the seating and behaviour on entry to the feast will affect our eternal destiny- for when the Lord comes, He will make the arrogant man suffer "shame", which is a commonly used descriptor of the rejected at judgment day (Lk. 14:9). The Lord goes on in that same discourse to explain what our attitude should be- He tells the parable of the great supper, to which those who were invited didn't pitch, and there was a desperate, last minute compelling of smelly street people to come in and eat the grand meal. "When you are bidden of any man to a meal" (Lk. 14:8) is clearly meant to connect with "A certain man made a great supper, and bade (s.w.) many" (Lk. 14:16). Evidently the idea of eating with the Lord at His table connects with the breaking of bread. Our attitude at that memorial supper is in essence our attitude at the greater supper of the last day. We sit there with our Lord and with our brethren. We will sit there at the last day with the deep feeling, like the handicapped beggars had in the parable: "I should not be here. What am I, me, me with all my weakness, doing *here*?" . If we sit likewise at the breaking of bread with that spirit, we will not even consider grabbing the best seat for ourselves; nor would it cross our mind to say to someone else sitting there "Hey you, what are *you* doing here? If *you're* here, I'm gone! Don't you dare take that bread and wine, you're not in fellowship!". Yet this is precisely the attitude of those who exclude their brethren from participation at the Lord's table; for the breaking of bread is a foretaste of the feast to come, and the Lord is teaching that our attitude to our brethren at it is in fact going to be reflected in how He deals with us at the latter day marriage supper. It seems so many of our exclusivist brethren are voting themselves out of their place at the Kingdom; although I believe God's grace is such that He has a place even for them.

14:9- see on Mt. 20:11.

The public nature of the judgment experience is hinted at throughout the Lord's parables. The other guests at the Lord's table will see the man who took the highest place in the ecclesia taking now the lowest place- he has "shame" before their eyes, and likewise the believer who took the lowest place in this life will have praise for that humility from the other guests, as the Lord exalts him or her higher (Lk. 14:9,10). In this context the Lord proceeded to warn His followers not to be like the man who sets out to build a tower, but can't complete it- and therefore he has shame from those who behold it (Lk. 14:29). This is just another way of saying the same thing. There will be believers who grandly showed themselves to their brethren to be building something which actually they couldn't complete; and they will have shame before their brethren when the day of judgment reveals who they really are. All this, of course, has massive practical implications. If all will be ultimately revealed before our brethren in the last day, why try to act before them as someone we're not?

The Lord told a parable about how the man who takes the highest room in the feast [= the ecclesia in this life] will be rebuked at the coming of the Master and "with shame take the lowest room" (Lk. 14:9). The idea of the Lord Jesus returning and one of His guests having "shame" must surely refer, in line with other Biblical passages, to the shame of condemnation. 'And so therefore', the Lord continues, 'take that lowest place at the feast right now'. When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat, He's actually referring to condemned King Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). If the "lowest room" is seen as the place of the shame filled condemned... then surely He's saying that we should consider ourselves as "condemned" now as we sit at the feast. And what feast does the Lord have in mind? Is He perhaps referring on some level to the breaking of bread, which is the Lord's supper / feast where we now each take our place? Should we not, therefore, be sitting there feeling [although this is only part of the story] condemned, and the lowest of all? Is that not *one* [and only one, be it noted] of the emotions elicited in us by the cross? The "feast" of the breaking of bread is clearly meant to be understood by us as a foretaste of the Messianic "feast" of the future Kingdom. And if we genuinely feel we should have the least place there, we will reflect that in our taking the lowest place at the memorial meeting. In our hearts, we will sit there knowing we ought to be condemned.

The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modelled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies (Jer. 39:5). When the Lord spoke of how we must come down from our good seats at the feast and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:9), He's actually again referring to Zedekiah, who likewise had to come down from his throne and take a lowly seat (Jer. 13:18). That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. This gives a fine, fine insight into His sensitivity to us. Indeed, several times the Spirit in the NT uses OT pictures of unworthy believers as the basis of a description of the faithful. See on Lk. 10:33,34.

There is even the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place- yet still within the family of God (Lk. 14:9).

14:10 The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it anew with us at the marriage supper (Mt. 26:29). The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is

but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord's table is to judge them as excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

We are come to "God the judge of all" - even now (Heb. 12:23). He is right now enthroned as judge of our lives (Mt. 5:34; Ps. 93:2). We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it (Ps. 139:2); and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). "God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" in His mind (Ps. 75:7)- although the final putting down and setting up will be at the judgment seat (the basis for the parable of the man being asked to go up higher, Lk. 14:10). This same parable is also rooted in Prov. 25:7: "Put not forth thyself in *the presence* of the king, for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither: than that thou shouldest be put lower in *the presence* of the prince". We are in the King's presence both in this life- when we chose where to sit- just as much as when He returns and re-arranges the seating. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.).

The parable about taking the lowest seat sounds obvious to us. If a poor nobody is invited to the King's feast, he would naturally take the lowest place, with feelings of wonderment, awe, embarrassment, joy, quiet honour, excitement that he'd been invited, that he was somewhere too good for him, by grace. The element of unreality in the story is that the man arrogantly takes a high place, and has to be demoted at the coming of the King. There's something unreal about this. But there's the rub. This is exactly how we are behaving when we jockey for status and 'power' in the ecclesia [in whatever form], when we fail to consider each man better than ourselves to be. This is how absurd we're being. The Lord's parable was evidently based upon Prov. 25:6,7: "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men". The way the Lord applies this to His church implies that we should consider each of the other invited guests as "great men" of nobility. This is the level of respect which He intends there to be amongst us for our fellow brethren. The parables of judgment truly touch the very core of our spiritual being.

14:11- see on Acts 5:31; 2 Cor. 11:7.

So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom: "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:10-11). Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will

think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us [I am verily guilty of this]. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it.* The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner... this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for ... he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9). See on Mt. 18:4.

14:12 The Lord gave His parable about how *He* has invited us, through the call of the Gospel, to a great supper. He then went on to say: "When *thou* makest a dinner, or a supper..." we ought to invite those who can't recompense us (Lk. 14:12). Quite simply, the very experience and wonder of having been invited to the Kingdom should lead us to likewise invite others. But further. If we have truly understood the implications of the Lord's gracious calling, if we have truly perceived our desperation, we will take *the* lowest place, considering ourselves the *lowest* and least worthy. And we will therefore go out and invite others of the same class to which we perceive ourselves to belong- the poor, the maimed and blind.

Our attitude to others will be reflective of our perception of God's grace in calling us- as we were invited by such grace, so we will invite others to *our* table who likewise cannot recompense us (Lk. 14:12). If we are the blind and maimed invited to the Lord's table, we will invite the blind and maimed to our table. The extent of God's grace to us really needs to sink in. When was the last time *you* did an act of pure grace to others like this...? The servant seems surprised that after the crippled and blind beggars have been drafted in to the opulence of the feast, "yet there is room" (Lk. 14:22). Quite simply, there are more places in the feast of the Kingdom than there are people willing to fill them! How encouraging is that thought! The same Greek word for "place" recurs in Jn. 14:2,3, where the Lord Jesus taught that He was going to die on the cross in order to prepare a place for us in His Father's palatial mansion. The effort made in preparing the feast therefore speaks of Christ's life, death and resurrection for us. And it's *so* tragic that most people don't want to know. So in a sense, "all you gotta do is say yes". Just accept the invitation; take the messengers for real. Although perhaps we are left to read in the detail to the story, that many a desperate beggar just couldn't grasp that the messenger was for real, and preferred to stay put. Maybe only the *truly* desperate thought 'Maybe there's some truth in it... I've nothing to lose'. The many places in God's Kingdom... are only for those who desperately want them. Those who make meaningless excuses about how busy they are, those who can't believe that really God could be true to His word and really give us beggars a place in His wonderful Kingdom... will by their own decision not be there.

14:12-24 Jesus described those who responded to the Kingdom Gospel as entering into a marriage supper (Mk. 2:18,19; Lk. 14:12-24), which was a well known figure for the future Messianic Kingdom (Is. 25:6-9). By eating / fellowshiping with Him in faith, His followers were in prospect enjoying the Kingdom life. To exclude people from His table is to seek to exclude people from His Kingdom.

14:13 There is a connection between Lk. 14:13 and 21. "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind... *for* they cannot recompense thee". Yet this is exactly what the parable of v. 21 teaches that God does: "Bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind". The basis of God's calling of us must be the basis upon which we relate to others. We cannot recompense Him, yet He shows us His gracious invitation. So we too must share ourselves with those who cannot give us anything. In this sense, we like our Father, serve for nothing in the sense of no personal, concrete gain. We must *be* gracious by nature, and just *be* as He *is*.

14:13-21 Having spoken of how we are bidden by God to the 'feast' of the Kingdom, lived out by us in prospect and symbol at the breaking of bread, the Lord goes on to say: "When *thou* makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection" (Lk. 14:13,14). This inevitably is to be connected with how the Lord went on to say that *we* are the poor, blind, lame etc. who have been invited to the feast (Lk. 14:21). The point being, that if we perceive our own desperation and inappropriacy to be called to the Kingdom feast, then we will likewise invite others who are perceived *by us* as the lowest of the low, and otherwise unsuitable for a king's banquet table. So we are to reflect God's calling of us, the desperate, the down and outs, in our calling of others. A person who feels they are somehow a nice guy and worthy of invitation will be the one who tends to consider others as unworthy of invitation to the Kingdom. He or she who perceives their own desperation will eagerly invite even those they consider to be in the very pits of human society. The lame, blind etc. were not allowed to serve God under the law (Lev. 21:18), nor be offered as sacrifices (Dt. 15:21), nor come within the holy city (2 Sam. 5:6-8). The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind (Mt. 15:30), and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God's service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn't work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can't do the works, but depend upon grace. We need to appreciate too that in Palestine, to refuse an invitation to a feast was a major insult to the person who gave it. That the majority of people refused it would've been so hurtful to the host. And in this we see a picture of the pain of God, that the majority refuse His invitation. Therefore He is so happy when anyone *does* respond, even if they're down and out. And we should hold in our heart the tragedy of God, the pain of God, that so many have refused Him; and therefore never judge anyone as unsuitable who may respond to the invitation. We're making the invitations for *His* sake, not our own. And on this basis we 'bring in' those desperate types to the Lord's feast (Lk. 14:21). The same word is used about Barnabas 'bringing' the unlikely convert Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27), and later 'bringing' or introducing him to the Antioch ecclesia (Acts 11:26), the "other sheep" being 'brought' into the fold (Jn. 10:16), the blind man whom people thought was no good for Jesus being 'brought' unto Him (Lk. 18:40), the Samaritan 'bringing' the good-as-dead wounded man to the inn / the ecclesia (Lk. 10:34), all reflecting how the goodness of God leads / brings [s.w.] desperate sinners to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In our 'bringing in' of desperate people to the Lord's feast, we are vehicles for that grace of God which 'brings in' men and women to Him. Notice in passing that we invite people to the Kingdom feast without seeking a recompense from them- i.e. we should not expect anything from them, be it personal loyalty, money, respect etc. And if we don't get it from them, only then will we be rewarded / recompensed for our preaching at the last day. So it should be no surprise to us if as with Paul our converts turn against us and in no form 'recompense' us for calling them. Actually we should take comfort from this, as it is an encouragement that we will have our recompense at the last day.

14:15 The parable of the great supper chronicles the preaching of the Gospel over time. There were three stages of appeal: "To them that were bidden" (the Jews in Israel), to those in the streets and lanes of the city (the Jewish Diaspora), and finally, in a spirit of urgency, the preachers are commanded: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:16-23; the same spirit of urgency in witness is to be found in the Lord's command to His preachers to cut the courtesy of prolonged greetings). Once the required number are in God's spiritual house, the feast will begin- and that feast represents eating bread in the Kingdom, at the second coming (Lk. 14:15). The language of 'going out' should be connected to the command to 'go and teach all nations'. The parable concerns the master of the house (God) commanding His servant (Christ); yet the connection with the preaching commission indicates that the commission given to Christ He fulfils through us, as demonstrated earlier in this study. The ever

increasing sense of urgency in the appeal to 'come in' ought to be reflected in our preaching in these last days.

We mustn't just like *the idea* of being in the Kingdom. We must seek it above all. The Lord told a parable about people invited to the Kingdom who all came up with different excuses as to why they couldn't come. This was in response to somebody remarking: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" - 'how great it would be to be in the Kingdom!' (Lk. 14:15). And the Lord is replying 'Many of those given the real opportunity to be there actually don't want it that much at all. Don't just like the idea of being in my Kingdom, but make it the driving passion in your daily life, for which you'll sacrifice all'.

In Lk. 14:15, the Lord continues to turn the questions / comments back on themselves. A man comments how blessed will be the person to eat bread in the Kingdom of God; and Jesus responds by telling the parable about how in fact the majority of those who receive invitations to eat break in the Kingdom actually turn it down because of worldly distractions. Again the message is clear. 'Take your focus off the blessedness of *others* in the future Messianic Kingdom; but concern yourself with the very real possibility that you *yes you yourself* may actually turn down the invitation to be there because you're too caught up with the things of this world'. See on Lk. 14:25.

Time and again His parables sought to justify His association with outcasts (Lk. 14:15-24; 15:1-32; Mt. 18:23-25; 20:1-15; 21:28-32). When the nobleman came to ask Jesus to cure his son, Jesus agreed; and the man went home. But it was only on the way home that he really believed. He came to faith spontaneously, and not because Jesus insisted on it. Or remember the woman who had had five men in her life, and presumably a number of children to go with each of them. Her face and body would have reflected the story of her life. She was living with someone not her husband. Jesus didn't tell her to break up with the guy. He knew full well that if a woman left her man, she had nowhere to go. Here was a woman who had been 'married' five times. Who would want her? There were children involved. Probably even her family had rejected her. Jesus accepted the real life situation, and human failure to rise up to higher standards. One wonders whether the very lack of specific demand from Jesus maybe motivated her to somehow normalize her life. The gentle way Jesus treated these cases shows not so much approval, but an understanding of the frailty of human nature. And this is what enabled Jesus to be so unwaveringly committed to His own perfect standards, and yet be so natural and at ease with the lowest of the low.

14:16- see on Lk. 14:8,9.

14:17 - see on Mt. 24:48.

Israel had consented to be "bidden" to the feast; and according to Oriental practice, to accept an initial invitation to a feast was to commit oneself to respond to the final notice of it. But "they would not come", and yet despite this insult, their divine host had sent forth yet more servants to beg them to come. The Lord puts behind Him the insult of our rejections, and graciously pleads with us- even God pleading with men. The whole history of Israel is eloquent proof of this grace of God.

In the parable of the great supper, which is similar but not necessarily the same as that of the marriage feast, the servants going forth "at supper time" (Lk. 14:17) fits more naturally into the context of a preaching appeal just prior to the second coming than to the first century. The "supper", i.e. the Kingdom (Lk. 14:15; Mt. 22:2), is prepared, and at "supper time" - 'Kingdom time' - the appeal is made. "All things are now ready" (Lk. 14:17) explains the unmistakeable sense of urgency in the commissions given to the servants to preach. This again indicates reference to an eleventh hour preaching campaign just prior to the second coming. The 'decorum of the symbol' suggests that the animals being killed for the meal would necessitate a brief period of invitation immediately prior to the feast, rather than them being on the table for 2,000 years. See on Mt. 24:14.

14:18- see on Lk. 14:33.

There was a harder side to Christ. He was a demanding Lord. He told His disciples to forsake what they had and follow Him. They did. And apparently with no prefatory praise or introduction, He called them "ye of little faith... fools... slow of heart to believe". Of course, He may have prefaced these criticisms with something softer (cp. His letters to the churches); but the Spirit has preferred not to record it. Often His parables warn that those who think He will understand their weakness, those who are too familiar with His softer side. The parable of the great supper records men explaining to Christ why they can't *immediately* respond to Him, although they want to when it's more convenient: "I have bought a piece of ground, *and must needs* go and see it... I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them... I have married a wife, therefore *I* cannot come" (Lk. 14:18-20). The implication is that they assumed that the servant calling them to the wedding (i.e. Christ) would understand that their excuses were quite reasonable; the man who pleaded marriage as his excuse would have been alluding to the Law's provision to have time off from the Lord's duties on account of marriage (Dt. 24:5). All these reasons were assumed to be quite reasonable, and the men sound as if they were confident that *of course* Christ would understand. The parable of the King's son records excuses which are more evidently unreasonable; some said they were going to work on their farm, when actually the banquet was going to be held in the evening (Mt. 22:5). There is a connection with the parable of Lk. 14, where the excuses seem more reasonable. But the similarity shows that as far as the Lord is concerned, *any* excuse, evidently irrelevant or apparently reasonable, is just not acceptable to Him. But the point of the parables is that as far as Christ is concerned, these were all just empty excuses, even the excuse that appeared to be based on a past concession to weakness. He's saying that the invitation to His Kingdom, to His very own wedding, must take priority over all the everyday things of human experience which we assume are so justified, and which we assume He will quite understand if we put in front of Him and His call. *Every reader* ought to feel uncomfortable on considering this. It's this category of Christian who will be so surprised when they are rejected: "Lord, Lord, open to us... When saw we thee hungry...?" (Mt. 25:11,44). They thought they knew Him, but He has never known them (Mt. 7:23). This idea of surprise at rejection is to be connected with that of brethren thinking (mistakenly) that of course the Lord understands their putting His call into second place. He is a Lord they hardly know in this life, despite what they think, and He will be the same at judgment day. There's a point to be made from the way they are so confident they know Christ, but He says He has never known them. They didn't live up to the demanding Lord they served. The idea of a two-way relationship with Him was evidently foreign to them. They thought their theoretical knowledge and outward works meant that Christ knew them. The worrying thing is, how many of us feel we have a two-way relationship with the Lord?

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 [as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely an element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I...?"... maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel... The parable of the wedding feast has an inappropriacy in that for 'merely' rejecting the invitation to the feast and beating the messengers, the King despatches an army to attack them- whilst the meal is as it were hot on the table ready to be eaten (Mt. 22:3-7). The point is that every rejection of the invitation, every mockery of the preacher, elicits an amazing anger in God.

Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the weddings. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly

by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

As we would expect from the fact that Jerusalem is finally captured and burnt, the work of 'Elijah' will initially be unsuccessful - only a minority of Israel will respond. "They all with one consent (s.w. 'agreement') began to make excuse" (s.w. 'reject') sounds like a conscious, national rejection of the message (Luke 14:18).

The Jews will be judged by the word at the second coming (Jn. 12:48); but they were 'accused' (judgment seat language) by their rejection of God's word in the Old Testament during their lifetime (Jn. 5:45). The Jews in the parable "began to make excuse (saying)... I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18). The Greek word for "excuse" here is also translated "reject" - by excusing themselves from the requirements of God's word in this life, they were effectively rejecting themselves, as they will be at judgment. So as we read the word, we show our judgment. It could be that the reluctance of some to get down to reading the word is not simply because they lack time, but more subtly because they realize they are faced with God's judgments in it.

14:21 The tragedy of the fact that the Jews by and large rejected the invitation of God meant that the servants are asked to "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes... and bring in [any who will respond]" (Lk. 14:21). The 'quickness' of the preachers is matched by the 'quickness' of the response of those who heard them in the first century. Now what this means is that if we as preachers have an urgency about our approach and our presentation of the message, then people will respond quickly. If we present the urgent good news as a set of academic propositions to be studied at length in the comfort of an untroubled conscience, then those who respond [if they do at all] will do so with the same laid back, cool, calculating attitude. Peter preached on Pentecost with a fire and passion which came from realizing the urgency of human need and Christ's salvation. And this is why, it seems to me, the people responded so quickly. They were baptized in a matter of hours after hearing the Gospel preached from his lips.

We in these last days are "the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind" who lay in the city streets (Lk. 14:21). Yet we are invited and led (the blind) or dragged / carried (the lame) into the great supper. For those who deeply meditated, the lame at the great man's table would have taken them back to lame Mephibosheth at David's table. His response to the invitation was to *bow*; think of a lame man bowing. How awkward it must have been, and how awkward he must have felt. "I'm a dead dog, from a family who cruelly hated you; why, why me?" was his response. And this ought to be ours. The awkward bow of that lame man, however embarrassing it was to watch for David in his glory, is a superb type of our attempts to respond to the inexplicable grace we have received from the Lord. He knows our weakness. Even though He taught plainly that 'the majority' (Gk; AV "many") of those He called would not be chosen, His parables often use percentages which imply that two thirds (parable of the pounds) or half (parable of the virgins) *will* respond. This shows the love that hopes, in the face of the finest knowledge and foreknowledge of human nature which any man has ever had.

The usual excuse for not reading Scripture daily, or remembering the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread as He asked, or meeting with brethren and sisters etc. normally goes along these lines: 'I've nothing against these things. But after all, we're only human beings, Christ understands that, He knows we have to get on with the things of this life'. To which so many passages in the Gospels reply: 'Yes, the Lord does know exactly what everyday human life is all about; and He expects you,

in these daily things, to make decisions which *consciously* sacrifice what you could get for yourselves in life'. And to which Paul replies: "The love of Christ constrains us". Consider the parable of the great supper (the Kingdom). The servant goes out and invites people to the supper. They each make excuses which on a human level seem perfectly reasonable. One man was on his way to inspect some land he had just bought; another man was on his way (Gk.) to prove his new oxen; if they were no good, he had the right to get his money back. It seems, humanly, a bit unreasonable to go up to a person right in the middle of doing something important in daily life, and say 'Now stop that, come to a supper'. The third man assumed Christ would understand why *he* couldn't respond: "I have married a wife, and therefore (of course, as you'll appreciate) I cannot come". After all, even the Law said that a man was free from military obligations after his marriage. But "the master" was "angry" with those men (Lk. 14:21). What Moses' law conceded to men, the Lord Jesus wasn't necessarily ready to concede (and his attitude to divorce was similar).

In the invitation to the Kingdom, "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind" (Lk. 14:21) are invited; with the implication that Christ will be "recompensed at the resurrection of the just". We don't recompense Him now by our works; we are lost sheep causing Him needless work and worry, wasting His goods and needing to get ourselves out of the problem (Lk. 16:1), needing His frank forgiveness for our huge debts (Mt. 18:24). As Job recognized, if we are righteous, we give nothing to God (Job 35:7). Our *unrighteousness* commends God's righteousness (Rom. 3:5). All things come *out of* God: "Who hath first given to him? ...for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:35,36); it's give, give, give with God. We are the poor beggars sitting down at the great supper, unable to recompense. Of course, it depends where we put the emphasis. The parable which relates how Christ desires fruit from us is followed by that of the marriage supper, where it seems we are just asked to accept an invitation with humility (Mt. 21:34; 22:3). The point surely is that we are invited, for no reason, to the Kingdom, and we must accept with the humility that will accompany a recognition of such grace (Lk. 14:9). But our experience of this grace will inevitably bring forth some spiritual fruit. Again, it seems we are intended to follow the story through, and visualize the inappropriate, uncultured conduct of these beggars at the table, causing so much unspoken embarrassment and pain to the generous rich man. The link with Is. 55:1-3 would suggest that we can interpret the call to the supper as the call of the Gospel, and the hungry people sitting down to a fine meal as our ecclesial experience now (although this isn't to say that we can't read it as concerning the future Kingdom too). The preceding Lk. 14:8-11 describe us as sitting down at the feast in this life, until the host walks in and starts re-arranging the seating order (cp. the coming of Christ in judgment on His household). We are left to imagine the grabbing for food, the greedy, selfish eyeing up of the plates, the grasping, the lack of social skills, the lack of good conversation between each other, the occasional cursing under the breath, perhaps even throwing of food, the eager desire for wine, the lack of restraint. All in the company of the Master (God) and His servants (Christ and the Angels). And this, it seems to me, was the Lord's imagination of His immature ecclesia, feasting on the good things He has prepared for us. Can we not begin to enter just a little into the pain and acute embarrassment and sadness we cause to our gracious Host by the self-centredness of our natures, manifest as it is in spiritual terms so often? It's quite possible to become so spiritually selfish, so bent on our own salvation, that the whole spirit of the supper is lost. After all, the idea of a large supper is to inculcate a social spirit rather than just to provide individual feeding to each of the guests. How many times has it been reasoned in these last days: 'Sorry, I have to work out my own salvation, I just can't spare time and can't risk association with my weaker brethren...'. And the Lord Jesus, in His perfect way, saw this coming as in sunny Galilee He formulated His parables of grace.

14:22- see on Lk. 14:12.

In the parable of Lk. 14:22, the servant reports to the master that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to 1st century ears: "The servant

said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room". No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But *this* servant *did*! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master *so* well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship possible between us and our Lord, especially in the area of preaching / inviting people to His supper. The initiative is in our hands, and as we come to know Him better, we come to know His mind, and to sense how He would react. We have His aims and desires as ours, and we are in harmony with Him without having to be told things in so many words. And of course for a master to serve his servants was unheard of (Lk. 12:35-38). But this of course was the wonder of what the Lord did for us, "as one who serves" (Lk. 22:27), defining for us our attitude to each other at the memorial table and in all aspects of our lives and relationships. See on Lk. 13:7.

In the parable of Lk. 14:22, the servant [= Jesus] reports to the master [= God] that the invited guests wouldn't come to the supper [cp. God's Kingdom]. The master tells the slave to go out into the streets and invite the poor. And then we're hit with an incredible unreality, especially to 1st century ears: "The servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room". No slave would take it upon himself to draw up the invitation list, or take the initiative to invite poor beggars into his master's supper. But this servant *did*! He not only had the unusual relationship with his master that allowed this huge exercise of his own initiative- but he somehow knew his master *so* well that he guessed in advance what the master would say, and he went and did it without being asked. In all this we have a wonderful insight into the relationship between the Father and Son, especially in the area of inviting people to His supper [cp. salvation]. The point of all this is to demonstrate how the Lord Jesus has His influence upon the Father, and can at times change His stated purpose [e.g. with regard to the rejection of Israel- just as Moses did]. And this is the same Father and Son with whom we have to do, and whose matchless relationship is the basis and reason of our salvation.

14:23- see on 1 Cor. 9:13.

This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

Noah's ark is a well known type of the salvation which humanity can find in Christ; and yet close analysis of the Genesis record reveals that there were some animals whom Noah had to bring into the ark and take them with him (Gen. 6:19; 7:2); and others who came to Noah and entered into the ark of their own volition (Gen. 6:20; 7:9,15,16). The same Hebrew is found in Gen. 8:9, about how the dove came to Noah of its own volition, and Noah welcomed her and took her into the ark. Putting all this together, we are to compel men to come in (Lk. 14:23); and yet we are also to be there to welcome in the seekers who seek of their own volition. It's easier to do the latter; to put up a website, waiting there for some eager seeker to come and find. But we are also to compel people in, and to also bear in mind that there are some who will be attracted to the Gospel from selfish reasons, as the man who buys the field thinking that he can exploit it for his own benefit. These too

we are to take on board and not turn away. Whilst people, with all their wonderful uniqueness, should never be pigeon-holed nor over-categorized... all the same, we need to consider the type of person we're dealing with as we plan out our approach. For if we seek them, we will consider who they are, and how appropriately we can engage them.

The eagerness of the Lord to accept us, to find in us spiritual fruit, is perhaps reflected in the way that He begins inviting people of 'His' level to the feast of the Kingdom, but ends up lowering the bar as time goes on, to try by all means to get at least somebody in there (Lk. 14:21-23). This theme of lowering the bar is perhaps continued in that same passage by the way the Lord says that His disciples must forsake / 'bid goodbye to' all that they had (Lk. 14:33). This is the same word found earlier in Lk. 9:61, where some time before, a potential disciple who first wished to go and "bid goodbye to" his family was judged as not suitably committed to the urgency of the task. But now, the Lord says that this is acceptable in His definition of discipleship. This Lord is our Lord.

14:24 There may be the implication that the three people said "I cannot come" with the implication 'I can't come *right now*, but later'; and the Greek could bear such an interpretation. The master's comment at the end suggests that he knew these people would later turn up at the supper, but he would refuse them entry: "For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" (Lk. 14:24). There are often connections within the Lord's parables; in this case, the men who were so busy with daily life that they turned up at the wedding later would connect with the story of the other wedding guests who didn't have enough oil, and who *later* turned up at the wedding feast- again, only to be barred entry.

14:25- see on Lk. 7:9.

Lk. 14:25 records the people eagerly following Jesus, and then He turns and tells them that actually God is coming after them with 20,000 men and they have only 10,000, and they on a personal level *urgently* therefore need to make peace with Him- because every minute now counts. Time and again, the Lord is urging people to look at themselves and their own position, not follow Him because they're part of a crowd who does, not hesitate from personal commitment because of never-never questions about cosmic ethics and Divine justice which are well beyond us... He forces the spotlight back on us, me myself and I, time and again. And His audience squirmed, just as they do today.

14:26 The Lord himself spoke of how He expected this of us; and He put it in language which He surely *knew* would arrest attention: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, *and* mother, *and* wife, *and* children, *and* brethren, *and* sisters... he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:26). He's a demanding Lord- and reflection on His life and death for us shows that He has every right to be so. Notice how the Lord Jesus uses the figure of polysyndeton- i.e. repeating the word "and" when there's no grammatical need to, in order to build up the impression of how many different people we must be prepared to break with. His message is plain: the Lord Jesus must come in front of every human relationship, or else we are not His disciples. And it isn't just human relationships that must be sacrificed; it's "houses... lands" (careers, cars, we might say) as well (Mt. 19:29). It has to be seriously asked whether our community, especially the younger generation, are prepared to be the Lord's disciples; whether they have given up these kind of things for His sake. He must be the *Lord* of our lives, the master passion and controller. Christ's love *constrains* us. *These* sort of demanding words are so common in the Gospels that they almost slip our notice. There can be no serious doubt what He's saying: He has no room for passengers or part-timers. As far as He is concerned, it can't be a hobby.

14:27 ` He taught that unless a man was willing to carry his cross and forsake all that he had, he couldn't be His disciple (Lk. 14:27). And He called them His disciples, even though they clearly didn't perceive the real nature of the cross, nor did they actually leave all that they had but retained some things. The disciples were told to sell what they had (Lk. 12:22,32,33); but it seems they kept

their fishing business. After having asked them this, the Lord again had to speak to them about forsaking all that they had (Lk. 14:33). Their claim to have left literally all (Lk. 18:28) appears somewhat exaggerated. Indeed, the parable of the unjust steward being specifically directed at the disciples (Lk. 15:1 cp. 16:1,9), it could appear that they had a special problem with lower-middle-class petty materialism (Lk. 16:9). Likewise Lk. 6 is spoken specially to the disciples, and it has much to say about materialism. The Lord was and is very generous to our weak efforts to rise up to His high standards.

Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "... the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him.

Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our attitudes.

14:28 "How shall they hear without a preacher?" It's impossible to hear without a preacher. Of course, God could beam the message into men some other way. But normally He chooses to work through human preachers. The preachers in the parable of the great supper are bidden "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. 14:28). The house of God's Kingdom is filled with people as a result of enthusiastic preaching.

14:29- see on Rev. 16:15.

The man who starts building his spirituality but can't finish is to be "mocked" by those who behold him (Lk. 14:29)- and yet the world rather commends those who renege on their commitment to Christ. Surely this refers to walking naked at the day of judgment, and his shame being seen openly? "Everlasting contempt" suggests that the failure of the rejected and God's condemnation of their sin will be permanently in the consciousness of the faithful throughout the Millennium, or even the entire ages of eternity (cp. Is. 66:23,24). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3?

14:31 The parables contain elements of unreality in order to make a point. Lk. 14:31 speaks of a King coming in judgment upon another King who only has half the army which he has. The more powerful King is of course God. But we are likened to a "king" also, on His level in that sense, who has only half His strength. This is altogether such an under estimate of the Father's physical and moral superiority to us!

14:32- see on Rom. 14:19.

Does the man with 10,000 men faced with the oncoming army of God with 20,000 men just recklessly go ahead, or does he seek reconciliation? There was surely an intended connection within the Lord's teaching concerning how the loving Father saw the prodigal son "afar off" in his sin and separation; and how the King [God] coming against man with 20,000 men in battle needs to be reconciled with whilst He is still "afar off" (Lk. 14:32; 15:20). God is both coming towards us in judgment; and yet also sees us 'from afar' in untold grace and desire to save. It is this wondrous paradox which makes the ultimate meeting of God and man so intense and wonderful. The 'harder side of God', the King coming in overpowering judgment against sinful man, is what gives power and poignancy to His final meeting with man as the Father meets the prodigal. See on Lk. 10:34.

14:33- see on Lk. 12:22; 14:23; 21:3.

The weak king who sends ambassadors asking for conditions of peace is understood by the Lord as the man who forsakes all he has in order for peace with God. This is the importance of forsaking

wealth (Lk. 14:33), as the merchant did (Mt. 13:44-46), as the blind man left his garment (Mk. 10:50), as the widow threw in her two mites, rejecting the temptation to be 'prudent' and keep one for herself to use as capital for the future (Lk. 21:2), as Matthew "left all, rose up and followed" (Lk. 5:28), and as the disciples in that beautiful childlike innocence could say "Lo, we have left all...?" (Mk. 10:28). What this surely means is that in our *attitudes* we must be as if we possessed nothing, as if we have in our heart of hearts resigned everything, even the very concept of personal 'possession'. See on 2 Cor. 6:10.

Let's not under-estimate the struggle which there is to believe the simple fact that there are more places in the Kingdom than people willing to fill them; that really God is begging us to come in to the place prepared for us through the death of His Son. When we read of the Master telling the servant to "*compel*" the beggars to come in to the feast, it's the same Greek word as we find used in one of the excuses given for not going in to the feast: "*I must needs go* and see" (the field the man had supposedly bought that evening without ever seeing it) (Lk. 14:18,23). Just as our loving God, with all the power of His most earnest desire, can seek to *compel* us to accept His offer, so the power of our own flesh *compels* us the other way. The petty human issues had become so large in the minds of the people concerned that they ended up telling obvious untruths or giving very poor excuses to get out of attending; life had gotten on top of them and that was it. The story seems so bizarre; the refusal of such a wonderful invitation would've been the element of unreality which struck the first hearers. The point is that petty human issues, coupled with our lack of appreciation that we are down and out beggars, really will lead people to lose out on eternity. The other such element of unreality would've been the persistence of the host to fill the places with anyone, literally *anyone*, willing to come on in. It's not so much a question of 'Will we be there?' but rather 'Do we really want to be there?'. Because if we do, we shall be.

When He speaks of leaving all and following after Him (Lk. 14:33), He surely had in mind the well known story of Mattathias, who began the Maccabean revolt by saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant *follow after me*... and they *left their possessions behind* in the town" (1 Macc. 2:27). And again the Lord seems to have had this in mind when He says that when He comes, His true people are to flee Jerusalem and not worry that their 'stuff is in the house' (Lk. 17:31). For an itinerant teacher like Jesus of Nazareth to offer his ideas and his interpretation of the Old Testament, and then have men following Him, was not out of place in first century Palestine. But the Lord twists the whole figure of 'follow me'. Unlike the other teachers, his teaching didn't lead to taking arms and fighting Rome. His men are to follow Him in wilfully taking up and carrying a cross, imitating His supreme human bravery in both His life and above all in His death, a bravery which He showed in facing sin in the eye and conquering every temptation, whatever the cost, whatever the human implication.

The Lord followed right on from the supper parable with the demand to hate one's own life, pick up their cross and follow Him, without which we cannot be His disciple. He also told the parable of God coming with a huge army to meet us who are far weaker- and our need to make peace with Him and forsake all that we have in order to follow Christ (Lk. 14:25-33). These radical demands of Jesus are in fact a development of His parable about the supper. For amongst some Middle Eastern peoples to this day, refusing the invitation to enter the banquet for such a meal- especially after having signalled your earlier acceptance of the invitation- was "equivalent to a declaration of war". And so the parable of *us* as the man going out to war against a far superior army suddenly falls into place in this context. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that doesn't renounce all that he has, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). The renouncing or forsaking of all we have refers to the man with 10,000 soldiers renouncing what human strength he had in the face of realizing he was advancing against a force of 20,000. The picking up of the cross, the 'hating' of our own lives, the renouncing all we have... obviously refers to doing something very hard for us. But the context is the parable of the supper, where the 'hard' thing to understand is why people refused the invitation, why they just couldn't believe it was real and for them; or why they just let petty human issues

become so large in their minds that they just couldn't be bothered with it. Simply believing that we will be there, that in all sober reality we have been invited to a place in the Kingdom, that God is compelling / persuading / pressurizing us to be there... this is the hard thing. This is the hating of our lives, picking up our cross, forsaking our human strength and surrendering to God.

"Whoever of you does not *renounce* all that he has cannot be my disciple". Renouncing is something we do in our hearts and deepest feelings and attitudes. Have we truly *renounced* it all? Even if there are still bank balances and pension plans and property deeds and cars and treasured possessions... made out in our name. Have we in our hearts *renounced* them? That they aren't *really* mine. I have no personal long term security from them, because they're *not mine*. I'm just holding in stewardship what God gave me. And not D.H. but the Lord Himself drives the point home- if we have any *other* attitude to these wretched things, these *almost*-nooses around our necks, then we are *not* His disciples. It's one of the scariest thoughts for 21st century Christianity. The fearless, gripped-by-Jesus approach to life which we see in the early church is the very opposite of the passivity of our post-modern world. We are called to a passionate, emotional life; a life where we each have someone to save, someone to die for, to live for, to sacrifice our self for. And this approach to life will naturally take care of how we use 'our' money. It is the passion-less life which results in a mean, careful approach to the spending of 'our' resources for others. See on Acts 4:32.

In Lk. 14:33, the Lord appears to make discipleship dependent upon giving up our possessions and forsaking all we have. But it's quite apparent that His disciples didn't literally do that. Zacchaeus only gave away half of his possessions (Lk. 19:8); and other disciples of Jesus clearly retained their homes and some possessions. The Lord must therefore mean that He expects us to *in our minds* resign all personal ownership of absolutely everything which we have- even if those things remain, to human appearance, 'ours'. This is really a challenging thing, in this world of savings and acquisition.

The merchant man for the sheer joy of finding the beautiful pearl sells *all* he has, for the pure excellency of possessing just that one pearl (Mt. 13:44-46). And that man is to symbolize every one of us who would fain attain the Kingdom; "whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not *all that he hath*, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). The Lord had recently taught that to him who overcomes, He will give *all that He has* (Lk. 12:44). This is yet one more example of the wondrous mutuality between a man and his Lord; we sacrifice all that we have for Him, and He will give us all that He has. The very height and wonder of all this motivates me at least to want to lay absolutely all before Him, to make Him the One to whom I can say I have committed all. Not just so that according to the covenant I'll therefore get all *He* has; but just from realizing the sheer wondrous grace of it all.

14:34 The fact there is no middle road is the most powerful imperative to total devotion. The Lord foresaw that it would be possible for His men to be as salt which had lost its savour; to appear as His, but for this to have no practical effect at all; and such salt is to be "cast out" in the end (Lk. 14:34,35). We *must* have influence upon others, or we aren't salt.

The command to take up the cross daily is amplified by three small parables, one of which says that the believer is like salt, but salt is no good if it has lost its saltiness (Lk. 14:27,34). What to us is the great height of carrying Christ's cross is seen by Him as being as usual and expected as salt being salty.

15:1-7 The Lord's amazing parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also the restoration passages of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31, which speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men

repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn't 'return' to the land because they saw no need to 'return' to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to 'return' to the land was a 'return' to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd's shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It's only those who don't want to be there who won't be.

15:2 The Lord was criticized for “receiving sinners” and eating with them (Lk. 15:2). Instead of the usual and expected Greek word *dechomai*, we find here the Greek *prosdechomai*- He welcomed them *into fellowship*, symbolizing this by eating with them. This was an act which had religious overtones in 1st century Palestine. Notice that *prosdechomai* is used by Paul to describe welcoming a brother / sister in spiritual fellowship (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 2:29). The Lord fellowshiped people in the belief that this would lead them to repentance, following His Father’s pattern of using grace in order to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He didn’t wait for people to get everything right and repented of and *only then* fellowship them, as a sign that they were up to His standards.

The theme of eating continues after Luke 14- for Luke 15 contains parables told by the Lord in answer to the criticism that He ate with sinners (Lk. 15:2). He explained that He had come to seek and save the lost, and that was why He ate with them (Lk. 15:4 cp. Lk. 19:10, where He justifies eating with Zacchaeus for the same reason). Note how in the case of Zacchaeus, the man only stated his repentance after he had 'received' Jesus into his house and eaten with Him. This exemplifies how the Lord turned upside down the table practice of the Jews- He didn't eat with people *once they had* repented, but *so that* His gracious fellowship of them might *lead them to* repentance. The parables of Lk. 15 speak about eating in order to express joy that a person had repented and been saved- the eating was to celebrate finding the lost sheep, coin and son. But the Lord was saying that this justified His eating with not yet repentant sinners. Thinking this through, we find an insight into the hopefulness of Jesus for human repentance- He fellowshiped with them and treated them *as if* He were celebrating their repentance; for He saw eating with them in this life as a foretaste of His eating with them in His future Kingdom. He invited them to a foretaste of the future banquet. His fellowship policy was therefore to encourage repentance; and seeing He wished all to be saved, He didn't exclude any from His table.

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The parables of the lost coin and lost sheep invite the hearer to identify with the heart of the God who seeks His lost. But the final climax of this triad of parables is that of the lost sons. Here the audience has to place themselves in one of two camps- the self-righteous son who ends up not eating with the Father, or the prodigal who sins so awfully and then eats with the Father in the hushed humility which experience of His grace along can bring. The Jews were worried about whom they might eat / fellowship with, just as many in the body of Christ are today. But the Lord turned it all around- *you* are a serious sinner, you need to make that long walk home to the Father in your day by day repentance, and eat with Him by His grace. He is seeking *you* to eat with Him; the question of whom *you* eat with is utterly secondary to that.

15:4 The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God’s people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the

Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The Lord knew there would not be repentance by Israel. But He went to the fig tree seeking fruit, even though it wasn't the time for fruit (Mk. 11:13). He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest (Mt. 9:37).

More than anything, preaching has taught me the immense value of the human person as an individual. The Lord's parable of the strange shepherd who leaves the 99 and gives his all for the one- the foolish one, the lost one, the antisocial one- is programmatic for me. The need is the call. If one person needs fellowship, forgiveness, love, the teaching of the Gospel, baptism, encouragement, re-fellowship, support, money, whatever... the value of them as an individual must be paramount. No matter what it costs us, how far we have to travel [in whatever sense], how much 'trouble' we get into, how foolish we look, how out on a limb we put ourselves. The value and meaning of the individual person was paramount in the Lord's teaching and example, and it must be in our worldviews too.

Although they have the appearance of simple stories, their essential meaning is only granted to the reflective and spiritually minded reader. Close analysis of the parables reveal that they often contain something in them that is arrestingly unreal; and in this is very often the crux of the message. Surface level reading and listening give the impression that they are simple, homely stories, obvious in their meaning. But they are not; otherwise all men would have understood them, and the Lord would not have spoken them *so that* Israel would hear but not perceive. The true meaning depends upon perceiving that there is an element of startling unreality within the story line, that flags attention to the real message. The parables therefore challenge our stereotypes and force us to re-examine cherished suppositions. Perhaps the most obvious signpost to this feature of elements of unreality in the parables is in that of the lost sheep: "What man of you..." would leave ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness and go searching for the one lost one? Answer: none of you would do that. And perhaps likewise, "What woman..." having lost just one piece of silver would be so obsessive about finding it, and so ecstatic with joy upon finding it (Lk. 15:4,8)? Perhaps the answer is also meant to be: "Not one of you". Yet this is the Father's passion for saving the lost, and rejoicing over them.

15:4-6 David leaving the sheep and going to fight Goliath recalls the parable of Christ as the good shepherd leaving the flock and going to save the lost sheep (Lk. 15:4-6). The shepherd goes alone at night up into the hills (cp. Isaac going to be sacrificed in the hills), and carries the lamb on his shoulder- as Christ carried the cross of our sins on his shoulder to redeem the lost sheep of mankind (Is.53:6). This lost sheep parable is also picked up in 1 Peter 2:25: "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls" (i.e. Christ the shepherd). But this in turn is quoting Is. 53:5,6: "All we like sheep have gone astray... but he was wounded (on the cross) for our transgressions", which is thus the parallel to the saving of the lost sheep. This interpretation of the lost sheep parable- i.e. that the shepherd going to save the sheep represents Christ going to die on the cross- was first prompted by David leaving the sheep with the keeper to go and fight Goliath, representing Christ's saving us from sin on the cross. The leaving of the sheep with the keeper perhaps looks forward to Christ's entrusting the disciples to the Father's care in those agonizing days while death parted him from them, as David's encounter with Goliath did. David's subsequent leaving of them altogether to go and live in the King's court clearly looks forward to our Lord's ascension to Heaven after his victory over the real Goliath.

15:5 At the time of Jesus, it was taught (*Mishnah Qidd* 4.14) that "A man should not teach his son to be a herdsman...for their craft is the craft of robbers". Shepherds weren't seen as kindly old men. They were seen as crafty and thieves. But the Lord chose that figure to represent Himself and the Father- even though the Old Testament likens God to the shepherd of Israel. The startling, unsettling figure [for the first century Jewish mind] was to demonstrate how it is the Lord's humanity that

makes Him our saviour. Likewise, the likening of the Gospel to yeast would have been shocking; or to a mustard bush, which is a member of the cabbage family [rather, e.g., than to a fruitful vine or upright palm tree]. It is signalled to us that there is to be a strangeness to this new Kingdom about which Jesus spoke, a humanity and yet unusualness about it. It was hard for the Lord to explain to us the level of love for us which He would reach in the cross. So He told a story of a shepherd who so madly loves his sheep, whose life is so taken up by his job, that he would die to save one of them, and comes back triumphantly rejoicing when he has found the lost sheep (Lk. 15:5). The average shepherd would have surely accepted that some sheep are lost, it's the luck of the game. But this shepherd who dropped all and ran off after one lost sheep was no usual shepherd. And the element of unreality in the story brings out the Lord's grace towards us. Note in passing how the man : sheep relationship portrays that between us and Christ. As the sheep understood pathetically little about the shepherd's sacrifice to save it, so we too fail to appreciate the height of the fact that Christ died for us, as the shepherd for the sheep. We can be sure that the frightened sheep didn't bob along on the shepherd's shoulders, grinning all the way home. With his underside covered in faeces and mud, it would have struggled with the Saviour shepherd, fanatic almost in his passion to save the sheep. As he stumbled along the rocky paths, shoulders bowed down, hands against his chest clutching the animal's paws, the shepherd would be the living imitation of the posture of the Lord as He carried the cross of our sins to Calvary. All this is a pattern of the almost fanatic effort we should expend to win back the lost. And of course the element of unreality is seen in the way the shepherd takes the sheep *home* and not back to the fold, inviting neighbours around to rejoice that his sheep had been found. The quite unusual joy and humanly inappropriate love of the shepherd for that sheep is of course there to signpost to us the "love beyond all reason" of the true shepherd for us. The way the lost sheep is brought home rather than returned to the fold was also perhaps some sort of allusion to the teaching of Dt. 22:1 that the lost sheep of your brother's must be returned to *him*. This would mean that our pastoral care should not simply be for our 'own' sheep, those for whom we have responsibility; but for the lost sheep of other 'pastors' who've not done their job. See on Jn. 10:12.

15:6 In respect of God's relationship with the Angels, it is interesting to note that there seems to be a theme in Scripture of all of the Angels being involved in each action one of them does, due to the perfect unity that exists between them and God (see on Lk. 11:7,8; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Ex. 12:41). Thus when one of the Angels acts in our lives, all the others are conscious of it too. Consider how Luke 15 describes the joy in Heaven when one sinner repents; the man who found the lost sheep "calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me. . when she (the woman) hath found it (the lost coin) she calleth her friends and neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me. . likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth". The man and the woman must therefore represent God manifested through our guardian Angel. The Angel physically leaves the presence of God in Heaven and then goes off to arrange circumstances to encourage the sinner to return. He then calls all the others together to rejoice "when He cometh home" (into Heaven, into the multitude around the throne of God from which Angels go and return in obeying God's Word). The whole Heavenly household (or just those other Angels which our guardian has used in arranging circumstances for us to repent?) then rejoice together. Thus we read in Hebrews 1:14 that *all* the Angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation". *All* the Angels are involved together in this work. *ALL* things in Heaven (the Angels) and on earth (the things they arrange on earth) are for our sakes!

There is an element of unreality in the story of the lost sheep. And that unreality reflects the sensitivity of Jesus. The shepherd doesn't return the sheep to the fold, but takes it home and calls his friends round to see the dumb animal and rejoice (Lk. 15:4-6). The Lord knew we would frown a bit at this. He foresaw how hard it would be for us to rejoice in the return of a difficult sheep to fellowship.

15:7 There can be no doubt that Jesus spoke the words of God, and therefore His sayings can be interpreted at the deepest possible level; and yet at the same time, they were so easy to understand.

The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord's prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord's forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding words. He uses three words which feature the guttural 'h': joy = *hedwa*; one = *hada*; sinner = *hateya*. In passing, I find this kind of thing evidence that we do have in the Gospel records the actual words of Jesus, and not a rough summary of them interpreted by many others, as modern theologians wrongly suppose. Our view of inspiration enables us to return as it were to the actual, living voice of Jesus in confidence. If the record of His words is sure and true, then we can go on to guess in what tone of voice He would have spoken, and seek to define in our own minds ever more features of the Son of Man. This thought alone I find so immensely inspiring- for we hear the real Christ speaking to us down the centuries. The Lord's teaching style thus reflected His recognition that He was speaking to the illiterate, and that many of those who followed Him would need to commit His words to memory; and so He spoke His words in a form which was memorable by them, as well as profitably dissectable by computer-aided intellectuals of the 21st century. In this alone is a marvelous insight into both His genius and also His sensitivity to His audiences, from which we can take a lesson. But on a practical level, it is apparent that He had carefully prepared His sayings in advance, perhaps during His years up to age 30. I don't see His sayings as off the cuff bursts of wisdom, neither words merely flashed into His mouth by the Father. They were God's words, but carefully prepared by Him. He sets a matchless example to any would-be teacher in His church. Jesus spoke to the hearts of the people. He didn't use words like 'sin' very often. He uses *hamartia* ['sin'] in the Synoptics only 8 times, compared to 64 times in Paul's writings. Jesus wasn't talking theology, He didn't speak in abstract terms. Rather did He speak of evil fruit, lost sheep, lost coins, no good sons... because He was framing His message for the illiterate, who thought in images rather than abstractions.

15:8- see on Lk. 8:16.

Luke 15 contains two parables concerning repentance, where the restored sinner is in fact not repentant: the lost sheep and the lost coin. The Lord searches for them *until* He finds them; neither of them actually repent and seek to come back. Indeed, the coin is inanimate, it can't repent. It was actually the woman's fault that it got lost in the first place. Now all these are surely examples of hyperbole- a gross exaggeration to make a point. It isn't the Lord's fault that we stray. But He speaks *as if it is* in this parable, in order to make the point that He *so* strenuously seeks our return to Him. Likewise Yahweh likens Himself to a worthless husband who forsook His sweet wife of Israel in her youth (Is. 54:6).

God's need for man- as it were- is brought out by the parable of the lost coin. It's been suggested that the lost coin was one of the woman's dowry coins, and thus the story speaks of how every lost person is a personal and deeply felt loss to God. However, this view has been criticized in that a drachma, which had the same value as a silver denarius, was the wage paid to a worker for one day's field work (Mt. 20:1-16). It was far less than the dowry coins. It could be that instead we have here a reference to a desperately poor housewife- who certainly had no dowry money left. The poor were so poor in Palestine at the time of Christ that they were selling their land, and many had become landless labourers. They worked for money, with which they bought food. The husband went far and wide searching for work; the Lord's parable pictures labourers waiting around for work. It's been calculated that on the basis of one denarius / day as wage, even if the worker worked 300 days / year, and had four children and a wife plus himself to support, this income would only enable them to buy enough bread to provide 1400 calories / family member / day. This isn't enough to sustain a person's ability to do manual work. Therefore mothers and children faced malnutrition, and the women tried to grow crops on waste land and did anything for money in order to buy bread. The

smiling, full cheeked, charming Mediterranean woman with dowry coins around her forehead (beloved of those Sunday School books about Bible background) just wasn't the scene that the Lord had grown up in. The woman who'd lost her coin was searching desperately for it, because that was what she'd buy the kids food with. No coin, no food, whiny, hungry, sick kids. She needed, desperately needed, that coin; so that she could feed the hungry kids whom she loved and be the de facto domestic head which she was. And this is all a picture of God's *need* for the lost, His *need* for us, because He knows the feeding which that lost one can uniquely provide to His beloved family. And one wonders of course whether the Lord's parable wasn't drawn from real life incidents in His own childhood with Mary.

The lighting of the candle is a symbol of our conversion (Mt. 25:1; Heb. 10:32). Our lamps were lit by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:16; Heb. 10:32) for the purpose of giving light to the house. The Lord lights a lamp in order to search for his lost coin, that weak brother or sister that means as much to him on a deep, indescribably personal level as a woman's dowry money in the Middle East (cp. a wedding ring; Lk. 15:8). But the lamp he lights is us. This is yet another example of his parables being intended to fit together. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words).

15:10 The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents (Lk. 15:10), the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy.

15:11

The Parable Of The Prodigal (1)

Introduction

Forgiveness is something which man receives both in a one off sense at baptism, and also in an ongoing stream throughout daily life. Both these aspects of forgiveness are brought home to us in this parable of the prodigal. Because the wonder of forgiveness is so hard to fully appreciate, seeing that we experience so much of it so frequently, the parable of the prodigal son uses a variety of Biblical allusions to bring home the reality of forgiveness to us. The series of three 'forgiveness' parables which the prodigal concludes is set in the context of Lk.15:1: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him", the double mention of "him" indicating the spiritual charisma which the Lord holds over those desperately seeking righteousness. These parables were therefore designed to motivate these sinners to repent, highlighting the joy which true repentance can give to our Father. If only we would realize the gravity of our every day sins, the parables of the prodigal should have a like effect on us.

Prodigal Israel

As with most of the parables, the prodigal has a primary reference to the nation of Israel. The many Old Testament allusions bring this home without doubt. In practice, this means that the intensity of repentance which Israel will eventually manifest should be seen in our contrition at sin. In this lies a real challenge. The following allusions demonstrate that our Lord clearly intended us to make a connection between the prodigal and apostate Israel- and therefore with ourselves:

- The father falling on the prodigal's neck and kissing him sends the mind back to Joseph weeping on Benjamin's neck (another younger brother), typical of Christ's receiving home of a repentant Israel in the last days. As Joseph commanded his servants " Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready" (Gen.43:16), so the father did likewise (Lk.15:23). Both

repentances were celebrated with a meal of fellowship (cp. the breaking of bread). Both the prodigal and the sons humbled themselves to the position of servants. Like the prodigal, Israel were often brought back to their spiritual senses by famine (Ruth 1:1; 1 Kings 8:37; Lk.4:25 etc.). His realization that "I perish with hunger" (Lk.15:17) matches the description of Jacob in Canaan as "A Syrian ready to perish" (Dt.26:5), dwelling in a land that was 'perishing through the famine' (Gen.41:36). This affliction came upon natural Israel because of their 'murder' of Joseph / Jesus. The prodigal's profligacy is therefore to be seen as the crucifying of Christ afresh by the believer.

- The prodigal Israel went "into a far country" (Lk.15:13) - a phrase normally used in the Old Testament concerning the Gentile lands of Israel's dispersion (Dt.29:22; 1 Kings 8:41,46; 2 Kings 20:14; 2 Chron.6:32,36). In passing, the "far country" of Lk.19:12 and 20:9 should also refer to the lands of the Gentiles; *this* is where Christ has gone (as well as Heaven) , and will return to Israel when they desire him to. As with so many of the parables, this one is packed with allusions to the Proverbs. The "far country" recalls Prov.25:25: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country". Like many Proverbs, this is alluding to the Law- concerning how Israel would return from the "far country" of their dispersion upon their repentance. The sense of refreshment and exhilaration which this gives God should surely motivate us to repent, and also to encourage others to do so. Yet we need to ask whether we feel this same exaltation of spirit as God does "over one sinner that repenteth". It requires selflessness, and a real desire to see glory given to our Father.

- Our association of the prodigal with Israel in dispersion is strengthened by the mention that the prodigal "wasted" the Father's riches, the Greek meaning 'to scatter abroad'- suggesting that as Israel had wastefully scattered God's riches in the Gospel, so they too were scattered. Note how the prodigal is pictured as ending up with the pigs- well known symbol of the Gentiles. As the Son's return to the Father was matched by His going out to meet the son, when Israel " return unto the Lord... then the Lord thy God will... return and gather thee from all the nations" (Dt.30:2,3).

- The book of Hosea frequently presents prodigal Israel as the one who went astray from God, her loving Father and husband, committing adultery with the surrounding countries, with the result that God cast her off, leaving her to suffer in those very lands whose idols she had worshipped. Her sense of shame and knowledge of God's constant love then brought her to her senses (Hos. 2; 5:11-15; 6:1; 7:8-10). There can be little doubt that our Lord had his eye on this symbology when framing the prodigal parable. Hos.2:7,8 is the clearest example: "She shall follow after her lovers... he shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold (cp. the father giving the son his substance), which they prepared for Baal". These blessings of corn, wine and oil are referring to the blessings for obedience promised in Dt.28. The point is being made that these blessings were not immediately and totally removed once Israel started to go astray. This demonstrates how material 'blessings' are not necessarily an indication that we have favour with God. Consuming the Father's substance "with harlots" (Lk.15:30) is therefore parallel to giving it to idols. The spiritual riches of being in covenant with God, as well as our every material blessing from Him, were frittered away by Israel. Saying that doctrine doesn't matter, that other churches have

fellowship with God, giving our time and money to the surrounding world, all this is flinging with whores and bowing before idols. There is a direct equivalence between these things, in God's sight. God's "hand" worked upon Israel to make them realize the seriousness of their ways (Hos.2:10). This fact starts to plumb the depth of God's love- that even with those who have broken His covenant, God's hand is still working to lead them to repentance.

- Jer.31:18-20 describe how Ephraim moans: "Thou hast chastised me...turn thou me, and I shall be turned...after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed... I was ashamed... because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son?... since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still... I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord". We must not think from this that God just chose to turn Israel (the prodigal) back to him at a certain moment. It was because God "spake against him", through which the prodigal was "instructed", that he turned back.

- There is reason to see the family portrayed in the parable as being a priestly family- thus representing prodigal Israel, "a Kingdom of priests". The son did not ask for his share of the inheritance, but of "the portion of goods" - remember that Levites did not own any land. There is surely an echo of the curse on Eli's priestly family in the prodigal parable: "Every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch...for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests offices, that I may eat a piece of bread" (1 Sam.2:36). The Father had "hired servants", which takes us back to the reference in Lev.22:10 to the priests having "hired servants" in their household, who would have performed the mundane work for them (cp. the Gibeonites). The prodigal was therefore asking to be admitted back into God's service, resigning all the spiritual superiorities he could have enjoyed through being of the priestly line. Similarly latter day Israel will be willing to be accepted by God as Gentiles, having resigned their trust in their natural lineage. Our attitude on repentance ought to be similar- just wanting to quietly, humbly participate in God's family for the joy of being close to Him. Further indication that the hired servants represent the Gentiles is found in the fact that they had "bread enough" (Gk. 'an abundance of loaves'), connecting with the Gentiles of Mt.14:20 being "filled" (same word in Lk.15:16) with the abundance of loaves created by Christ.

- The parable of the lost son complements that of the lost sheep earlier in the same chapter. "My people hath been lost sheep", "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Jer. 50:6; Mt.10:6; 15:24). A comparison of the parable with Hos.7:9,10 indicates that most of Israel remain as the prodigal in the pig country: "Strangers have devoured his strength (cp. "devoured thy substance"), and he knoweth it not... they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this". The illogicality of Israel remaining in their pathetic spiritual position is so apparent to us from this; yet we of the new Israel can also be crazy enough to go on living out of real fellowship with God.

The reason for presenting such a catalogue of evidence is to show that prodigal Israel's latter day repentance will be of a similar intensity of repentance to ours in this life. They will mourn and weep with a rare intensity of self-hate and self-knowledge- even as a father for his only son. Do we shed tears on repentance? Do we realize, as they will, how our sins brought about the crucifixion? Do we appreciate that our spiritual indifference and lack of perception means that we, like Israel, "did esteem him stricken", seeing no beauty in him (Is.53:2-5) as we march through our lives, unthinking as to the power and beauty of the

cross?

The Spirit Of The Law

There are a number of other Old Testament bases for the prodigal parable. Significantly, several of these in the Proverbs portray the younger son's repentance as a model fulfillment of the spirit of the Mosaic law (upon which Proverbs is so often a commentary). For example, it is the wise son who is told: "Hear thou, my son, and be wise... be not among winebibbers... a whore is a deep ditch... the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Harken unto thy father... the father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him" (Prov.23:19-26). There are evident connections here with the prodigal. God's rejoicing over his return was therefore on account of the son's wisdom through hearkening to the Father's word. Thus God's joy is not just in the emotional recognition of the fact that we are in bad conscience with Him, and want to do something about it. True repentance is a result of really grasping the true wisdom of God, applying ourselves intellectually to it.

We are left to conclude that it was the son's reflection upon the Father's word which lead him to return to Him, as will be true of prodigal Israel in the last days. "Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance" (Prov.29:3) was clearly in the Lord's mind when constructing his parable. He evidently saw this proverb as applying to the same person in time of sin and repentance. Repenting and loving wisdom are therefore paralleled, showing again that repentance is not just a twinge of conscience, but involves coming to really know God. The prodigal wished to return home so that he could share in the loaves which the servants had "to spare", or (better), "had in abundance". This same word occurs in Jn.6:12 concerning the bread which "remained", i.e. was in abundance, after the feeding of the five thousand. In that acted parable, the bread represented the abundance of spiritual food which is in the spirit-words of Christ. It was this which the truly repentant sinner earnestly seeks, rather than a mere salving of conscience. "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father" (Prov. 28:7) shows that such genuine repentance and knowing of God's wisdom is effectively reckoned as keeping the letter of the Law. "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance" (Prov.17:2) seems to also connect with our parable; implying that the wise son who was willing to be a servant was ultimately greater than the son who appeared to be technically obedient to the letter of the law. Likewise, the son desiring to be fed with the husks of the pig food may connect with Lazarus desiring to be fed with the crumbs from the rich man's table (Lk.16:21). Yet Lazarus is representative of the repentant sinner who is ultimately justified. The degree to which God will so totally impute righteousness to us is indeed hard to come to terms with. But it is faith in this which will be our ultimate salvation.

The Prodigal's Repentance: Baptism?

This parable describes the general principle of repentance; yet we are repentant at many times and varying circumstances. Because of this, there are a number of well sustainable interpretations possible. There are a number of reasons for associating the prodigal's leaving the pigs of the Gentile world with baptism; after the pattern of Israel's exodus, we understand that our repentance and exit from the world and its thinking is symbolized by baptism (1 Cor.10:1). In this case, our whole life after baptism is like the journey home of

the prodigal- with nervousness, growing confidence and bitter regret and realization of our sins, we are stumbling home, desperately willing for just the humblest place of acceptance in God's family. And every step of our difficult, hungry journey the Father is having compassion upon us, and running out to meet us, searching for the lost sheep. There are so many references to God seeking out His people, and also to our seeking God. All our lives this process is working out; we seek for God, as He seeks for the development of a true spirituality in us. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8) is surely an allusion to the prodigal parable. Every day of our lives, as we struggle with our natural fear and faithlessness, this fact should gloriously motivate us in our spiritual strivings. The first thing which the prodigal says at his meeting with the Father is "Father, I have sinned" (Lk.15:21). Surely our first stammerings at judgment day may be similar? Think of it. As you behold the glory of the Father in the face of Jesus Christ, what will the first thoughts and words really be? Yet the overflowing love of the Father almost brushed all that aside in assuring that timid boy of his acceptance and vital place in the Father's mind. The Father's speed and zeal is captured by the repeated use of the conjunction "and": "His father saw him, *and* had compassion, *and* ran, *and* fell on his neck, *and* kissed him". The son's careful preparation of his request for mercy was needful for him, but not for the Father. This is a precise allusion to the spirit of Is.65:24: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear". This is primarily concerning God's relationship with men in the Millennium. Yet our daily experience of forgiveness now should give us a foretaste of the glorious sense of restoration with God which will be ours in the Kingdom.

The joyful homecoming and celebration feast after the prodigal's repentance then equates with the marriage feast which will begin the Millennium. The fatted calf which was killed therefore connects with the "fatlings" which were killed for the marriage supper of the Kingdom in Mt.22:4. And those Jews who refused the invitation to join in that feast easily equate with the elder brother. "Let us eat and be merry" (Lk.15:23) is alluded to by the Lord in his later description of the marriage supper: "Let us be glad and rejoice... for the marriage of the lamb is come" (Rev.19:7). "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mt.25:21) is the equivalent in the parable of the virgins. There is good reason to think that our Lord consciously designed his parables to allude to each other, and thus build up a more complete picture of his teaching.

Detailed Proof

Now for some more detailed proof of this powerful analogy of the prodigal's repentance:

- In the pig country, the son lived with "riotous living" (Lk.15:13). The same Greek word occurs in 1 Pet.4:4 concerning Gentiles (and also the latter day apostasy within the ecclesia?) living in "excess of riot".
- The context of the parable is set by Lk.15:2. It was in response to the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus that he received sinners and ate with them. Jesus is replying by showing that the meal he ate with them was in the spirit of the joyful feasting occasioned by the finding of the lost coin, and the return of the prodigal. The prodigal's repentance is thus likened to those who were responding to Christ's gospel.
- The prodigal "spent all" (Lk.15:14), just as the diseased woman had "spent all" her living (Mk.5:26), and now came to take hold of Christ's mantle of righteousness. This we do at baptism. Other similarities between the prodigal and that widow are to be found in 'Studies

In The Gospels' by H.A. Whittaker.

- The prodigal's perishing with hunger and desperately needing bread suggests a connection with Jn.6:35: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me (cp. the prodigal's return) shall never hunger... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (cp. the receiving back of the prodigal). This coming to Christ is both ongoing and also specifically at baptism.

- The son was attached to a "citizen of that country", perhaps a personification of the Biblical devil to which we are joined before conversion. He was made free from him the moment he started his journey back. He "was dead, and is alive again" is also baptism language (cp. Rom.6:3-5; Col.2:13). "He arose" from the pigs (Lk.15:20) certainly implies new life and resurrection.

The record of the prodigal's treatment at the homecoming suggests that we are to see in this the sharing of Christ's personal reward with repentant sinners. Removing his rags and clothing him with the best robe recalls Zech.3:4, concerning the very same thing happening to Christ at his glorification. Being given a robe, ring and shoes takes us back to Joseph/Jesus being similarly arrayed in the day of his glory (Gen.41:42). We earlier showed that this parable is rich in reference to the Joseph story, with Joseph's brothers typifying Israel and all sinners. But now there is a powerful twist in the imagery. The sinners (cp. the brothers) now share the reward of the saint (cp. Joseph). This is the very basis of the Gospel of justification in Christ, through having his righteousness imputed to us, so that we can share in his rewards. This will fully be realized at the marriage supper of the lamb, although it also occurs in a sense each time we repent, and live out the parable of the prodigal's repentance again.

Living Out The Parable

It must be evident that apart from at baptism, we each live out the experience of the prodigal in our daily lives, as we come to realize the extent and nature of our sins, and summon the faith in God's love to walk with quickening step back to Him. Association with harlots is a common Biblical symbol of committing sin (see James 1:13-15); all our sins are unfaithfulness against Christ our husband. They are not just passing adulteries; the Spirit uses the even more powerful figure of harlotries. There are quite a number of other references in James to this parable, which indicate that the prodigal's experience can apply in an ongoing sense to the believer after baptism. The son '*spending all*' uses the same word which occurs in James 4:3 concerning the believer who 'asks amiss' (cp. the prodigal's request to his father), that he might "*consume* it (same word) upon (his) lusts". James 4:4 continues: "Ye adulterers... know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?". This is all prodigal language. The next verses then seem to go in their allusions, implying that the prodigal is ultimately far more acceptable than the elder brother in the ecclesia: "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy (cp. the elder brother)... God... giveth grace (forgiveness?) unto the humble... draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you (cp. the prodigal's return being matched by the Father coming to meet him)... let your laughter (cp. the son's "riotous living") be turned to mourning... he that speaketh evil of his brother (is) *not* a doer of the law (as the elder brother thought he was), but a judge" (James 4:5-11).

The sense that the prodigal had of having come to a complete end, realizing the ultimate wretchedness of sin, should be ours when we repent. The prodigal's repentance is ours. The prodigal among the pigs, rising up to return, should be a cameo of our repentances

throughout each day. The allusion to the Septuagint of Prov.29:21 shows how that despite having reached such an "end", there is still a way back: "He that lives wantonly from a child shall be a servant, and in the *end* shall grieve over himself". Yet we know that after that "end", the prodigal returned.

The son 'coming to himself' in the prodigal's repentance (Lk.15:17) implies that his life of sin was madness, lived in a haze of semi-consciousness of his real spiritual self. This spiritual anaesthesia is *always* present when we sin. Yet it does not mean that God sees and feels our sins as we do; He has a constancy of spiritual awareness. An appreciation of this may help us in our struggle to sense the true seriousness of sin.

The Parable Of The Prodigal (2)

Killing The Fatted Calf

"The fatted calf" of Christ is 'killed' by God on our repentance in the sense that He is aware once again of the death of Christ whenever we are granted forgiveness. The spirit of Christ groans for us when we sin, as he did on the cross and in Gethsemane (Rom.8:26). Thus God looks on the travail of Christ's soul when He bears our sins away from us (Is.53:11). To crucify Christ afresh as it were puts Christ through the process of death on behalf of sin once again, but because the believer does not 'resurrect' to newness of life in forsaking the sin, neither does God 'visualize' the Lord's triumph over the sufferings of sin in the resurrection. Such a person has left Christ suffering, travelling in soul, groaning with tears, without any triumph or resurrection.

The son admitted that he had sinned "in thy sight" (Lk.15:21), exactly as David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba (Ps.51:4). In the same way as David openly recognized that he deserved to die, so the prodigal wanted to be made a hireling. Yet in reality, God did not take David's life, the prodigal was not allowed to even get round to saying he wanted to be made a slave (Lk.15:21 cp. 19), shoes being immediately placed on his feet (Lk.15:22) to distinguish him from the barefoot slaves. As God took His repentant wife back to her former status, speaking of her once again as a virgin, so the Father emphasizes: "This *my son* was dead..." (Lk.15:24). The prodigal was dead, but then became alive (Lk.15:32), in the same way as baptism marks both a one-off coming alive with Christ, and also the start of a newness of life in which we are constantly dying to sin and coming alive to God's righteousness (Rom.6:13). Our repentance and subsequent acceptability with God at our baptisms should therefore be on a similar level to our confessions of sinfulness to God after specific sins in our daily lives, and also related to our doing this at the day of judgment.

Yet in the daily round of sin and failure, it is sometimes difficult to sense the degree to which God is actively seeking our return, and willing to slay the fatted calf. The earlier parables of the lost sheep and coin show God actively working to find us; whilst that of the prodigal implies that He is not doing anything physical. Yet the clear connections with the preceding parables show that the woman zealously turning the house upside down must therefore be a figure of the mental energy expended by the Almighty in seeking out our repentance. In our semi-aware spiritual days and hours, before we 'come to ourselves', the Father's active mind is urgently seeking us. Surely this should motivate us in our stronger moments to be aware of the need *not* to sleep into the sleepy madness of spiritual indifference and sin. This indifference is effectively spending our substance with whores and riotous living. We have mentioned that Prov. 29:3 is one of the root passages for the prodigal parable: "Whoso loveth *wisdom* rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his *substance*". There is a parallel here between wisdom and the Father's substance; continuing a popular Biblical theme that God's spiritual riches are to be found in His words of wisdom. An indifference to the spiritual riches which we have been given in the word of Christ is therefore being likened to the prodigal squandering the Father's substance with whores.

It is hard to appreciate that this parable really is intended to be read as having some reference to our daily turning back from our sins- such is the emotional intensity of the story. Yet such is the seriousness of sin that we must see in it an ideal standard to aim for in this regard. The parable alludes to a passage in Job which helps us better appreciate this. The prodigal's confession "I have sinned... in thy sight", and his returning from spiritual death to life (Lk. 15:21,32) connect well with Job 33:24-30: "His flesh (of the forgiven sinner) shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth (cp. the prodigal): he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy... if any say (like the prodigal), I have sinned... and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God *oftentimes* with man". The prodigal's experience will often be worked out in our lives, the fatted calf slain time and again, and as such we will come to know and appreciate the Father's love even more.

The joyous feast around the fatted calf can therefore speak of the full fellowship with God which we enjoy each time we come to repentance. We saw that the return of Israel in Hos.2 was one of the source passages for the parable. The feast at their return is there described as a betrothal feast. This is obviously a one-off act. Yet such is the constant newness of life which we can experience through continued repentance, that the feasts of joy which we experience can all have the intensity of a betrothal feast. In like manner our relation with Christ in the Kingdom is likened to a consummation which lasts eternally.

The Elder Brother

In the same way as the Jews refused to appreciate the spirit in which Christ was feasting with the repentant sinners who responded to his message (Lk.15:2), so the elder brother refused to attend the celebrations. Thus he is set up as representative of hard hearted Israel; and all those in the new Israel who share his characteristics proclaim themselves to be aligned with the legalistic Pharisaism which failed to discern the real spirit of Christ when he was among them. A calf, dancing and music recall the scene on Moses' return from the mount (Ex.32:17-19); the elder brother's response as he returned from the field and beheld this sight may well have been rooted in his attempt to place himself in Moses' place. He zealously protested at what he liked to see as rank apostasy when it was actually the display of the real spirit of Christ, in receiving back a lost soul. For all this, the lesson is never learned. Schism after schism have been experienced over this very issue of having repentant brethren take their place at the memorial feast. The bad grace and bitterness of the elder brother as he stormed away from the happy feast is seen all too often amongst us.

The elder brother coming in from the field must be related to the parable about the servant coming home from the field in Lk.17:7-10. The servant should then have prepared the meal, on the master's command, and then admitted that despite having been perfectly obedient, he was still unprofitable. The prodigal parable points the great contrast. *God*, while having every right to order the servant/ elder brother to prepare the meal, is the one who has actually prepared it. *God* asks the elder son to come and eat immediately after returning from the field, rather than ordering him to prepare the meal, as He could so justly have done. Yet despite God's boundless love, the elder son refused to act and think in the spirit of the Father's love.

The corrective to the elder brothers' attitude is provided by the following parable of the unjust steward which comes straight afterwards in Lk.16. The steward was accused of 'wasting' his master's goods (Lk.16:1), using the same Greek word translated "substance" in Lk.15:13, concerning how the son wasted his father's substance. The steward forgave others, and therefore ultimately found a way of escape from his dilemma. The implication is that it was on account of the prodigal being willing to do this, not daring to point the finger at others in the Father's household because of his awareness of his own sins, that he was eventually saved. We can also infer that the elder brother walked out of the Father's fellowship because of his refusal to do this. Again we see how God works through our sins. Because of the prodigal's experience of sin and forgiveness, he

was better able to show that vital love and tolerance towards others, without which we cannot receive God's ultimate acceptance. In a sense, it was much *more* difficult for the elder brother.

Our Elder Brother...

Which leads us to one final thought. It was so much harder for Christ to be as patient with sinners as he was, seeing that he himself never sinned and experienced God's forgiveness. There is good reason to think that Jesus was speaking about the elder brother partly to warn himself. He was the favoured son, having the right of the firstborn. He alone could say to God "neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment" (Lk.15:29). The Father's comment "All that I have is thine" (Lk.15:31) connects with the references to God giving *all things* into the hands of the Son. His constant abiding in the Father's house echoes Jn.8:35: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever". Our Lord seems to have been indirectly exhorting himself not to be like the elder brother, thereby setting us the example of framing necessary warning and rebuke of others in terms which are relevant to ourselves. If our perfect Master was so sensitive to his own possibility of failure, how much more should we be, ever analyzing our attitudes to our brethren, "considering (ourselves) lest we also be tempted".

The Parable Of The Prodigal (3):

The Unreality In Luke 15

The three parables of the lost which climax in the parable of the lost son all exemplify the principles we have spoken about throughout these studies. They all depend for their power upon the many elements of unreality found within them; and the lost son parable requires us to fill in many details, try to finish the story, and to take due note of the crescendo of 'end stress' which there is. To appreciate the full power and import of these parables, we need to try to read them through the eyes of the Palestinian peasants who first heard them. Correct understanding of Scripture requires us to read it and feel it within the context in which it was first given. Bombarded as we are by billions of pieces of information each day, especially from the internet, we only cope with it all by letting it all fit into the worldviews and assumptions which we've adopted. Words and information and ideas tend to only fit in to what we've already prepared to house them, rather than us seeing *God's* word as something radically different, and allowing it to totally upset and change our cherished worldviews, constructs and approaches to life. God's word is still words- although they are inspired words. The problem with words is that we read or hear them, and interpret them within our frames of reference and culture. Take an example: "She's mad about her flat!". An American takes this to mean that she's angry and frustrated about the puncture / 'flat tire' which she has on her car. But in British English, the phrase would mean: 'She's really happy and enthusiastic about her apartment'. To understand what the speaker or writer means by those words, we have to understand their cultural background. And so it is with the Lord's teaching, aimed as it was to first century peasants.

The Thankless Sons

For those Palestinian peasants, politeness and respect to your father was paramount. Even if you didn't obey your father, you had to be polite to him. Rudeness to your father or public disobedience to him was the worst thing you could do, and you shamed yourself. The Lord turned that understanding on its head in His parable of the two sons in Mt. 21:28-32. He taught that the *better* son was the one who rudely refused to do what his father asked, but later relented and did it. The Lord saw this son as better than the one who politely agreed, and yet never fulfilled his promise. Perhaps that parable needs reflection upon today, where 'nicespeak' has become paramount- so long as you say something nicely, what you actually are saying and what you *do* isn't so important. *How* we speak *is* of course important; but it can be exalted to the point where words rather than real action become paramount. But that aside, the point is that both the sons were *extremely* rude to their Father. And he was the most loving, self-sacrificial dad that two kids ever could've had. We feel

hurt for the lovely old boy. One element of unreality is that he only had two sons- a small family for those days. How tragic that both his sons went so wrong and rebelled against him. And we sense something of his hurt, our heart starts to bleed for him, and we think of *our* Heavenly Father's hurt. And then the penny drops- those two boys are us.

The younger son was more than rude in demanding his actual share of the inheritance immediately. He was effectively wishing that his father was dead. He had the nerve to treat his lovely father as if he were already dead. There arose in Europe after the second world war the 'Death of God' philosophy and theology. We may distance ourselves from it in disgust, finding even the words grating and inappropriate, but let's remember that the younger son ends up the son who is found in the end abiding in the Father's house and joyful fellowship. This is how *we* have treated our wonderful Father. We know from the examples of Abraham (Gen. 25:5-8) and Jacob (Gen. 48-49) that the actual division of the inheritance was made *by the father* as his death approached. For the son to take the initiative was disgusting. Although the sons could have some legal right to what their father gave them before his death, they were strictly denied the right of actually having it in possession [i.e. the right of disposition](1). This awful son was therefore each of us. And the father responds with an unreal grace. He agrees. He did what he surely knew was not really for the spiritual good of the son. And according to Dt. 21:7, the younger son's share was one third. But the father gives him *half*. The younger son turns it all into cash within a few days [the Greek for "gathered all" definitely means 'to turn into cash']. This would've meant selling the fields and property quickly- and the father would've had to give agreement for this and have been involved in the contracts. Buying and selling takes a long time in peasant culture- selling quickly would've meant selling very cheaply. It would've been the laughing stock of the whole area. The way the son sells the inheritance would've been a more awful and unreal thing in the ears of the Lord's first hearers than it is to us. Naboth would rather have died than sell his inheritance- even to the King (1 Kings 21:3). The lifetime's hard work of the father and family was wasted. And the father went along with it all. This was more than unusual; it would've been outrageous in the ears of the Lord's hearers. But this is the outrageous nature of God's grace. He must be so torn by our prayers- as a loving Father, wanting to give us what we ask for materially, whilst knowing it's not for our good... and sometimes doing so. The father made himself look a fool because of his enormous love for this obnoxious son who wished him dead, this young man who clearly thought solely in terms of 'Gimme the money and I'm outta here for good'. And he thought this with no thought to the huge damage he was bringing upon the rest of the family. For they would've lost so much through losing half the property. We sense the pain of the father, of the family, and the selfishness of the son. And time and again we are breathless at the love and grace of the father.

Significantly, the son asked for his share of the property- not his inheritance. To receive inheritance carried with it responsibility, of building the house of your father, upholding the family name etc. But this son didn't want that. And the father could quite rightly have said 'No, you get the inheritance when you take the responsibilities that come with it'. But no, this son wants to quit with his lovely father and the whole family name. In that culture, to cut your ties with your home family, your inheritance, your land... was almost unheard of. It was almost impossible to do. But that's what this angry young man wanted. The incredible thing is, the father allowed him to do this! That element of unreality signposts the extent to which God allows us freewill, genuine freedom of determination- and how much it costs Him emotionally and as a person to do so. This is the frightening thing about freewill- how much it hurts and costs God to give it to us. This insight alone should lead to a far more careful and responsible use of our freewill. William Temple said somewhere, something to the effect that God gives us freedom even to reject His love. It's no good reflecting on the younger son and thinking 'But I'm not that kinda guy'. The whole point of the parable is that yes, we are. That's us. We're either like that son, or the self-righteous son who is left standing outside of the father's fellowship. Clearly enough, the God whom Jesus was revealing was *not* based upon some village patriarch. Freud rightly observed that many people's image of God is

based upon their experience of human father figures. For the true believer however, the Lord Jesus is revealing a Father-figure radically different to anything they've ever met.

Our Desperation

We don't like to think of ourselves as that thankless young man; but even more do we revolt at the idea that we were and are at times out there feeding pigs. Anyone who's travelled in the Middle East will know the annoyance of a beggar attaching themselves to you and just refusing to leave you. But watch how the locals deal with those types. They don't shout at them, or chase them. They will ask them to do something which is beneath even their dignity as a beggar to do. And they walk away shamefaced. I knew a brother who was a schoolteacher. The boss wanted to fire him because of his Christianity. The boss didn't say 'You're fired! Clear off!'. He simply transferred him to a remote village in the middle of nowhere. And so the brother did the only reasonable thing- he resigned. The young man 'joining' or 'gluing' himself to the rich Gentile citizen was like the beggar who glues himself to you, and you don't know how to shake him off. The pig owner told him to go and feed his pigs- thinking that this would surely be beneath this once-wealthy Jew who was hassling him. But so desperate was the young man, that he had to swallow every drop of pride, national and personal- and go do it. And he felt like a pig- he was willing to eat what they ate. *This* is the picture of our desperation at every sin- but we need to feel it, if we are to experience the path back to the Father. In an age when sin is often more about the words you type on your keyboard than actual physical debauchery, this parable hits home hard. Of course it was pride which was in the way for the son, and it is swallowing pride which is the essence of repentance. And again, it was fear of shame that delayed the young man's return- fear of having to go through the *kezazah* ceremony of being officially disowned, fear of how the mob of young kids which roam every village street would whistle and shout and sing insults at him. And we need to pause and reflect whether we contribute to this significant barrier which surely hinders so many from returning to the Father's house.

But the young man hadn't quite learnt the lesson when he decided to return home. He decided to return and ask to be made "as one of your skilled craftsmen" (Lk. 15:19 Gk.- he uses *misthios* rather than *doulos*, the usual word for 'slave'). Presumably he figured that he could work and pay off what he had wasted. His plan was to use the phrase "I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Lk. 15:18)- but this is almost quoting verbatim from Pharaoh's words of insincere repentance in Ex. 10:16! He still failed to grasp that he was his father's *son*- he didn't 'get it', that *this* would be the basis of his salvation, rather than a master-servant relationship with his father based on hard work. It was the father's amazing grace which swept him off his feet just along the street from his father's home; it was the father's unconditional acceptance of him which made him realize what sonship and repentance was really all about.

The Older Son

To refuse a father's invitation to a family celebration was seen as totally unacceptable, rude, and a rejection of one's father. Hence the rudeness of the guests refusing the King's invitations. The older brother would usually have played a prominent role in such feasts. But this son refuses to attend. This would've struck the Lord's initial audience as incredibly rude. Remember how Vashti's refusal to attend her husband's feast resulted in her being rejected (Esther 1). What the older son did would've been seen as an insult to all the guests; and many fathers would simply have rejected and disowned their son for this, or at least, expressed significant disapproval. Indeed, this was expected of him by society and the other guests. But yet again, the father humiliates himself and breaks all Jewish norms and expectations of correctness and decency. He leaves the feast! For the host to walk out was yet again seen as totally rude to the other guests- it of course echoes the shepherd leaving the 99 sheep and going off after the one lost sheep. The father doesn't go out and giving the arrogant, unloving, disobedient son a good talking to, as the audience would expect. Again, as so often, the Lord's parables set up an expectation- and then dash it. The father goes out into the darkness of the courtyard, and "entreats" his son (Lk. 15:28). The Greek *parakaleo* means literally

to come alongside, as if the father is inviting the son to stand alongside him in his extension of grace. Perhaps Paul is making one of his many allusions to the Lord's parables when he uses the same word to speak of how he 'beseeches' his legalistic brethren (2 Cor. 5:20).

But all this grace is ignored by the elder son. He insults his father. It may not be so apparent to us, but it would've been picked up by the Lord's first hearers. A son should always address his father in this context with the term "O Father". But he doesn't. He speaks of his brother as "Your son" rather than his brother. He speaks of how the prodigal "devoured *your* living". And he speaks of how he has faithfully served his father *as a servant*- like his younger brother, he failed to perceive the wonder of *sonship*. His awful outburst is doing in essence what his younger brother had done some time before. He was saying that he didn't want a part in his father's family. The "living" or wealth of the family was no longer *his*. He wasn't going to respect his father as his father any more. He didn't want to be in the family, so he wouldn't go to the family reunion. That poor, dear father. And what is the father's response? He calls him his *teknon*, his dearly loved son. Notice how the more common *huios* is used for "son" throughout the story (Lk. 15:11,13,19,21,24,25,30). In the face of such awful rejection, he shows his special love. It's like the Lord giving "the sop", the sign of special love and favouritism, to Judas- as he betrays Him. There's a powerful lesson here for those of us who find ourselves irked and angered by legalistic, arrogant brethren who refuse to fellowship with the rest of us. There was no anger and irksomeness in the father's attitude. He was only deeply sorry, hurt, cut up... but he *so* loved that arrogant elder brother. He goes on to say that he gives that son all that he has. But he could only actually do that through being dead! The father is willing to die for that arrogant older brother, whose pride and anger stops him wanting anything to do with his father, whom he has just openly shamed and rejected. And the father wants to die for him. This is to be our attitude to the self-righteous, the divisive, those who reject their brethren.

But of course, there's a real and obvious warning not to be like the older brother. It worries me, it turns me, right in my very gut, when I see so many of our community refusing to fellowship with their brethren because 'He's in that ecclesia... they've had her back... she's divorced and remarried... he's never said sorry, his motives aren't right, she only said those words...'. And those attitudes are made out to be expressions of righteousness. It is not for me to judge anyone; I seek to love those who act like this with the love and grief of the father for the elder son. But they must be gently warned as to the implications of their position. By refusing to fellowship with the rest of the family, by making such a fuss about the return of the prodigals, they fail to realize that they are in essence doing what the prodigals have done; and they are *de facto* signing themselves out of the Father's family. The issues are that serious. The parable isn't just a story with a possible interpretation which we can shrug our shoulders at and get on with life. The Lord's teaching, His 'doctrine', was and is in these parables.

The lost son story finishes, as do the other stories, with a banquet of rejoicing- rejoicing in the father's love. But it's no accident that Luke 15 is preceded by the parable of Lk. 14:15-24, where we have another great banquet- symbolic of our communion in the future Kingdom of God. The connection is clear. We will "eat bread in the Kingdom of God" if we eat bread with the Lord in the banquets of this life. And yet *so, so often* it is said amongst us: 'I won't break bread there. They have X or Z... who is divorced... who's not repentant... they have Q from that fellowship attending there... I'm not going in there'. It is not for us to judge. And I do not do so in what I write here. But it is the fairly obvious teaching of the Lord here that if we won't eat bread with Him in joy now, if we won't celebrate His grace and love for the lost in this life, then we will not in the future banquet. His grace is likely large enough to cover even the self-righteous; but we need to realize the eternal gravity of our decisions and feelings about our brethren in this life. Especially must we come to see ourselves as the prodigal. If we plan on being in the Kingdom, we must identify ourselves with the prodigal, and not with the self-righteous elder son who is left outside of the Father's fellowship, because he placed himself there.

An Unreal Father

The father whom we meet in the lost son parable is prefigured by the shepherd and woman of the earlier parables. The three parables are described as one singular parable (Lk. 15:3). The man who owned 100 sheep was rich. Shepherds were the lowest of the low. If you owned 100 sheep, you employed a shepherd to look after them and take responsibility for chasing the lost. But there's something unreal- the owner of the sheep is the one who is the shepherd. This actually is the point of the Ezekiel 34 passage upon which the Lord built the parable- having fired the unworthy shepherds of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, *I myself, even I*, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them ... I will bring them ... I will feed them ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ez. 34:11-15). The remarkable thing is that the owner of the sheep decides to become the personal shepherd, feeding, seeking, delivering, bringing the sheep *himself personally*. A Palestinian wealthy enough to own a whole flock of sheep simply wouldn't do this. He *always* hired someone else to do this- because being a shepherd was so despised. Behold the humility of God. But see too His personal passion for us. Hence the Lord's question: Which one of *you* would act like this? The Father and His Son take such passionate personal responsibility for us, that God was willing in Christ to shame and humiliate Himself in order to get us back into the fold.

Personal Responsibility

There's also something odd about the way the Lord speaks of the shepherd: "*He* has lost one of them". Translations of the Bible into semitic languages, especially Arabic, tend to read: "If one of them is lost" (passive). In the language and concepts of the Middle East, a speaker never blames himself. As in Spanish, they would not say "I lost my book"- rather, "the book went from me". Likewise "I missed the train" is expressed as "the train left me". And I would even speculate that preaching Christ in Arabic and even Hispanic cultures comes up against the problem of people strongly disliking taking ultimate responsibility, or to own up to the personal guilt of sin; the shifting of blame away from oneself is reflected even in their languages. And so when the Lord puts words in the shepherd's mouth whereby he takes direct responsibility for the loss of the sheep, this would've sounded strange even grammatically. Apparently to this day, it's hard to translate that actual phrase into Arabic. Likewise with the idea of the woman saying that she had found the coin which she had lost. The Lord is labouring how God, and God in Christ, feel an extraordinary personal responsibility for the lost.

If we imagine the woman who lost the coin, we sense something of her remorse and desperation as she searches the cracks in the floor for it. It could've been part of her dowry- all that she owned for herself, all that was her very own. Not even her body was hers- it was her husband's, to do what he wished with. But the dowry coins were hers- her very own. If the allusion were to one of these coins, it would speak of how much we mean to the Lord... that I, one of 6 billion, actually mean everything to Him, for whom I am His very own. But the allusion may also be to coins which the peasant women would keep bound up in a rag, close to their body. With this money, the woman would've had to feed the family for the next week or so. But... she'd let the rag come loose, and a coin had slipped out. In either case, we are to imagine the woman searching for it with a sense of remorse, taking responsibility that she was accountable for the loss. And this, we are invited to understand, is how the Lord feels for those who are lost. Notice how the woman searches *in the house*- presumably, she'd not been out of the house since she last had the coin. By filling out this little detail, we perhaps have a picture of how the Lord took responsibility, or felt responsible, for the loss of those 'within the house' of Israel.

The Joy Of The Lord

Hence the joy of the shepherd when the sheep is found- he lays it on his shoulders *rejoicing*. To carry a sheep on your shoulders, fighting and struggling with you, as you climb down a mountainside in the dark... isn't something which is usually done *rejoicing*. But this is the unusual, humanly inexplicable, *joy* which there is in the Father and Son when day by day they 'find' us and bring us back. And where would a shepherd usually take such a lost animal? Back to the flock, whom he's left in the wilderness. But then comes another unreal element. The shepherd takes the sheep *home to his very own house*. This sheep had such extraordinary value to this wealthy man. He came back dirty and exhausted- he humiliated himself and made himself a fool in the eyes of the world, all because of this humanly senseless love and joy which he had over this lost sheep. And we have to fill in the details, answering the unasked but implied questions- what about the 99 left out in the wilderness? The story ends with them out of the house- paving the way for how the elder son is left standing outside of the house. Note how Lk. 15:3 speaks of the three parables as one, in the singular, "parable".

The Lord's Grace

The shepherd-owner calls his "friends" together. This surely refers to the clubs the Pharisees formed in villages, called the *Khaburim* ['friends']. They ought to have rejoiced to be eating with sinners, as the Lord was- but they wouldn't. The whole context of the three parables is the Lord justifying why he ate at home with sinners, thereby showing that He considered them as somehow 'in fellowship' with Him. The Pharisees wouldn't do this unless those people repented and learnt Torah in great depth. But the Lord is surely saying that He sees those men who ate with Him as the sheep which has already been brought home. He reflected the gracious outlook with which He saw people; and His hopefulness that by treating a person as if they had 'come home', then they would indeed do so. Probing this line further, the Lord Jesus speaks of the found sheep as being symbolic of the repentant. But the sheep did nothing- it was simply acceptant of having been found. To accept being found is, therefore, seen by the Lord as what He calls 'repentance'. Now surely that's grace- salvation without works.

Radical Acceptance

There was a Jewish custom called *Kezazah*, 'the cutting off'. If a Jew lost the family fortune amongst Gentiles, he would be greeted at home by the whole family, who would break a pot and scream 'XYZ is cut off from his people'(2). The family and community would have no more fellowship with the person(3). Moulton and Milligan describe the record of a public notice by which parents declare their dissociation from their son who had wasted their wealth(4). This is what the Lord's Jewish audience would've expected to come next in the story, when the son returns. But no! There is the very opposite. Law and traditional expectation and even human perception of justice is thrown away, as the father races along the street towards his son and accepts him. For an elderly man to run publicly was yet again an unreal element in the story- mature men always walk, at a slow and dignified pace. Not gather up their robes and run, let alone publicly. Actually the Greek word translated "run" in Lk. 15:20 is that used about sprinting (1 Cor. 9:24,26; Gal. 2:2; 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 12:1). Here again we see the self-humiliation of the father before men, as he expressed a radical acceptance. Even we from our distance expect there to be a 'telling off', a facing of the issues. But there isn't. The grace of God which meets the returning sinner leads him to repentance. It of itself, by its sheer magnitude, elicits the state of contrition which is indeed vital; but this is inspired by the huge initiative of the Father and Son.

The father's radical acceptance is the very basis of our salvation. It is challenging, supremely so. Perhaps we handle 'classic' repentance easier- someone does wrong, goes off for a long time, is out of sight and out of mind, comes back, asks for our forgiveness with tears and humility. It's actually psychologically hard to say 'No'. *That* kind of forgiveness is relatively easy. But what is so much harder is to show forgiveness and the nature of the father's love and grace time and again in daily life; to keep looking and hoping for the one who has offended us, ruined us, destroyed us, used and

abused us... to be coming home. Actually I know virtually none amongst us who rise up to the father's love and grace in this. It remains a stark, sobering challenge to us all.

It needs to be understood that the father had to act as the village expected him to. They expected him to enact the *kezazah*, to hand the son over to them in some form for judgment, to make an example of this awful man. No village member is an island, all have to act within the expectations of the group. But the father breaks through all that. He again humiliates himself before the villagers by doing what he did. He likely angers them- for anger so often comes as a result of being confronted by the grace shown by others. We see it so often in the life of our spiritual community. Indeed, the Lord got at this in another parable, where He speaks of how some were angry at the extreme grace shown by the generous vineyard owner (Mt. 20:1-16).

The honour bestowed upon the son by the father is totally unreal. Without the slightest sign that the son is now responsible, is truly repentant, has the right motives... the father gives him the best robe, which is what was done for the person whom a leader wished to honour above all (Esther 6:1-9). And the father gives the son his signet ring (cp. Gen. 41:41,42). All this, before the prodigal has in any way proved himself. All he's done is come home, still not wanting to be a son, just a craftsman; and he was only driven home by his desperation. Such is the huge significance attached by the Lord to our turning up home. And in our dealing with returning sinners, which is every one of us day by day, we should reflect the same attitude.

We are left, as so often, to imagine how the story finished. How hard it would've been for the younger son to live with the older brother! And one day, dear, darling dad would've died. The younger son would've had *his* sons, been called upon to uphold the family honour, make decisions in the village. We are left to imagine how his experience of grace would've made him judge differently to all others.

A Window Onto The Cross

Who does the father represent? The context for the three stories is the Lord Jesus justifying his eating with sinners. The fact that the father had received the sinful younger brother is phrased in the same way as the Pharisees' complaint about the Lord Jesus receiving sinners (Lk. 15:2 = Lk. 15:27). And each of the stories involve a closing scene featuring a joyful meal of celebration. The father would appear therefore to refer to Jesus; and yet clearly enough we are intended to see the father as also our Heavenly Father. As you likely know, I don't go for the primitive equation 'Jesus = God'. I'm not a Trinitarian. So I take this to be an exemplification of how "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their iniquities unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Notice in how many ways the father humiliates himself before everyone, and breaks all traditional Jewish expectations to do so. He gives the younger son what he asks, and more than the Law allowed; he runs to meet the son; he accepts the son; he leaves the banquet where he is the host in order to plead with his older son; he doesn't discipline either of his sons as expected. He makes a fool of himself time and again, upsetting Jewish rules and norms. And the younger son pestering the father to divide up the inheritance may indicate that the father was about to die. Likewise, when the father says to the older son that he gives him there and then all that is his... this is language only really appropriate if the father is about to die, or has actually died. Does not all this speak of the cross as the basis for the Father's love, grace and acceptance? That there, God was in Christ to reconcile us to Himself, not imputing sin to us... there the Father was humiliated in Christ, made a fool of, ridiculed. The Almighty God came this low... to the public shame and death of the cross. The suffering of God in the cross was all about rejected and unaccepted love; and so it is to this day.

Notes

(1) Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables Of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1963) p. 128.

(2) Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005) p. 52.

(3) Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) p. 102.

(4) J.H. Moulton & G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary Of The Greek New Testament Illustrated From the Papyri And Other Non-Literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) p. 89.

Jacob, Esau And The Prodigal

The parable of the prodigal contains multiple allusions to the record of Jacob and Esau, their estrangement, and the anger of the older brother [Esau] against the younger brother (1). There is a younger and an elder son, who both break their relationships with their father, and have an argument over the inheritance issue. Jacob like the prodigal son insults his father in order to get his inheritance. As Jacob joined himself to Laban in the far country, leaving his older brother Esau living at home, so the prodigal glued himself to a Gentile and worked for him by minding his flocks, whilst his older brother remained at home with the father. The fear of the prodigal as he returned home matches that of Jacob as he finally prepares to meet the angry Esau. Jacob's unexpected meeting with the Angel and clinging to him physically is matched by the prodigal being embraced and hugged by his father. Notice how Gen. 33:10 records how Jacob felt he saw the face of Esau as the face of an Angel. By being given the ring, the prodigal "has in effect now supplanted his older brother" (2); just as Jacob did. As Esau was "in the field" (Gen. 27:5), so was the older brother.

What was the Lord Jesus getting at by framing His story in terms of Jacob and Esau? The Jews saw Jacob as an unblemished hero, and Esau / Edom as the epitome of wickedness and all that was anti-Jewish and anti-God. The Book of Jubilees has much to say about all this, as does the Genesis Rabbah (3). The Lord is radically and bravely re-interpreting all this. Jacob is the younger son, who went seriously wrong during his time with Laban. We have shown elsewhere how weak Jacob was at that time. Jacob was saved by grace, the grace shown in the end by the Angel with whom he wrestled, and yet who finally blessed him. As Hos. 12:4 had made clear, Jacob weeping in the Angel's arms and receiving the blessing of gracious forgiveness is all God speaking to us. The older brother who refused to eat with his sinful brother clearly represented, in the context of the parable, the Jewish religious leaders. They were equated with Esau- the very epitome of all that was anti-Jewish. And in any case, according to the parable, the hero of the story is the younger son, Jacob, who is extremely abusive and unspiritual towards his loving father, and is saved by sheer grace alone. This too was a radical challenge to the Jewish perception of their ancestral father Jacob.

The parable demonstrates that both the sons despised their father and their inheritance in the same way. They both wish him dead, treat him as if he isn't their father, abuse his gracious love, shame him to the world. Both finally come to their father from working in the fields. Jacob, the younger son, told Laban that "All these years I have served you... and you have not treated me justly" (Gen. 31:36-42). But these are exactly the words of the older son in the parable! The confusion is surely to demonstrate that both younger and elder son essentially held the same wrong attitudes. And the Father, clearly representing God, and God as He was manifested in Christ, sought so earnestly to reconcile both the younger and elder sons. The Lord Jesus so wished the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees to fellowship with the repenting sinners that He wept over Jerusalem; He didn't shrug them off as self-righteous bigots, as we tend to do with such people. He wept for them, as the Father so passionately pours out His love to them. And perhaps on another level we see in all this the desperate desire of the Father and Son for Jewish-Arab unity in Christ. For the promises to Ishmael show that although Messiah's line was to come through Isaac, God still has an especial interest in and love for all the children of Abraham- and that includes the Arabs. Only a joint recognition of the Father's grace will bring about Jewish-Arab unity. But in the end, it will happen- for there will be a highway from Assyria to Judah to Egypt in the Millennium. The anger of the elder brother was because the younger son had been reconciled to the Father without compensating for what he had

done wrong. It's the same anger at God's grace which is shown by the workers who objected to those who had worked less receiving the same pay. And it's the same anger which is shown every time a believer storms out of an ecclesia because some sinner has been accepted back...

Notes

- (1) K.E. Bailey, *Jacob And The Prodigal* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) lists 51 points of contact between the Jacob / Esau record and the prodigal parable.
- (2) A.J. Hultgren, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) p. 79.
- (3) See e.g. Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary To The Book Of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) Vol. 3 p. 176.

15:12 The somewhat sad picture of the loving Father dividing between his sons "his living" (Lk. 15:12), for them to go off and make what they will of, to either squander in the world or selfishly and self-righteously hoard to themselves, is a picture of the vast and genuine delegation to us by the Father.

The Father has given us huge freewill and an amazing amount of self determination. Divine delegation is one of His great characteristics as a Father. It would have been highly unusual for any father to agree to liquidate part of the family estate ahead of time, just so as to give in to the will of a wayward son who totally rejected him. And yet the father did this; he liquidated part of the family inheritance to give it to a son who wanted to openly quit the family. This is how much the Father is willing to give us the essential desires of our own hearts, how much He is willing to allow us to go our own way, so that we may serve Him of our own freewill.

15:17 God hoped through the hope of Hosea that 'Gomer' would say "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now" (Hos. 2:17). But Gomer / Israel would not; and so the Lord picked up the idea and puts it in the mouth of the returning prodigal son in Lk. 15:17.

15:20 Compare "Slay and make ready" (Gen. 43:16) for the meal. This is the basis of the prodigal son parable (Gen. 45:14,15 = Lk. 15:20); father = Christ; prodigal = repentant Jews, wanting to be servants and nothing else.

The Father offered forgiveness without repentance to the prodigal son before there was any direct evidence of repentance- just a sign of general regret or desire to be in the Father's house. Indeed, it would see that the very fact the son *wanted* to return to the Father's house was quite enough to warrant his acceptance there- and the killing of the fatted calf.

The Lord's zeal for our redemption and His enthusiasm to see us as righteous is brought out in the parable of the prodigal. The Father (manifest in the Lord) runs out to meet the son. That story was masterfully tied back in to Is. 64:5-8: "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways... we have sinned... we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags... but now, O Lord, thou art our father". The patient, hopeful father saw in the son a boy rejoicing and working righteousness; but this was hardly how *he* felt! And so it will be with Israel in the last days. And so it is with each of us now, in our times of repentance. That surpassing grace is ours; we are seen as working righteousness when all we have is a bitter self-loathing and desire to somehow get back to God. But the crucial point is: *how often* do we have such a true repentance? We repeatedly sin, that we admit. But how frequently is there this kind of repentance which calls forth such grace, to see us as so righteous when we are so unrighteous, the grace of Jesus so great, so free...?

The parables so often allude to contemporary Jewish conceptions of grace, and show how God's grace is so far beyond them. The Father is watching for the return of the prodigal, even while the

son was "far off" (Gk. *makron*); and this is the same word used about the "far (Gk. *makros*) country" where the son was (Lk. 15:13,20). The Divine eyesight sees the person who is far off in sin, and longs for their return. This was quite contrary to all Jewish and human notions of showing grace to those who return - *after* they return. There was a contemporary Jewish story about a son who wished to return to his father; and the father sends a message to him saying "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you". The Lord's parable showed how the care of the Father for His children is so far more than that. And He is there watching billions of cases, simultaneously... such is the passionate heart of God for the individual.

We must grow in our realization of the *enthusiasm* of God for our salvation. Consider how the Father ran unto the pathetic son and fell on (Gk. violently seized) his neck and kissed him (Lk. 15:20; the same Greek as in Acts 20:37).

The Father restlessly watching for the prodigal's return matches the woman searching for the lost coin "till she find it" or the unusual shepherd who searches for his lost sheep "until He finds it" (Lk. 15:4,8,20). This involves God in huge activity- setting up providential encounters, nudging consciences through circumstance. The huge amount of 'work' is one thing; but the mental energy of concern and thoughtfulness is phenomenal beyond our comprehension. God rises up early seeking His people- rather like us somehow being able to wake up early in the morning without an alarm clock, because our internal clock is restlessly wanting to be up and on our mission for the day. In all this we are to manifest God- for we too are to seek and save the lost.

The elder brother in the prodigal story shows an unbelievably self righteous attitude. Yet, this truly is the position of the legalists of Christ's day and this. The love of the Father [God] for the son [repentant Israel] is quite something. Would a father really rush out and kiss him, i.e. forgive him (Lk. 15:20 cp. 2 Sam. 14:33) without first requiring an explanation and specific repentance? For this unusual Father, the mere fact the son wanted to return was enough. And when the vineyard workers refused to work and beat and killed the Owner's servants that were sent, the response we expect is that the Owner sends in some armed men and re-establishes control. But He doesn't. Why ever keep sending servants after some are killed? But this is the loving, almost desperate persistence of the Father for our response. This is what the parables of Israel teach. In the end, He does something humanly crazy. He sends a single Man walking towards them- His only Son. Or think of the parable of the older son. The loving Father divides all that He has between the two sons- and the son who remained at home therefore ended up with *all* that the Father had, seeing the younger son had blown the other half of it (Lk. 15:31). This was the extent of God's love for Pharisaic, hypocritical Israel. He gave them His all- the blood of His only Son. Elderly oriental gentlemen never run in public. But the Father will do so when the younger son returns. Such will be His joy, and such is His joy over every sinner who repents!

15:21 I have sinned- see on Job 33:27

In your sight- see on Ps. 51:4.

15:22 *robe*- see on Rev. 6:11.

quickly- see on Lk. 14:5.

15:24 The prodigal son was a favourite of Paul's. At least four times (Lk. 15:24 = Eph. 2:1,5; 5:14; Col. 2:13) he makes the point that he saw the repentant son as a type of every one of us: not just those who publicly disgrace themselves and go out of church life for a time.

It's bankruptcy, or bankruptcy. Paul spoke of spending and being spent in the Lord's service (2 Cor. 12:15), alluding to how the prodigal spent himself in dissipation (Lk. 15:24). That sense of losing all must come- either in sin's service, or in that of the Lord. See on Mt. 3:11.

15:28 The elder son would not 'go in' to the wedding (Lk. 15:28); and the Lord surely constructed that story to use a word which so often is used about going in to the Kingdom (in Matthew alone:

5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21). His point clearly is that those who don't enter into His Kingdom *chose themselves not to do so*, they keep themselves out of the Kingdom, because they cannot bring themselves to show a true love to their brother. In the end, the very end, we receive our dominant desire.

15:30- see on Mt. 20:11.

The bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30).

The parables are full of almost incidental indications of how well the Lord knew our nature and how accurately He foresaw the future struggles of His body. He foresaw that the elder brothers would be self-righteous and unwilling to accept back into fellowship the repentant. Yet instead of making the father address the older boy with words like "You hypocrite! You yourself are disobedient! Get away from me, you callous hypocrite!", the Lord puts the words of grace themselves in the father's mouth: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). The Lord foresaw that the elder brethren's relationship with the Father would be damaged by their harshness. But in the way the story ends, I see real hope for the hard line, right wing Christian who condemns his brother, in the light of the Lord's teaching that we will be judged as we have judged. Wrong such brethren certainly are; but their Lord is gracious enough, it seems, to still work with them. In the same breath as the Lord warned that by our words we will be justified and condemned, and that we will have to account for them at the judgment, He also said that whoever speaks words against Him, He will forgive. I'd like to concentrate on other examples of where the Lord Jesus in His sensitivity foresaw this problem of dealing with apparently weak believers.

The prodigal son parable has as its end stress the problem of the self-righteous elder son. This is in fact the crux of the whole story. He refuses the invitation from his father to come in to the feast- an image used elsewhere in the parables to describe rejection of God's invitation. To refuse such an invitation was a public insult and rejection of his Father. He refuses to address his father as "Father" and refuses to call his brother "brother" [cp. "thy son"]. By breaking his relationship with his brother, he broke his relationship with his Father. As we do likewise. And the end stress of the whole wonderful parable is that we are left wondering how the story finished. The elder brother is left standing there, temporarily rejecting his father, wondering... whether to storm off into the evening darkness, or to turn back and go in to the feast and accept his brother. And this is really the essential point of the story, and the appeal which it makes to us. We may just mindlessly forget some disfellowship case of years ago, leave the decision to others, forget in our own minds that there is a brother or sister begging for our renewed fellowship and forgiveness. Yet it is exactly these issues and our response to them which may decide our eternal destinies. And this was the end stress of the parable...

15:31 Much homework awaits someone to work out all the times when the Lord was speaking *to Himself* in the parables, through the elements of unreality. Perhaps He saw Himself tempted to be like the elder brother in the Prodigal parable, who was "always" in the Father's house (as Jesus per Jn. 8:35) and 'everything the father has is his' is the very wording of Jn. 17:10. Or is it co-incidence that the only time the Greek word translated "choked" is used outside the sower parable, it's about the crowds 'thronging' Jesus (Lk. 8:14,42- note how they're in the same chapter and section of the Lord's life)? Was the Lord not aware of how the pressure of the crowds, whom He carefully tried to avoid, could choke His own spiritual growth? Was it for this reason that He begged those He cured not to generate big crowds to throng Him? And thus yet another layer of the Lord's mind and thinking will be revealed to us.

16:1 The Lord Jesus without doubt focused upon the twelve disciples; they were His special love, His predominant concern. And when they came to write up their records of their experience of this

amazing Master, they bring this out very much. He clearly chose them in order to impress His character upon them, and then left them to continue the witness to Him. Even in high society, surrounded by the elitist Pharisees, He spoke parables which were to them- even though the others heard (Lk. 16:1,14; 20:45). There is a repeated feature, in Luke particularly, of the Lord teaching the twelve in front of a multitude- as if the huge crowds were there just listening to what the Lord was speaking specifically to the twelve. When one of the crowd interrupts, the Lord quickly returns His focus to the twelve (Lk. 6:19,20 cp. 7:1; 12:1,13,22). For Jesus, the disciples were His focus and priority.

The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward".

16:2- see on Lk. 20:25.

The parable of the unjust steward suggests that there are times in this life when we are called to give an account of our stewardship- and how we react to those judgment calls is what will affect our ultimate destiny (Lk. 16:2). We have a tendency to consider God as passive to our failures and acts of righteousness, simply because His judgments are not openly manifest. We may forget that on, say, 6.6.96 we swore under our breath in anger... but God, in this sense, doesn't forget. The passage of time doesn't act as a pseudo-atonement for Him as it does in our consciences. The tendency for human beings to assume that God forgets our wrong actions and will never judge them is frequently commented upon in Scripture. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness", i.e. to judge them for it at a future date (Hos. 7:2). The day of judgment is likened to God 'awaking' (Ps. 68:1; 73:20). Not that He is now sleeping; but then, the principles of His judgment which now appear to lie dormant will be openly manifested. Peter warns that the condemnation of false teachers is given by God in an ongoing sense, and that damnation doesn't slumber (2 Pet. 2:3).

The 'unjust steward' was saved because he forgave others their debts after getting into a mess himself. He wasted his Lord's goods, as the prodigal did (Lk. 15:13 connects with 16:2). Seeing the prodigal represents all of us, the lesson is surely that we all waste our Lord's goods, therefore the basis of salvation is through our forgiving others as an outcome of our own faith in the Lord's grace. This is one explanation of why the parable of the steward flows straight on from that of the prodigal.

One of the most telling examples of an unfinished ending is to be found in the parable of the unjust steward. This is perhaps the hardest parable to interpret; but I suggest the thought is along the following lines. The steward has done wrong; but the element of unreality is that he isn't jailed or even scolded, it's just left as obvious that he can't do the job of steward any longer. The usual response of a master would be to jail servants for running up debts (Mt. 8:23-25). But the Master is unusually gracious. The steward now faces poverty, and so he takes a huge gamble. Before news of his fall is common knowledge, he urgently runs around to those in his master's debt and tells them that their debts are forgiven. His haste is reflected in the way he says "Write quickly... and you... ". He has to write off their debts before his master finds out, and before the debtors know that he now has no right to be forgiving them their debts. His gamble is that his master is indeed such a generous and gracious guy that he will actually uphold these forgivenesses or reductions of debt, and that therefore those who have received this forgiveness will be grateful to the steward, and be generous to him later, maybe giving him employment. The story reflects a theme of the other parables- how the servant knows and understands his master extremely well, and can guess his response. The way the servant invites the beggars to the feast even before his master has told him to do so is an example. But the power of the parable is in the unended story. Does the gracious Master indeed

forgive those in his debt? And seeing he is impressed by how the steward has acted, does he in fact re-instate him, impressed as he obviously is by this sinful steward's perception of his grace? From the other parables we are led to believe that yes, the Lord and Master is indeed this gracious. And of course we are to see ourselves in the desperate position of the steward, staking our whole existences upon His grace and love beyond all reason. For me, this approach to the parable is the only one which can make any sense of the master dismissing the steward for fraud, and then praising him for his apparently 'dishonest' behaviour in forgiving the debtors (Lk. 16:2,8). See on Lk. 10:34.

16:4 The parable of the unjust steward must be read in the context of the preceding parables of forgiveness. The man is in debt to his Master, surely speaking of our sinfulness (Lk. 16:3,4 cp. Mt. 18:24). He has wasted his goods- which are given to us at baptism (Lk. 16:1 cp. Mt. 25:14). He *could have* begged, but he was too proud. Therefore *in order to get forgiveness* he raced round forgiving everybody else. This suggests a spiritual selfishness which surely isn't ideal. And yet "the Lord commended the unjust steward"- He makes concessions to our weakness.

16:6- see on Lk. 14:5.

16:8 There were times when the Lord used shock tactics to get His message over. He did and said things which purposefully turned accepted wisdom and understanding on its head. Thus He touched the leper, spoke of drinking His blood... and used leaven, the usual symbol for sin, as a symbol of the quiet influence of His Gospel. And His parables feature the same element. Because the parables are so familiar to us, we can overlook the fact that their true character is intended to be shocking and disturbing- they are most definitely not just comfortable, cosy, moralistic tales. Consider the way He chooses to take a lesson from a crook who fiddles the books. The 'hero' of the story was a bad guy, not a good guy. Yet the point of the story was that we must realize how critical is our situation before God, and do literally anything in order to forgive others. We can't let things drift- disaster is at the door unless we forgive others *right now*. Everything is at stake in our lives unless we forgive others. The parables didn't give simple teaching to those who first heard them. He used that form of teaching so that men would *not* understand Him; and even His disciples had to come to Him in order to receive the interpretations.

The way "the children of this world" are so zealous in forgiving others their debts so as to get themselves out of major trouble is an example to us, the Lord said (Lk. 16:8). It could be that His comment that they were "wiser than the children of light" was a rebuke to the children of light- that those in the world are more eager to forgive, more zealous in their secular lives, than many of us are. The unjust steward in the parable of Luke 16 ran round forgiving others their debts, so that in his time of crisis and judgment he would have a way out of his own debt problems. And in the context of forgiving our brethren, the Lord holds him up as an example. But He laments that sadly, the children of this world are often wiser than the children of the Kingdom, i.e. the believers (Lk. 16:8). I take this as meaning that the Lord is sorry that His people don't see the same obvious need to forgive each other, in view of their own inadequacies and the coming of judgment. The children of this world see the coming of their judgments and the urgency of the need to prepare, far more strongly than many of us do; we who face the ultimate crisis of sinful, responsible man meeting with an Almighty God.

The story of the indebted steward likewise stresses the importance of true forgiveness. The master commends the steward because he had told others that their debts to his master were reduced. No *human* master would ever commend his steward for acting so irresponsibly (Lk. 16:8). But the Lord Jesus does commend us for forgiving those who sin against Him, even though our forgiving of those indebted to us and Him is against all the laws of human common sense. See on Mt. 18:23.

16:9 The Bible has a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality. So great is the Lord's emphasis about this, that He suggests in the parable of the

crafty steward that if we use our worldly things prudently, when we spiritually fail, the fact we have used them wisely will bring us into the Kingdom (Lk. 16:9). This implication that we can almost buy our way into the Kingdom is hyperbole. This is a device the Lord commonly used in His parables: an exaggerated statement to make a point. When He spoke of the good shepherd leaving the 99 good sheep to go chase the foolish one, this doesn't really mean that He does in fact leave us. He will never leave us. But so great is His love of the lost that it's *as if* He leaves us for the sake of finding them. Or the command to gouge out our eye if it offends us. This is a gross exaggeration; but our self-deprivation of those things which lead us into sin requires the same self-will and self-mastery. So in Lk. 16:9, the Lord is saying that the use of our material possessions is *so* important that it's *almost as if* (in the hyperbole) we can buy our way into the Kingdom. See on Lk. 11:41.

We have nothing now, we own nothing, all we have is given for us to use wisely, so that when we fail (morally, in the failures of our lives), our use of these things may prepare the way for our entry into the everlasting place of the Kingdom (Lk. 16:9). We fall so easily into the trap of thinking 'this is *my* money... *I* worked for it, saved it...' It's God's money. The danger of materialism is to think it is *ours*. Israel were told that every 7th year they were to cancel debts, release each other from the debt they had; and yet it was "the *LORD's* release". You released a man from his debt, Yahweh released him. What it meant was that your money was Yahweh's money. He released the debt, you released it. In being generous spirited, then, and realizing 'our' money is God's, we are Yahweh-manifest. We are invited to see ourselves as the Levites- whose inheritance was Yahweh, and not anything material in this world. Relationship with God and the honour of doing His service was seen as the ultimate antidote to materialism. Eliphaz seems to have perceived this when he told the wealthy Job: "Lay thou thy treasure in the dust... and the Almighty shall be thy treasure" (Job 22:24,25 RV).

There is no doubt that our attitude to materialism is a sure indicator of our real spiritual position. We are to make friends of mammon [riches] by giving it away (Lk. 16), forsaking all we have- the implication being that riches / mammon are our spiritual enemy, no matter how little of them we possess. And yet we are surrounded as never before by a materialistic, money *loving* world.

16:10 God Himself 'detests' the mammon which man so highly esteems (Lk. 16:13-15 NIV). A day will come when man *will* despise material possession. "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold... to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks... for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty" (Is. 2:20,21). But for us, today is the day of the Lord's coming in judgment. If we will be forsaking all we have in that day; we ought to now, in spirit. The parable of the unjust steward surely teaches that our attitude to the "mammon of unrighteousness" will determine our eternal destiny. The wealth of this world is called "that which is least... that which is another's [i.e. God's]" (Lk. 16:10,12 RV). We are told: "make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail [at the Lord's return], they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles" (Lk. 16:9 RV). There will come a day when money will fail, and when we will despise it for what it was- "that which is least".

16:11 Lk.16:11,12 draws a parallel between the "true riches" and "that which is your own"; both phrases, in the context, refer to our reward in the Kingdom. The true riches is the spiritual knowledge of God. In Christ are hid all the riches of God. David rejoiced at the truths of the word more than at finding great riches. We can look forward to a highly personal knowledge of God in the Kingdom; the riches of knowledge "which is your own". This is in the same sense as Rev.2:17 speaks of each believer receiving a stone with "a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it". No other being will be able to enter into the personal knowledge of God which we will then have; as even in this life, it is scarcely possible to enter into another believer's spirituality and relationship with God. To some degree, the Kingdom will be something different for each of us, although this diversity will be bound together by the great unity of all being the collective bride of Christ, and all manifesting the same God, all having the same "penny a day".

If we are faithful with the riches we have been given, *then* we will be given the true riches of eternal salvation (Lk. 16:11). This "unrighteous mammon" is not our own, it is the wealth of "another man", i.e. God; whereas in the Kingdom, we will have our very own "true riches". This is an altogether lovely idea. Whatever we have now is not ours; we come into this world with nothing, and at death we carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). We must give our all if we are to attain the Kingdom.

Lk. 16:11 hammers home the point: If we are faithful in how we use the things lent to us by God in this life, we will be given "the true riches". What we now have is "the Truth", because this is how the Spirit speaks of it. But Truth is relative, and the Truth God wants us to accept as Truth is doubtless designed by Him to be acceptable by mere mortals. But it isn't "the true riches" spoken of here. We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" (Lk. 16:12) in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone. To me, those few words of Lk. 16:11,12 take me to the brink of understanding what the Kingdom will be about. We can go no further.

16:12 The time is soon coming when I will be given that which *is* my own (Lk. 16:12)- the things associated with being in the Kingdom. We are slaves now, owning nothing (1 Cor. 6:19), but then we will be gloriously free (Rom. 8:21). So this idea of owning nothing, not even ourselves, is only true of this life; the day of release from slavery will dawn, we will receive that true freedom and that true concept of personal possession- if *now* we resign it. Abraham really grasped this idea that we now can own nothing. He swore to Yahweh as "the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine..." (Gen. 14:22,23). He knew that Yahweh is the owner of all, and *therefore* he was not going to yield to the temptation to increase what appeared to be 'his' possessions. See on 1 Cor. 6:19.

We are asked to be faithful in that which is God's, and then we will be given "that which is your own" (Lk. 16:12) in the Kingdom, as if we will be given "true riches" which somehow are relevant to us alone, the name given which no one knows except ourselves (Rev. 2:17). "Riches" represent the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:13), and they are paralleled with "that which is your own", as if somehow in the Kingdom we will be given a vast depth of spiritual knowledge and perception which is in some way relevant to us alone.

The parable of the unjust steward makes the point that in the Kingdom, the faithful will be given by Christ "the true riches... that which is your (very) own" (Lk. 16:12). The reward given will to some degree be totally personal. Each works out his *own* salvation, such as it will be (Phil. 2:12)- not in the sense of achieving it by works, but rather that the sort of spirituality we develop now will be the essential person we are in the eternity of God's Kingdom.

16:13 The Lord Jesus surely based His words of Lk. 16:13 on those of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21: "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". So although on one hand the Lord Jesus Himself quotes Elijah's 'truth' approvingly, there is evidence galore that at the very same time, Elijah's attitudes were far from Christ-like, as we will show below. At the very same time, Elijah mocks the Baal worshippers, teasing them to shout louder, because maybe their god has gone 'in a journey'- a Hebraism for 'gone to the toilet' (1 Kings 18:27). This kind of mockery and crudeness is surely not how the Father and Son would have us act. Yet Elijah did this whilst at the same time deeply believing the fire would come down, and bringing it down by his faith. And saying other words which were alluded to with deep approval by the Lord.

Mammon is an "abomination" (Lk. 16:13,15)- a word associated in the Old Testament with idol worship. We are to not only be free of such idolatry, but despise materialism.

16:22 The way the Lord constructed His parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is proof enough that He Himself alluded to false ideas without correcting them, but rather in order to make a moral point within the faulty framework of understanding of His audience. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances of where a technically 'wrong' idea is used by God without correction in order to teach a higher principle. Thus an eagle doesn't bear its young upon its wings; it hovers over them. But from an earth-bound perspective, it would appear that [looking up], the eagle is carrying its young on its wings. God accommodates Himself to our earthly perspective in order to lead us to Heavenly things. He doesn't seek to correct our knowledge at every turn, or else His end aim would not be achieved.

We assume too quickly that the Lord's reference to the Angels carrying Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham means 'straight after his death'. But not necessarily so. He died, was buried, and then at the Lord's return, the Angels will carry the faithful to judgment / the Kingdom- they will go forth and gather the elect. The rich man would only be thrown into Gehenna at the last day, as Jesus so often taught elsewhere. The only element of accommodation to, or parody of, existing Jewish beliefs was in the rich man asking that Lazarus be returned from the dead to warn his brethren. And this element is doubtless inserted into the story by the Lord as a prophecy of how even His resurrection would not convert those who did not truly listen to the Old Testament.

So serious is the tendency to material acquisition that the Lord uses a telling hyperbole in Lk. 16 (in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus): He implies that the rich man was condemned just for being rich. This is hyperbole, an exaggeration to make a point. And the point was, that being rich is *very likely* to lead you to condemnation. The rust of riches is likened to the fire of condemnation and rejection (James 5:3).

16:23 Forget, for one moment, that 'the rich man and Lazarus' is a 'difficult passage'. Focus on how Lazarus is "in" Abraham's 'bosom' or chest (Lk. 16:23). This doesn't mean literally inside it. He was 'in' Abraham's arms, on his chest; and this is explained to us in v.25 as meaning that Lazarus was receiving "comfort" at the same time as the rich man was experiencing torment. Mic. 7:5 uses the same figure of being "in" a man's bosom to describe how a wife is held by her husband. And Lam. 2:12 uses it again to mean 'receiving comfort'. This is what the Kingdom will be like, especially immediately after our reward. For this is what the parable is about- the rich man will not be eternally tormented, his torment will be on knowing the reality of the fact that he stands there rejected. But while he is temporarily tormented, some poor beggar brother is getting comforted by Abraham. Both of them with Divine nature. Abraham holding the other brother to his chest and comforting him. And, in passing, this would interpret for us John's words in Jn. 1:18: "The... son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (after His ascension). After His ordeal, Jesus was as it were receiving comfort from His Father. There was and is an emotional bond between them. And so there will be between us all in the Kingdom. The parable of Lk. 16 goes on to say that there will be those who will want to cross over from rejection to acceptance, and *also*- and note this- there will be some who will want to go the other way to save those in the group of the rejected- weeping, screaming, gnashing their teeth as they will be. But it won't be possible for them. Even in Divine nature, some of us will have the desire to do the impossible- to save those rejected. It will be rather like the Angels in the time of Ahab suggesting their plans of action to God, but they were all turned down except for one. To have Divine nature, as Angels do, doesn't preclude having emotional thoughts. Nor does it mean we will have 100% understanding of God's ways beamed into us.

16:24 In the day of judgment, that man will cry out "father... have mercy / pity on me", just as Lazarus used to cry out to him daily. The apparent terseness and indifference of Abraham's response in the parable is surely intended as a reflection of the attitude which the rich man had shown to Lazarus in his mortal life. A great gap had been *fixed* between the saved and the rejected; and the language begs the question, 'Fixed by whom?'. Clearly, by the rich man in the attitude he adopted in his daily life. For it would not be God who fixed a gap between the damned and the saved; through

His Son He seeks to save and bridge such gaps. The lesson is that whenever we hear the voice of the desperate, we hear inverted echoes of our own desperation at the final judgment. And how we answer now is related to how we will be answered then. We make the answer now.

16:26 The eternal chasm between them was foreseen by the Psalmist: "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity [cp. the condemned goats]: but peace shall be upon Israel [the sheep, looking on at the rejection of the wicked]" (Ps. 125:5). Those who will want to cross the chasm then will be unable to (Lk. 16:26); the great gulf is fixed. In the context of describing the establishment of the Kingdom, we read that God's servants will eat, drink and rejoice, singing for joy of heart, at the same time as the rejected will be ashamed, hunger and thirst and howl for "breaking of spirit" - all the language of the rejected (Is. 65:13,14,17,18 RVmg.). It seems that this is a picture of the rejected watching the accepted eating with Christ as the Passover is eaten anew. Hence their howling and shame; for shame implies being naked in the presence of others. Thus the rejected will in some sense be in the presence of the accepted.

16:28 The fact that sin really does result in eternal death, and that death is really unconsciousness, there is no immortal soul, the Hebrew word *nephesh* doesn't mean that, leads us to preach the hope of resurrection which we have. It must do- for otherwise we would be plain selfish. And it makes us realize for ourselves the decisiveness and finality of this life's decisions for the determining of eternal destiny. The hope of resurrection is the first and most basic need of our fellows. It was said of the 18th century British preacher Richard Baxter that "he preached as a dying man to dying men". Our mortality, and our appreciation of that of others, should lead to an intensity of appeal to them. Knowing the truth about death leads to a great desire to testify to others. Recall how the rich man in the parable, once he perceived the truth about the death state, earnestly wished to testify to his brethren and persuade them to believe (Lk. 16:28). Elie Wiesel tells how victims of the holocaust either facing death or reflecting upon it later, felt an overbearing desire to testify to others: "We [victims of the holocaust] have all been witnesses and we all feel we have to bear testimony... and that became an obsession, the single most powerful obsession that permeated all the lives, all the dreams, all the work of those people. One minute before they died they thought that was what they had to do". We don't- quite- have to go through those starings of death in the face to perceive death as we should; for the Bible has a lot to say about it, and if we accept the Biblical definitions, then we too will feel this strong compulsion to testify to others.

16:30 Reflect on what the Lord was really saying in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It was Abraham who showed the rich man how useless were human riches. The rich man thought that his natural ancestry was enough- he appeals to "father Abraham". But the point of the parable was surely that the rich man was not a true son of Abraham because he had been materialistic and had neglected the needs of his poorer brother. *This* was and is the implication of being a true son of Abraham.

16:31- see on Lk. 24:11.

The parable of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus surely carried with it the message that we ought to be generous to the poor; and that there is a need to do this in view of the judgment to come and sense of the future we may miss because of our selfishness in this life. The condemned rich man wanted to warn others of the need to be generous to the poor so that they would not be condemned. The Lord's comment was that it was His resurrection from the dead which was intended to "persuade" people of this (Lk. 16:31). Accepting the import of His resurrection therefore should result in our being "persuaded" towards a life of generosity to the marginal- just, of course, as the Lord's death and resurrection was God's grace to us, the marginal beggars in spiritual terms.

17:1 Not all the disciples were dirt poor. Their fishing business employed hired servants. The parable about "one of you" having a servant ploughing and preparing his food was spoken to the twelve (Lk. 17:1,7).

Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation. The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share.

17:3 "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3) is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'. In Mt. 18:15, the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins... go and point out the fault... if he listens to you, you have regained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me very hard indeed to judge the level of another's repentance.

17:4 Peter found it hard to grapple with the idea that the degree or amount of sin was irrelevant. But "seventy times seven" indicated how far out he was. Even when a brother's repentance seems humanly unlikely (the 490th time in the day takes some believing!), we must still have that covenant mercy for him. Note that only a verbal repentance was required- and the Lord said that the forgiver was to just accept this, rather than demand evidence of 'forsaking' in physical terms. The Greek word for repentance is a compound meaning 'to think differently after'. Repentance is essentially a changed *attitude of mind*. This is why it's difficult to judge whether it exists within the heart of another person. Because our very natures are sinful, we live constantly in need and receipt of mercy, every second of our existence. The New Covenant is often spoken of in the Old Testament as "mercy" and/or "truth". If we are *in* that Covenant, we are permanently living *in* grace/mercy. Mercy is not something which we just receive in the few moments while we pray for forgiveness. It is something constantly ongoing. We live *in* it. If we appreciated this, we would not see our forgiveness of others as something we occasionally 'grant'; we will extend mercy to them constantly, as God does to us.

17:5 The disciples asked that as a community, their faith may be increased so as to forgive others as Jesus requires them to (Lk. 17:5). The Lord's response is that they should on an individual level realize that even if they were perfectly obedient, they were "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10)- and the only other time that term occurs on the Lord's lips is when speaking of how the unprofitable servant will be cast away to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 25:30). What He's saying is: 'Imagine condemnation. Being cast away as you stand before the judgment seat. That's you- that's what *should* happen, even if you "do" all. Get it- you're saved by grace, an amazing grace- respond to that, and forgiving others will flow naturally enough from that'.

17:8 There is the real possibility that when Christ returns, none will hold the faith (Lk. 17:8). Only eight people were truly watching when the flood came; and Peter cites this as an example for us at the time of Christ's return. No wonder there is such emphasis upon the need to watch. If we are the generation which will see Christ's appearing, we will be the only people who never physically die. And we will be those who welcome the Lord Jesus to this earth, who stand ready to welcome Him. This is an honour higher than we probably appreciate. No wonder there is this pressing need in these

last days to watch our doctrine, our way of life, *to hold on* to the great salvation which we have been given in prospect.

What we may think of as righteousness which touches His heart is nothing more than the monotonous ploughing of a field, according to Lk. 17:8-10. This extraordinary story is so simple: A master doesn't thank his slave for ploughing all day. When he comes home in the evening, the slave's job is to get the Master's food ready, and then when the Master has been looked after, he can get himself something. The Master has no need to thank (Gk. *charis*, s.w. to give "grace") the slave, and the slave expects nothing else. This is how the Lord sees our works; He expects us to serve Him for nothing, because of our role as His slaves, and not because we expect any gratitude, recognition or reward. We serve because we are His slaves. The parable teaches that absolute obedience should be the norm of our lives, not the exception, and that this is only what our Master demands and expects. From the way He told the story, Christ framed our sympathy to be with the slave. But His point is that when we have done all, worked all day and then gone the extra mile in the evening, we should still feel unprofitable slaves, slaves who aren't much profit to their Master. The passive, unspoken *acceptance* seen between Master and slave in the parable should be seen between us and the Lord. There is no attempt by the Lord to ameliorate the Master : slave figure; "Ye call me master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am" (Jn. 13:13). And yet we are told that at the judgment we will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). This can not, therefore, be praise of our efforts at obedience; it will be praise for the status we are in on account of being in Christ, being counted as righteous as Him. The parable was spoken in the context of the disciples thinking that God would be very happy with them if they forgave their brother seven times a day (Lk. 17:3-6). But the Lord is replying that things like this, which to us may seem going more than the extra mile, should be the norm; such heights of spirituality are only the daily ploughing of the field, and are only the obvious minimum which Christ accepts. He won't shew us grace ("thank") for doing this- with the implication that His grace is totally undeserved, not related to our forgiveness of others or other acts of obedience. The story paints the Master as being rather ungrateful and hard, to see his servant work so hard, then go the extra mile, and not utter a word of thanks. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, to the natural mind, that's how I am'. Christ says that the slave will not expect the Master to say to him "Sit down to meat", but will expect to be told, tired as he is, to gird himself and serve his Master (Lk. 17:7,8). The Lord's words here are surely intended to recall when He said that in the Kingdom He would make us each sit down to meat and come forth and serve us (Lk. 12:37). The point of the connection is to show that Christ's treatment of us in the Kingdom *will* be different from that of an ordinary Master, but we really, honestly shouldn't expect it; we should serve because we are His servants, not expecting any praise or response from him. As it happens, He will give us all this in the Kingdom, but we shouldn't expect this at all. As the slave would have been dumbfounded if his Master did this, so should our response be in the Kingdom. What makes it difficult is that we *know* our Master is like this, that He's a most unusual Lord, one who washes our feet; and the extraordinary relationship we have with Him ought to make us eagerly desire to show a similar service to our brethren (Jn. 13:13,14).

17:9 The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word "charis", usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" here (Lk. 17:9). The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become selves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with

each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

17:10 There is a telling detail in Lk. 17:10 which further reflects the grace of Jesus: "When ye *shall have done* (not 'when you do') all these things which are commanded you, (you will) say, We are unprofitable servants". It may be that this is taking us forward to the Kingdom; it is at the judgment that we 'do all' (Eph. 6:13), it is in the Kingdom that we will obey all the commandments (Ps. 119:6). This parable is a glimpse into the appreciation of grace we will have as we enter the Kingdom; once we are fully righteous, we will realize how unprofitable we are of ourselves (notice we may still feel in a sense "unprofitable" then). We will realize that all our service is only the repaying of the huge debt incurred by our sinfulness. *Then*, and perhaps only then, will we see works in their true perspective. This surely is the purpose of the judgment seat. We will walk away with the sense of wonder at the grace of Jesus that filled the one-hour workers as they walked away from the pay table with a day's wages.

We shouldn't be discouraged if in our self perception we see ourselves as serious sinners. We must say of ourselves that "we are unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10)- i.e. condemned, for this is how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Lord's thinking (Mt. 25:30). This is the finest paradox of all. If we perceive ourselves as worthy of condemnation, we will be saved. If we would judge [i.e. condemn] ourselves, we will not be judged / condemned (1 Cor. 11:31).

As slaves, we serve without expecting any thanks at all; we do what is our duty to do by reason of who we are (Lk. 17:10). The Lord spoke this in response to the disciples saying it was impossible for them to accept His teaching about unconditional forgiveness of each other (Lk. 17:5). Man's ingratitude is perhaps one of the hardest winds to weather, and it can so easily blow us off course in our service. But as the Lord's slaves, judged by Him alone, we didn't ought to look for recognition of our labours; neither should we demand apologies for *anything*. The Lord humbled Himself to wash the feet of His brethren, even though He was their leader (Phil. 2:4-11 is full of allusion to the foot washing incident, as if there the Lord exemplified the spirit of the cross). There may be brethren who consider it beneath them to talk to others, who think it is not for them to help wash up or move furniture or all the host of other tasks that our gatherings require. But in these things lies the spirit of Christ. Paul didn't lord it over others, but was a fellow-worker with them (2 Cor. 1:24). It is one of the finest paradoxes: that he who is the greatest must be the servant of all. See on Mk. 10:45.

17:11 Time and again, the Gospel records reveal how the disciples manifest the Lord Jesus. There are several passages where the text is unclear, as to whether it should read, e.g., "As *they* were on the way" or "As *He* went" (Lk. 17:11 RV cp. AV). The textual confusion may reflect the unity between the Lord and His preachers. Even within the Gospels, incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same.

Even when He was heading away from Jerusalem during the course of that final journey, He's still described as going to Jerusalem, Lk. 17:11.

17:12 Reflect how the group of ten lepers huddled together, Jew and Samaritan together, their differences sunk in their common appreciation of their desperation (Lk. 17:12). In deep seated humility, we can wait with unfeigned faith for the day of acceptance to dawn, serving with a true love, not interested in feuding with our brethren, thankfully partaking of the emblems with them, not forgetting *how* we were cleansed from our past sins (cp. 2 Pet. 1:9 RV- a sure allusion to the nine ungrateful lepers who forgot the wonder of their cleansing). If we remember how we were cleansed, then there will abound in us virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness,

culminating in a true love (so Peter's logic runs in 2 Pet. 1:5-9). For our desperation, the cross of the Lord Jesus, the frankness of the Father's forgiveness- these things will ever *live* within our grateful, gracious souls.

17:20 The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

The tendency to multiply words in prayer without intensely *meaning* them is probably behind the Lord's teaching about faith as a grain of mustard seed, which could move a mountain (Lk. 17:20). He's surely saying that a little bit of the *real thing* can do such wonders.

"When will the Kingdom come?" was another perennial question (Lk. 17:20)- again answered by the Lord redirecting the entire enquiry. "The kingdom of God is within you... as it was in the days of Lot... one shall be taken and the other shall be left" (Lk. 17:34). 'Don't worry about the calendar date, don't let a fascination with prophecy distract you from the personal reality that whenever I do come, some will be left behind. Will that be *you*?'. See on Lk. 19:11.

17:21 The life that He had and now lives is the essence of the Kingdom life. Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God" (Lk. 17:21). And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

"The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). This is more correctly translated "the kingdom of God is *among* you" (see A.V. mg.). The context shows that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees (v.20); the "you" therefore refers to them. They were certainly not Christian believers - the kingdom of God was not established in *their* hearts. The Jews were making a great public show of their zeal in looking for Messiah. In this passage, "the kingdom of God" seems to be a title of Messiah, seeing he is to be the king of the kingdom. Thus when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Blessed is he (Messiah) that comes in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9,10). This parallels Messiah and "the kingdom". Thus John the baptist preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he (Jesus) that was (prophesied)" (Mt. 3:2,3). In our passage in Luke 17:20-24, Jesus answered their question about "when the kingdom of God should come", by speaking about the coming of "the son of man". Christ's point was that the Jews were making so much show of being on the look out for Messiah's coming, expecting him to be suddenly revealed in power, that they failed to realize that Messiah - "the kingdom of God" - was already among them in the humble person of Jesus. Thus he warned them: "The kingdom of God (Messiah) comes not with outward show... behold, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20,21). A well known theologian, Joachim Jeremias, has come to the same conclusion: "The meaning 'indwelling in' can certainly be excluded. Neither in Judaism nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that the reign of God is something indwelling in men, to be found, say, in the heart; such a spiritualistic understanding is ruled out both for Jesus and for the early Christian tradition" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1972) p. 101). He goes on to draw out the parallel between Lk. 17:21 and Lk. 17:23,24:

"Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you... And they shall say to you, Lo, there! Lo, here! go not away, nor follow after them: for as the lightning, when it flashes out of the one part under the heaven, shines unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day".

The parallel is between the Kingdom of God coming at the return of Christ at the last day- and the Kingdom being 'within' or 'among' you. Jeremias suggests on this basis that "the Kingdom of God is within / among you" means 'The Kingdom of God will come among you suddenly and visibly, at the last day- so it's no good expecting it right at this moment now'.

Who He was and is, this is the definition of the Kingdom life. It's why one of His titles is "the kingdom of God" (Lk. 17:21). And it's why it can be said that we 'have' eternal life now, in that we can live the essence of the life we will eternally live, right now.

17:22 Lk. 17:22 warns that in the last days, the Lord's disciples will "desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it". Yet Jn. 8:56 implies it is always possible to see one of the days of the Son of man through faith in Him. Is the Lord not hinting here that there will be a clouded spiritual vision amongst His latter day followers, even though they will "desire" this not to be the case? And can we not see uncomfortable similarities with our position and feelings today, realizing our vision is somewhat clouded, desiring for things to be different, but still not seeing...?

17:24-26 Lk. 17:24-26 speaks of the days of the Son of man" - and refers them to three things:

1. The days of Christ's ministry
2. The time leading up to His return
3. The day of judgment, of His actual second coming.

Putting these together, we come to the following conclusion: those living in the very last days will effectively be living with the actual presence of Christ, it will be as if Christ has physically returned, although He has not done so. This may well be in order to provide encouragement to the persecuted saints in their latter day holocaust; but it surely suggests that they will *know* that Christ is about to return, that they are living in the days of the Son of man. Those days leading up to Christ's return will not, therefore, just seem like any other portion of human history- *to the faithful*. The signs will be so clear to them that it will be as if Christ has returned.

17:26 The idea that the believers who live on the brink of the second coming *will* know the day and hour fits in with at least two themes in latter day prophecy: firstly, that there will be a sudden upsurge in Biblical and prophetic understanding within the true ecclesia in the very last days; and secondly, the repeated teaching that the second coming will occur after a defined, specific number of days of persecution (literal days, it seems, seeing that no figurative interpretation makes any real sense). The believers who are alive in this period and correctly perceive their position in prophecy will then be in exactly the situation we spoke of at the beginning of this study: they will *know* with absolute certainty that the Lord's coming is imminent. This is why the days leading up to Christ's return are called "the days of the son of man" (Lk. 17:24,26)- the signs will be so clear that it will be *as if* he's back. And doubtless in the depths of their (our?) tribulation, we'll dearly cling on to that glorious assurance.

17:26-32- see on 2 Pet. 2:5-8.

17:27 In *Contra Celsum* we read Origen justifying the Christian church against Celsus' criticisms that it is a church of poor, simple people. That the majority of Christians would be poor and simple was indeed the expectation of both the Lord Jesus and Paul. Yet Origen seeks to justify the Christian church as middle class and respectable, with respected intellectuals amongst its membership. It was and is this desire to be seen as worldly-wise and 'normal' which is the death-knoll for any revival of Christianity. It was this which led to the acceptance of the Trinity; and it is this which robs true Christianity of its radical nature and appeal today. Perhaps in our last days this lesson needs to be learnt as never before. The Lord's picture of the world of the last days is of a household eating and drinking, absorbed with being normal (Mt. 24:38; Lk. 17:27). But the Lord's point is that this very 'normal' behaviour is what He finds so wrong.

17:28 There can be no doubt that the sexual aspects of Sodom's sins have great similarity to the moral filth of our present world. But significantly it was not this aspect which our Lord chose to highlight when speaking of how "the days of Lot" typified those of His return. Instead He spoke of those things which were more likely to ensnare His people: "*They* (as well as our present world) did eat, *they* drank, *they* bought, *they* sold, *they* planted, *they* builded" (Lk.17:28). Their obsession with

daily activities without an awareness of God was as bad as their other sins; a point we would do well to be aware of. However, their eating and drinking must have been to gross excess- Ez.16:49 defines "the iniquity of Sodom" as being "fulness of bread" among other things. Some lavish Christian lifestyles frequently feature "fulness of bread" - but because it is not perceived as a gross sin, this unhealthy similarity with Sodom slips by unchallenged. "They bought, they sold" suggests that Sodom was a major trading centre, rapidly increasing in wealth; "they planted, they builded" (Lk.17:28) implies a real boom town. Such success resulted in the people being proud and haughty (Ez.16:49,50); the wealth created at the expense of others brought about "abundance of idleness in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ez.16:49). It is these aspects of Sodom which are so precisely matched by our self-centred, money mad world. As our Lord realized, it is these aspects which are most likely to ensnare the child of God. Yet Sodom's people were not completely unaware of their religious conscience. Jeremiah likened the false prophets of Israel who effectively taught that sin was service to God to the people of Sodom, suggesting that they too said the same (Jer.23:14). This is another hint that the people of Sodom had some degree of responsibility, as have latter day Israel whom they typify.

17:29 The whole human experience is analogous to sleepwalking; we go through the motions of reality, but actually (as a race) we are spiritually asleep. The world around us are sleepwalking, in God's eyes. And we too should share His perspective. The Lord said that Lot in his last days in Sodom was a type of the believers living in the world at the time of the end (Lk. 17:28-31). Lot in those last hours was walking around the streets of that city trying to save his family, walking amidst angry, blind people who hated him, drunk on their own lusts. Walking those streets must have been an uncanny experience. But that is God's picture of the world of our day, and our own uncanny, almost charmed life amongst the sleepwalkers

17:30 "The day of Christ" refers both to the time of the believers' judgment seat in Phil. 2:16, and to the lightning-like appearing of Christ to the world in judgment in Lk. 17:23,29,30. The coming of Christ in judgment will be at the same 'day' for both believer and unbeliever. But what evidence is there that the "*day* of Christ" is a period of 24 hours? We *must* understand that the meaning of time as we know it will be collapsed around the time of the second coming. It is for this reason that we can only suggest *possible* chronological scenarios, of which there are as many versions as there are Bible students.

God's Name is essentially His character. He *is* His character. In all He creates and destroys, in all He shows of Himself to man, this character is revealed, magnified and glorified. Lk. 17:30 says that at the last day, the Son of man will be "revealed"; and yet the other references to the Son of man being revealed refer to the way He is even now revealed to His true followers by the Father (Mt. 11:27; 16:17 etc.). At the second coming, the real nature of God's Son, the essence of His character, will be revealed to all. At the very time that the Wicked One will be revealed, so will the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:8). In the way God judges man, His character is again glorified and revealed; for in the way He judges, His essential characteristics are revealed. It is therefore possible to see anticipations of the day of future judgment in how God has judged in the past- thus incidents like Adam and Cain's rejection, the Babylonian and Roman invasions and the subsequent condemnation of God's people, the flood... all these are prototypes of the future judgment. Take, for example, the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom. It is full of language elsewhere used about the judgment seat.

17:31- see on Lk. 14:33.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded

and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The news that Joseph was alive and glorified was received rather like that of Christ's resurrection: initial disbelief, but then the family of Jacob who believed it rose up and left all they had to go to be with Joseph; Israel in AD70 and the last days are likewise bidden leave their stuff and go to be with Christ (Gen. 45:20 cp. Lk. 17:31).

17:32 Lot seems to have gone to Sodom for material ends- our Lord holds up his wife as an example of those who love the materialism of this world more than the reality of his Kingdom (Lk.17:31,32). But the Angels speak of spiritually prepared people as being the only real possessions Lot had: "Whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out".

"But his wife looked back from behind him" (Gen.19:26) suggests the picture of the wife following behind Lot, filled with remorse at the loss of all she had held dear. Our Lord comments concerning not desiring our "stuff which is in the house" in the day of his coming: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever (like her) shall seek (Greek: 'plot') to save his life shall lose it". We can infer from this that she plotted and schemed how to save her possessions- i.e. her 'life', seeing that for her, her life did consist of the abundance of the things which she possessed (Lk.12:15). These feelings grew so strong that she paused to take a loving, wistful look at the city. Remember that the fire only fell after Lot was in Zoar; therefore the city was looking as it normally did. Their exodus was at night- "the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar" (Gen.19:23), so she would have seen the flickering lights of the city in the distance. Compare this with how the virgins of Mt.25 go out to meet their Lord at night.

"Remember Lot's wife" suggests that we should meditate upon her position as it has especial warning for the last days. Her leaving of Sodom appears to have been due to the personal influence of Lot her husband, yet ultimately she failed to have that personal desire to obey God. It would not be pushing the type too far to suggest that the wives of latter day believers may feel that they can enter the Kingdom in the spiritual shadow of their husbands. One cannot help wondering whether she left Ur not through personal response to the promises but because the others were leaving. Doubtless her uncle Abraham would have led her and the whole family in regular prayer and meditation during the journey towards Canaan. But somehow the reality of the God of Israel was never allowed to touch her inner being, and the years of the soft life in Sodom would have sealed her spiritual state. It is hard to avoid making the point that many of us may be in a similar position. Gen. 19:14 RVmg. brings out the likely immediate background to her decision. Lot's sons in law

“were to marry” his daughters. The Lord too perceived that they were marrying and giving in marriage the very day the flood came, and He pointed out the similarities with the Sodom situation (Lk. 17:27-29). Could it not be that the very day of the double wedding, they had to leave? With all the build up to the wedding, Lot and his wife would so wanted to have stayed just another day to see the wedding of their two daughters. It is to the girls credit that they both left. But Lot’s wife had invested so much in it emotionally that she just had to look back.

17:34 Not only is the city of Sodom representative of the world of the last days, but Lot's calling out of Sodom by the Angels is typical of our being 'taken' by Angels to meet the Lord.

In that day, "One will be taken, whilst the other will be left [behind]" [Lk. 17:34]. The Greek for "taken" is the same as in Jn. 14:3- the Lord comes again to *take* us to be with Him. Seeing this passage also speaks of the second coming, it seems to me on reflection to fit more logically that the faithful are taken away; and the rejected 'left behind'. The Greek word for "left" really has the idea 'sent away'. Whilst it's not the same Greek word, it is the same *idea* as in several pictures of the judgment- the rejected are 'sent away'; the idea of being 'left sitting' doesn't seem to be there. So in the very moment of the Lord's return, the essential division is made; the faithful are taken, whilst the rejected are "left", but their being "left [behind]" is actually their condemnation, their being sent away from the Lord.

17:36- see on 1 Thess. 4:15.

17:37 God sometimes uses language in a way which we may find embarrassing or inappropriate. Thus when creating a mini-parable to explain the gathering of the responsible to him at the second coming, Jesus likens himself to a rotting carcass which will instinctively attract the eagles, representing the responsible (Lk. 17:37). Within the human use of language, it seems inappropriate to liken the Lord Jesus Christ to a decaying carcass. It seems similarly inappropriate to liken God's response to our prayers to an unjust judge who grudgingly answers requests (Lk. 18:1-7), or to repeatedly compare Jesus to a thief (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,33; 1 Thess. 5:2-4; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). It seems out of place to liken believers struggling to enter the Kingdom to violent people trying to storm a city by force (Mt. 11:12). The absentee landlords of Galilee were despised by all; and yet the Lord uses one of them as a figure for Himself (Lk. 20:9). Most stunning of all is Psalm 78:36,65,66: “They (Israel) did flatter Him (God) with their mouth... then the Lord awaked... like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts”. Now hold on, this just isn't what we expect; to read about God being flattered by foolish men, and for Him to be likened to a drunken soldier who goes on the rampage kicking others in their private parts (this is alluding back to 1 Sam. 5:9). And the Lord likens His final appeal to Israel to casting dung around them (Lk. 13:8).

18:1 Lk. 18:1: "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint". There are so many allusions by Paul to this verse and the ensuing parable. This shows just how like us Paul was; he had his favourite parables, one or two that really stuck in his mind, just as we do. And he alluded to them! They were in his heart, to inspire and motivate him, just as the Lord intended. Paul picks up the idea of not fainting in 2 Thess. 3:13: "Brethren, be not weary (s.w. "not to faint") in well doing" . What well-doing did Paul have in mind? Attending the Sunday meetings? Being patient with some difficult sister in the ecclesia? The connection with Lk. 18:1 tells us what he had in mind: keep on praying intensely. It's no co-incidence that Paul started that section of 2 Thess. 3 (in v.1) with the exhortation: "Brethren, pray for us". And he concludes it with the same rubric: "Brethren, be not weary" (faint not), in your prayers. He knew from the parable that repeated prayer was powerful. And so he asks them to keep at it for him, because he needed it. Perhaps Paul had the same thing in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians (3:13): "In (Christ) we have boldness and access with confidence (to God, in prayer, cp. Heb. 4:16)... *wherefore* I desire that ye faint not (s.w. Lk. 18:1) at my tribulations"; is he not implying 'You know how powerful prayer is, so don't faint in it, you know what struggles I'm having, *please* keep on praying for me, like that persistent

widow in the parable'. This fits in with a number of other passages in which Paul unashamedly begs his brethren to pray for him. In this we see his humility, his high regard for other brethren who were almost certainly weaker than him, and also the physical desperation of his daily life.

18:1-5 Note the Psalmists' *joy* that judgment is coming (Ps. 67:4; 96:12,13). The same spirit can be seen in the parable of the woman who keeps begging the unjust judge to open her case. She may have had her little piece of land taken away from her, whatever it was, she is confident she has a watertight case and this is why she so pesters the judge to judge her (Lk. 18:1-5). Now this is a powerful challenge to a brotherhood which underneath seems to *fear* the judgment process. David shows the same spirit in asking God to 'avenge my cause' (Ps. 35:23). There is the same confidence that by grace, he is in the right and longs for justice to be done. So much of Romans is dedicated to the images of the court room; we are justified, and we should be earnestly seeking the vindication of Spirit against flesh.

18:3 Much of the pain felt by the spiritually abused focuses upon the issue of injustice. They were treated like *this*, but others are treated like *that*; *you* can't break bread in a church, but *he* can, even though *they* know that *he* is homosexual; *she* isn't allowed to attend the gathering but *he* is, and so forth. The Lord told a parable about a woman who repeatedly asked for 'justice', with the implication that she would only eventually find it at the Lord's return. But He went straight on to tell another parable, about the repentant man who beat upon his breast saying "God have mercy upon me, the sinner"; this man "went down to his house *justified*". The theme of 'justification' is thus a thread which continues from the woman demanding 'justification' (Gk.) against her abuser (Lk. 18:3). The Lord's point wasn't merely that justice will only be ultimately done at His return; but further, that we are all serious sinners, who have been 'justified' by God's grace; and this colossal-scale experience of receiving undeserved justice / justification should mean that we're not so concerned about receiving justice in human matters in this life. There cannot be perfection this side of God's Kingdom being established upon earth. To seek for perfection in relationships is perhaps reflective of a lack of faith or understanding relating to the Kingdom of perfection which is yet to come. One of the greatest things for me about that Kingdom is the unity and perfection of relationships which there will then be. It is, however, all so hard because the New Testament presents how the church should be- an ideal of loving, sensitive, caring relationships in the spirit of Christ. And this is very attractive to us. It's very hard, therefore, to face the reality that this great intention, this lofty possibility, has actually been left unachieved by the church. It's like reading the descriptions of God's house in Ezekiel 40-48. This wonderful temple could've come about in Ezekiel's time. The possibilities are given in such great detail- but their fulfillment was quite simply dependent upon whether Judah wished to make it come real by living up to it (Ez. 43:10-12). And they chose not to. It's the same with the ideal "house of God" presented to us in the New Testament. Those who tend towards perfectionism find this very hard to cope with. It is indeed a tragedy, that so much Divine potential is as it were wasted, not realized, by our dysfunction. But none of this should take away from the personal reality of salvation and relationship with God which we each have. This is not to say that exposing abuse and dealing with it shouldn't happen. It should. But let's not feel that if justice isn't done, we are somehow without justice. We are the ultimately justified, and our standing before God's judgment seat is far more significant than our standing before that of mere humans.

First century Palestinian peasant courts have been described in some detail. They involved a mass of men shouting at the judge, who usually decided cases according to who gave the largest bribe. Women never went to court. It was a man's world there. This woman had no male in her extended family to speak for her. She had no money to pay a bribe. But still she went to court and sought to persuade the judge. In this element of unreality we see the bravery of prayer, the height of the challenge; that we who have nothing and no human chance of being heard, will indeed be heard. It would've struck the initial peasant hearers of the story as strange that above all the male shouting, somehow this heroic woman was heard- and was heard repeatedly. Again, we see an encouragement

to prayer. And to liken powerful praying to a woman was in itself unusual in that male dominated age.

18:5- see on Lk. 11:7.

The widow by her continual coming in prayer 'wearied ' the judge into responding (18:5); Strong defines this Greek word as meaning 'to beat and black and blue' (RVmg. gives "bruise"). It's a strange way of putting it, but this is another reminder of the intense struggle of prayer. Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. Our prayers are to give the Father no "rest" (Is. 62:7), no cessation from violent warfare (Strong). See on Col. 2:1.

The parable of the widow who keeps nagging the free-wheeling judge is rather humanly unlikely. Would such a tough guy really pay attention to the repeated requests of the woman? But although he considers himself independent of both God and men, he ends up being controlled by the widow. This reflects the immense power which there is in human prayer, and God's willingness to respond if we are importunate enough.

18:7- see on 2 Pet. 3:9.

The many connections between Revelation and the Gospels need to be followed up; the incidents in Christ's earthly experience seem to be woven by him into the fabric of the visions he gives John. The theme of persecution is especially common. The widow crying to God because of persecution represents the prayers of the "elect" remnant of the last days (Lk. 18:7 cp. Mk. 13:20). They will be asking for vengeance against the beast which is persecuting them, and thus this parable is the basis for the souls under the altar crying out for vengeance (Rev. 6:9). Christ's return is therefore the day of vengeance (Lk. 21:22; Is. 34:8; 61:2; 63:4) of his persecuted latter day ecclesia. Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.

All these are latter day problems: abuse of "the little ones", self-righteousness and lack of real faith in prayer.

We read that God *will* shorten the period of time of trouble before His return (Lk. 18:7); and we read that He *will* also lengthen the period of grace (Lk. 13:6-9)... *if* His people ask Him. What He 'will' do perhaps should be read as what He *can* do. And this is why so much prophecy is conditional. Significantly, no other religion that I know contains this feature- of a God so passionate and so real that He will change His stated will and intention for the sake of His people's prayers.

18:8 "Nevertheless", despite the fact God answers prayer, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith?" (Lk. 18:8). The implication is that the experience of answered prayer *ought* to develop faith, but such will be the spiritual perils of the last days and the lack of serious prayer, that there may well be no faith in the final generation.

18:9-14 Despite the power of prayer in bringing about the Lord's return in vengeance, Lk. 18:9-14 continues in this same context to warn that despite this:

- Perhaps the Lord won't find such faith in prayer when he returns
- Many will pray but be so sure of their own righteousness that their prayers are hindered
- The disciples will tend to despise the little ones in the ecclesia.

May we not give way to these latter day temptations!

18:10 We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are “unprofitable servants” (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). If we realize our utter spiritual desperation, our worthiness of rejection, our betrayals of our Lord's love, if we condemn ourselves in our own judgment; *then* we will not have to go through this process when the Lord comes. Yet if we don't do this, Paul says, then we are drinking condemnation to ourselves at the last day. It's a powerful, terrifying argument. Such *must be*- not ought to be- our level of self-analysis and knowledge of our desperation. If we so know our desperation now, we will not be condemned. Knowing and feeling our desperation is the key to so many Christian problems: monotony and boredom in spiritual life, problems with our partner, with our ecclesia, pride, a critical, ungrateful spirit, a lack of heartfelt praise, a reserve in witnessing. Even division amongst us would be outlawed by a true sense of our personal desperation. See on Lk. 6:42.

18:11 The OT idiom of prayer ‘returning into one’s own bosom’ is surely the quarry from which the Lord dug His image of a man praying *with himself*. It isn’t real prayer; it’s one part of the brain talking to a black box in another part of the brain, that we call ‘God’.

18:13 - see on Ps. 51:4; Lk. 23:48; 1 Tim. 1:16.

Usually men prayed with hands crossed over their chest. But men even at funerals don't usually beat upon their breast: "The remarkable feature of this particular gesture is the fact that it is characteristic of women, not men". The man was quite exceptionally upset and in grief- because of his sins. And personal recognition of private sin wasn't a big feature of first century life. The Lord's initial audience would've been amazed at the contrition and grief which this man had because of his secret sins; and this is the lesson for us. The times of prayer in the temple coincided with the offering of the daily sacrifices. The man asks for God to 'have mercy on me' (Lk. 18:13). But he uses a different word to that in Lk. 18:38, where the same translation commonly occurs. *Hilastheti moi*, he says; and the noun occurs only in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10 to describe the atonement sacrifice. It seems the man was so extraordinarily moved by his own sin and the sacrifice offered. No wonder the same phrase occurs in Lk. 23:48 about people likewise beating their breasts in repentance when they saw the actual sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The humble man “smote his breast, saying, God, be *merciful* to me a sinner”. “Be merciful” translates the word elsewhere translated “make propitiation”, in describing the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2:17). The man’s sinfulness drove him to plead for the cross: ‘Please God, make a propitiation for me’ was his plea. He realized his need for the cross. And we should look back at the cross and feel and know the same need. . According to the Lord's own teaching, there are in some ways only two types of believer: either we are the self-righteous Pharisee, or the publican who beats his breast in self-loathing, hating his corrupt heart, begging for “mercy” [Gk. propitiation], confessing that he is *the* sinner (Lk. 18:13 Gk.). Paul, in one of his many allusions to the Gospels, reached the same height of contrition when he said, in total honesty, that he was “[the] chief of sinners”. James 4:9 tells some believers in the Jerusalem ecclesia that their joy ought to be turned to heaviness, implying the downcast look of the publican who could not so much as lift up his eyes to God (Lk. 18:13). This man is held up by the Lord and James as some kind of hero and example to us.

The man who ‘humbled himself’ smote upon his breast in knowledge of his own sin and his Lord’s grace (Lk. 18:13). The Greek phrase occurs elsewhere only once, again in Luke’s thought, in describing how those humbled by the vision of the cross beat upon their breasts (Lk. 23:48)- surely in recognition of their sin and contrition before the grace of God outpoured. In the cross, we see self-humbling that we might be exalted. And we respond by likewise humbling ourselves, that others may be exalted.

18:14- see on 2 Cor. 11:7.

The Lord taught that he who humbles himself in prayer will be exalted (Lk. 18:14). Paul perhaps had this in mind when he spoke of how the Lord Jesus on the cross humbled Himself that He might be exalted (Phil. 2). Real prayer is a humiliating experience, a true humbling of self after the pattern of the Lord's crucifixion. We really need to ask ourselves whether this is anywhere near true of our prayer life.

To come before "the throne of grace" is to come in essence before the judgment and before the cross of our Lord. Inevitably these things convict us of our desperation. The publican who beat upon his breast "went down to his house justified" (Lk. 18:14). Yet we were justified by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9). That man's faith was consciously focused upon the Lord's sacrifice. We believe on Him who justifies us, through the blood of the cross (Rom. 4:5), and this faith is manifested through focusing upon the cross, and expressing it in prayer to be justified. The publican went home after prayer "justified rather than the other". It has been suggested that this reflects "a Semitic idiom which describes... an anticipation of his acquittal in the final judgment".

18:15- see on 1 Pet. 2:2.

18:17 We will enter the Kingdom as shy children. This is the implication of Lk. 18:17: "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein". It doesn't just mean that we must *now* be as little children, but more that we will enter the Kingdom as little children. For Jesus had just said that "of such is the Kingdom". Children unspoilt by the hardness of this world and this flesh... this is how we will be as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom. And we should live the Kingdom life now. See on Lk. 12:37.

He perceived spiritual prompts in the ordinary things of every day life. Recall how the disciples rebuked those who wanted to bring children to Jesus (Lk. 18:17). Yet He saw in them the qualities of those who would be in His Kingdom. Those kids weren't 'spiritual' in themselves. They were just Palestinian kids with well meaning mums. Yet, the Lord explained, that was no reason to disregard them. They should be seen as reminders of spiritual qualities which should be in us all. And this was how He perceived everything in His daily round of life. He raised everything to an altogether higher level.

18:18 "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" was another classic question (Lk. 18:18). 'Give me a list of dos and don'ts, I'm game'. But the answer was ultimately: "Follow me" (Lk. 18:22)- 'don't worry about specifics, but have a spirit of life committed to following Me, bearing My cross'. For that is reward enough. Likewise Peter was interested in what the reward would be for having given things up for the Lord; and the final answer is really 'I'm going to die on the cross- please share that death with me' (Lk. 18:28-33 and parallels).

18:22- see on Mk. 10:21; Lk. 10:42.

In the first century, family and the family inheritance was everything. The way the Lord asked His followers to reject family and follow Him was far more radical than many of us can ever appreciate. Likewise His command to sell everything and follow Him (Lk. 18:22) implied so much- for the Middle Eastern family estate was the epitome of all that a person had and stood for. And to be asked to give the proceeds of that inheritance to poor strangers... was just too much. It could seem, once one gets to know Middle Eastern values, that to abandon both family and the village home in favour of Jesus was just impossible- those things were more valuable to a Middle Eastern peasant than life itself. But still He asked- and people responded.

Consider the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor

"We have left all

...and come, take up the cross

[no comment by Peter- he censord this bit out in his hearing of the Lord's words]

and follow me”

...and have followed you”

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at least eight times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

18:24 Mk. 10:24 speaks of the man who trusts in riches; the parallel Lk. 18:24 speaks of him who *has* riches. To have riches is, almost axiomatically, to trust in them. This is the nature of wealth 'possession'. For the man who has / trusts in riches, he must bow down like the camel wriggling through the small gate on its knees, having shed *all* its mountain of goods. This parable was given in the context of the Lord's straight statement: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 18:14 cp. 25). As the camel rose up from its knees the other side of the gate, so within the Kingdom's gates, those who have shed their trust in possessions will likewise be exalted.

18:25 Luke's writings bear the marks of a doctor writing; he uses exact medical terms. Luke's medical language is clearly seen in how he records the Lord's words about "passing through the eye of a needle" (Lk. 18:25). He uses the Greek medical term *belone*- a surgeon's needle. Matthew and Mark use the more domestic word *raphis* (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25).

18:28- see on Lk. 14:27.

The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had “left our own homes” (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says “left *all*”. Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

18:29- see on Acts 8:12.

18:30- see on Mt. 10:27 for the allusion to Job.

18:32- see on 1 Thess. 2:2.

18:33

Judgments on Israel Experienced by Jesus on the Cross

Hos.2:3,6 = Mt.27:27-29; Jn.19:28

Josh.22:13 = Lk.18:33

Ps.89:30-32; Is.28:18 = Mt.27:30

Ez.22:1-5 = Jesus mocked by Gentile Roman soldiers, Mt.27:27-31

Is.50:2,6 = Mt.26:67; 27:30; Lk.18:32

Jer.18:16 = Mt.27:39

These similarities are too close to have been engineered humanly; if it is accepted that Jesus was crucified, it does not seem unreasonable to accept that the sufferings of Jesus described in the New

Testament really did happen. It therefore follows that Jesus of Nazareth did bear the sin and judgments of Israel, and therefore he is their saviour-Messiah.

18:34- see on Lk. 9:45.

19:9- see on Acts 16:34.

Abraham- see on Gen. 23:3.

Lk. 19:9 = Rom. 4:11,12. If you have real faith, you'll be like Zacchaeus. You'll have his determination, his unashamedness to come out in the open for Christ your Lord.

19:10- see on Mt. 13:46; Lk. 9:54,55; 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:33.

19:11 Lk. 19:11-27: 'Will the Kingdom come really soon, like, in our lifetimes?'. Answer: the parable of the pounds. Trade *your* personal talent- because there is such a thing as people being rejected at the last day because they didn't do this. See on Lk. 21:7.

19:13 How far His affairs prosper is dependent upon the zeal and initiative of us His stewards (Lk. 19:12,13; 1 Cor. 4:1,2).

As a whole, the church of all ages will fully have manifested His character. This is why it may be that the true church has been concentrated on different aspects of spirituality at different times. It also explains why the final date of the coming of Christ is in some way dependent upon our spiritual development. And it also explains why the whole body of Christ is told collectively "occupy till I come" (Lk. 19:13), using the Greek *pragmateuomai*, i.e. be pragmatic, be realistic, and develop these characteristics, so you may as a body reach the full reflection of Christ. See on Eph. 4:15.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and yet is also again called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). The point is, we must act now as men and women will do when they are on their way to judgment, and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren.

One of the Lord's pen pictures of the rejected included that of the man who thought that because he had preserved the talent (the basic doctrines of the Gospel) intact, therefore he was entitled to a place in the Kingdom. We are left to imagine him half-proudly, half sheepishly, holding it out to the Lord (Mt. 25:25). But he should have traded with his pounds (Lk. 19:13 RV)- done something with it all. The crowds hung upon Jesus' every word and teaching; it was so fascinating for them, so wonderful (Lk. 19:48 RV); and yet they still crucified Him. Those words, those wonderful ideas, didn't pierce deep within.

19:14 "They hated Joseph" because of his dream that one day he would reign over them (Gen. 37:4,8). Christ had problems with His brothers (Jn. 7:3); the Jews hated Christ and would not have him reign over them (Lk. 19:14).

19:15 If we are to take the judgment figures literally, another the question arises: Does Christ know beforehand who will be accepted, and the degree of their reward? If we take the judgment figures to have a literal meaning, then it sounds as if He doesn't know. Lk. 19:15 suggests that perhaps He doesn't know; the Lord calls the servants "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading". He is ordained *to be* judge of all (Acts 10:42). However, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with

all power given to him, this seems unlikely- although it must be remembered that in the same way as God is omnipotent and yet limits His omnipotence, so He may limit His omniscience. The shepherd sees the difference between sheep and goats as totally obvious. It needs no great examination. Surely the idea is that the judge, the omniscient Lord of all, will act at the judgment *as if* he needs to gather evidence from us and thereby reach his verdict. The parables give this impression because they surely describe how the judgment will feel to us.

The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and is called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. See on Mt. 13:47.

19:16 The purpose of the judgment is for our benefit, to develop our appreciation and self-knowledge. This is perhaps reflected by the ten pound man saying that Christ's pound had gained, had worked to create (Gk.) the ten pounds he could now offer (Lk. 19:16). The man who achieved five pounds uses a different word in describing how the pound given him had made five pounds (Lk. 19:18), while the men in Mt. 25:20,22 uses yet another word to say the same thing. This is surely a realistic picture, each of the faithful comes to the same conclusion, that what spirituality they have developed is an outcome of the basic Gospel given to each of us at our conversion; yet they express this same basic idea in different words. The place of basic doctrine as the basis for the development of all true spirituality should need no further stress, if the Lord's teaching here is appreciated.

All those who will be in the Kingdom will feel that really we should not be there, we don't deserve it, we will be hesitant to enter it and therefore Christ will have to almost make us go into the Kingdom. It's the same in the parables of Matthew 25, at the judgment Jesus will praise the righteous for doing so many good things, and then they will disagree with him, they will say 'No, we didn't do that, really we didn't', and He will say 'Yes, in my eyes, you did'. Their good works had not been consciously done. This is surely what the Lord was driving at in saying that our left hand must not know what the right hand does. We aren't to be self-consciously brooding on our own generosity. It would seem that with a spirit of amazement and surprise the man says 'Your pound has gained [more] pounds!'. It's the self-righteous, those who think they have done so much and therefore they must be in the Kingdom, who will be rejected.

19:17 The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the whole nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

The reward was way out of proportion, both to what had been given, and to what they had achieved with it: ten cities! The Master's words almost seem to be a gentle rebuke: "Because thou hast been faithful in a *very little*, have thou authority over ten cities" (Lk. 19:17); "thou hast been faithful over a *few things*, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Mt. 25:23). The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely

greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

19:18 The faithful in the parable of the talents / pounds realize that "thy pound hath gained" what spirituality they can now offer Christ at the judgment. They understand that their growth was thanks to that basic deposit of doctrine delivered to them. Each of us have been given different aspects of Christ's character to develop from the same basic doctrines, and therefore we will each have an individual discussion with out Lord. We shouldn't think of the judgment as being a process which is more or less identical for each of us. This misconception arises from failing to recognize that our meeting with Christ is only *likened* to a human judgment court. The similarities aren't exact.

We are to "gain" more for the Lord on the basis of what He first gave us. The Greek word translated "gain" is elsewhere usually used about gaining men and women for Christ- a wife 'gains' her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1); Paul sought to 'gain' people for the Lord (1 Cor. 9:19-22); we 'gain' a lost brother by pastoral effort with him (Mt. 18:15). Be that going for a coffee with him, sending an email, trying to imagine his feelings and approaching him appropriately. Significantly, the other usages of this word translated 'gain' are about the folly of gaining material wealth, even gaining the whole world. We can't be successful about the Lord's business, of gaining folks for Him, if we are selling our soul to gain material things. That's the point. We were "delivered" talents by God. It's the same word used about how the Lord Jesus exhaled His last breath on the cross; how "that form of doctrine" was 'delivered' to us before baptism (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 15:3; Jude 3). We can't say we have no talents. Christ died for you, for me; He bowed His head towards each of us personally and gave us His last breath.

19:20 In the culture of the orient, it was not usual for a person to keep money in a cloth. Their culture was to trade and barter with what they had. That a man should just bury such a talent was therefore unreal for the original hearers. The point of this unreality is surely that spiritual laziness is *so* bad. It was better to have traded and lost through genuine mistakes, through naivety, through the betrayal and deception of others, than to simply *do nothing*. I fear, really fear, that our Christian culture has bred for many of us a 'do nothing' culture- which is exactly what this element of unreality is warning against. We can delegate responsibility to church committees, to others, to our leaders; or we can do nothing out of fear, fear of making a mistake, fear of taking a risk, fear of what other brethren may think of us... all the time denying this principle of Divine delegation. And it might be added that the 'do nothing' man of the parable emphasized that the talent or money was not *his*; he returned to his Lord what was his ["*thy* talent"]. In order to trade it, or even to put it in the bank and get interest, he had to take personal ownership of it. And this he failed to do. And it is just this that we are being asked to do by our Lord- that His truth, all that He has given us, is in a sense *ours* now, to be used on our initiative, for His glory and service. Indeed, the reward of the faithful will be to be given *more* of their Lord's riches in the Kingdom, with which likewise to use their initiative in order to bring Him glory. We are left to think how the story might have gone on- the faithful were given *more* talents and they go away and do, in the Kingdom age, what they did in this life- using what they were given for *His glory and service, on their own initiative*.

We are *expected* by Christ to realize that our relationship with Him means total commitment to His cause. In this sense Jesus is a demanding Lord. Thus when He gave the talents to His servants, He doesn't tell them to trade with them; it seems that the one talent man is making this point when he says 'You gave me your money to look after, and I looked after it, I didn't steal it; you're unreasonable to think I should have done anything else with it, you're expecting what you didn't give'. And the Lord is; He expects that if we realize we have the honour of knowing His Truth, we should get on and do something with it, not just keep it until He comes back. He doesn't have to ask us to do this; He takes it as being obvious. The anger of the rejected man comes over as genuine; he really can't understand his Master. He's done what he was asked, and now he's condemned because

he didn't do something extra. He was a Lord that man never knew- until all too late. You can imagine how you'd feel if someone gives you some money to look after, and then expects you to have doubled it, although he didn't ask you to do anything with it.

19:21 The man who didn't develop as he should have done accuses the Lord of reaping what he didn't sow (Lk. 19:21). But the Lord does sow the seed of the basic Gospel, as the parable of the sower makes clear. The point is that the unworthy fail to let that seed bring forth fruit, they fail to see that the Lord expects fruit from those doctrines they have been given. But they fail to see the link between the basic Gospel and practical spirituality; they feel he's reaping where he didn't sow. Christ will require his own, i.e. that which he has sown, the basic Truths of the Gospel, with usury (Lk. 19:23). The parable of the tiny seed moving the great mountain was surely making the same point; the basic Gospel, if properly believed, will result in the most far reaching things (Mt. 17:20 cp. 13:31). There is an element of unreality in the parable of the pounds: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few pounds to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards.

19:22- see on Job 15:6.

19:23 Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44). The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee... wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank?". The rejected are to be cut in two, shown as the two faced hypocrites which they were. But the idea of cutting in two was immediately associated in the Jewish mind with making a covenant. When Abraham placed the sacrifices in two parts and the Lord passed between them, the idea was really that God would cut in two the man who broke the covenant. Hence the Jews spoke of 'cutting a covenant'. Those who have made the covenant with God but not kept it will be cut in two, as they initially agreed. God will keep His side of the covenant.

Luke 19:20–23 shows Jesus using the untrue words of the one–talent man in the parable to reason with him, but He does not correct the wrong words the man used.

According to Lk. 19:23, the Lord will show the unworthy how they could have entered the Kingdom. This is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that *at least the man should have done something!* Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used

about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, our understanding of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrine, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind.

At His coming, He will "require" of us our use of wealth (Lk. 19:23). The man who did nothing with his pound should have at least lent it out on usury, the Lord said- even though this was illegal according to Moses. He should have done at least *something* with his money, even if it involved taking a lower level of service than the Lord ideally expects.

The parables of the Kingdom speak of the eternal consequences of the judgment. The Lord will require His own at the judgment (Lk. 19:23). This doesn't mean, as the one talent man thought, that Christ will require us to give back to Him the basic doctrines of the Gospel which we were given at conversion. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our achievements at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord. See on Mt. 25:27.

19:24,25 The parable of the pounds also comments on the Angels' relationship with the unworthy. Jesus "said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. . . and they (i.e. that stood by) said unto Him, Lord, he hath ten pounds" (Lk. 19:24,25). "Them that stood by" must surely be a conscious reference by the Lord to Zechariah's prophecy of the Angels as "these that stand by" Christ (Zech. 3:4,7); note that he too speaks in a judgment/reward context. If our Lord is referring to the Angels, then we have a fascinating picture of them taking away the opportunities given to the unworthy and granting them to the accepted. Their query of the amount of reward being given fits in with what we know about their limited knowledge, and the fact that our reward will be far greater than their present status (Heb. 1,2). Hence their reverent questioning of the extent of reward being given. They said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds" (Lk. 19:25) suggests that "them that stood by" somehow questioned the Lord's judgment; their sense of equality was not that of their Lord. They felt that the gloriously strong brother with his wonderful reward didn't need it to be made even more wonderful. "Them that stood by" could refer to the Angels, or to the way in which the judgment will in some sense take place in the presence of all the believers. The fact is, even with God's nature, it will be difficult to appreciate the principles of judgment which the Lord uses; and so how much more difficult is it today!

19:25- see on Mt. 20:11.

They interrupted a parable, clearly not understanding it (Lk. 19:25). Yet the Lord said that His parables were only not understood by the unbelieving Jewish world.

Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the elder son is apparently accepted in the Father's fellowship, although his attitude to his weak brother is so wrong (Lk. 15:31); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

19:26 At judgment day, the rejected who have nothing will find that even what they have is taken from them (Lk. 19:26). This surely means that the spirituality they appeared to have, what they thought they had, actually they never had, and even the appearance of it will be taken away from

them. We can appear to have spirituality, when in fact we have nothing, nothing at all. The man who built his house on the sand had the sensation of spiritual progress; he was building, he was getting somewhere, apparently. Likewise Israel were an empty [fruitless] vine, but they brought forth fruit- to themselves. In reality they had no fruit; but they went through the fruit-bearing process (Hos. 10:1). In Jer. 5:13, God mocks the false prophets as being "full of wind", or 'ruach'- with which His true prophets were filled. This play on words reveals that spirituality is either the real thing, or a being filled with wind in such a way that apes the true spirituality.

19:27- see on Rev. 14:10.

It is fairly certain that time will be compressed at the judgment seat; there will therefore be no problem in such an individual discussion between each of the responsible and Christ. Several Bible passages suggest a going through of *works*; and yet we know that the basis of acceptability with God is not works but rather faith. The judgment of our works seems not to be related to as it were weighing up our salvation chances. For salvation is a gift, unrelated to works. That's what grace is about. But our use of our talents will be related to who and how we will eternally be. In the parable of the talents, the one talent man who kept his talent but didn't use it will have that talent taken from him; but Lk. 19:27 continues the story: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me". The implication seems to be that the one talent man is saved and doesn't share in the condemnation of the wicked which will happen at the final judgment. The 'going through' of works is therefore for our benefit, to teach us- not as a basis upon which the Lord decides worthiness. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23).

19:35 When they put their clothes on the colt and started mistakenly proclaiming Jesus as the triumphal Messiah entering Jerusalem to begin His political Kingdom, the Lord doesn't rebuke their misunderstanding. Instead, He defends them to the critical Pharisees (Lk. 19:35-37,40). He imputed righteousness to them, as He does to us today.

19:38 God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). Thus Matthew records that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:9). Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. We have seen that the accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

When the people shouted Hosannas and "Blessed be the King that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Lk. 19:38), they thought the Messianic Kingdom had come. And the Lord didn't turn round and correct them for their misapplication of Scripture. Neither did He reject them or call fire down from Heaven upon them because of their misunderstanding. He said nothing, and let the crowd live on in their misunderstanding and see His death – in order to teach them something about what was needed in order to enable the Kingdom. And the same 'long term' approach of the Lord is found in His dealing with the demons issue. The elder son in the parable falsely claims to God that he has never broken one of His commands; but although this is evidently untrue, the father (representing God) does not correct him in so many words (Lk. 15:29-31).

19:40 Often Scripture alludes to or quotes other Scripture which may seem out of context, if we insist on seeing everything from our viewpoint of time. Thus Lk. 19:40 quotes Hab. 2:11 concerning the stones of apostate Israel crying out, and apparently applies it to the acclamation of faithful men. Matthew particularly seems to quote Scripture which is relevant to the Lord's second coming as applying to His first coming. Indeed, the way the NT quotes the OT apparently out of context is a sizeable problem. There are times when we may quote or allude to the words of a Bible passage quite out of context, just because the words seem appropriate. And it seems the NT sometimes does just the same. Search and try as we may, the context seems just inappropriate. This may be explicable by understanding God to have the ability to take words from one time-context and insert them into another, in a way which to us is not contextual. *We* have no authority to do this; but *He* can. *He* can speak as if "the resurrection is past already"; but for us to do so is to deny the Faith.

19:41-44 1 Pet. 2:12 defines the "day of visitation" as that of the Lord's return to earth to establish His Kingdom. But a similar idea is to be found in Lk. 19:41-44. Because Jerusalem knew not "the time of your visitation", she didn't perceive the things of "her peace" "in this day" (RV), *therefore* days of destruction would come upon her in AD70. The implication surely is that had Jerusalem accepted Jesus as Messiah, the events of AD70 need never have happened, and His first coming could have been the day of "visitation" to establish God's Kingdom. Of course God's program functioned differently because this never happened; but that doesn't take away from the fact that it was truly possible.

19:41-44- see on Lk. 21:20-24.

19:42 The pain that arises from knowing what might have been is so poignantly brought out by the grief of Martha and Mary over their brother's death- they knew that if Jesus had have been there, Lazarus wouldn't have died (Jn. 11:21,32). Jesus as God's Son had something of this ability to see what might have been- hence He could state with absolute confidence that if Gentile Tyre and Sidon had witnessed His miracles, they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes (Lk. 10:13). He lamented with pain over the fact that things would have been so much better for Jerusalem if she had only known / apprehended the things which would bring her ultimate peace (Lk. 19:42). The Lord Jesus was deeply pained at what might have been, if the things of God's Kingdom had not remained willfully hidden from Israel's perception. His pain was because of realizing what might have been. In this He was directly reflecting the mind of His Father, who had previously lamented over Jerusalem: "O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river" (Is. 48:18).

19:44 All major events in God's purpose have occurred within the approximate period when true students of the word expected them to - the Flood, the desolation of Jerusalem and its rebuilding, the Lord's first coming, the events of A.D. 70 etc. are all good examples. How much more then with the time of the second coming and the consummation of God's purpose? "The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto His... prophets" (Amos 3:7), and the purpose of their writing was so that we might understand. The Lord rebuked the Jews because they couldn't discern the signs that Messiah's first advent was with them (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44); and his first advent was a type of his second. The coming of judgment through the Babylonians was another type of the last days; and Israel were criticized for not perceiving the approach of that day, whereas "the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming" (Jer. 8:7). This means that as the natural creation have an inherent knowledge of the seasons, so God's people should have a sense of the time of the Lord's coming. The Lord said the same when he spoke of how our internal awareness of the approach of Summer should correspond to our certain knowledge of the Kingdom's approach.

The grace of Jesus and His Father, so great, *so* free, was a challenge for even the Lord to express in any verbal medium. The way He spoke was grace itself. He wept over the men of Jerusalem, sorrowing that their destruction must come because "thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"

(Lk. 19:44). He could have quite well said: "because you have rejected me...". But His grace was greater than to say that. The utter inappropriacy of our salvation is brought out time and again in His teaching. The oil lamp with the bruised reed and smoking flax which annoyingly filled the house with smoke was nurtured and tolerated in hope by this Lord of ours.

19:48- see on Lk. 19:13.

20:9 'From where do you get your authority? What is your exact nature and relationship to God?' was answered by the parable of the servants who refused to receive the Son and give fruit to the owner (Lk. 20:9-16). The Lord could've answered: 'My authority? From God, He's my Father, I had a virgin birth, you know'. But He wasn't so primitive. Instead He appealed to them to realize their own responsibilities to their creator and to accept His authority by giving fruit to the Father

20:13 God sent His Son to Israel, thinking "they will reverence him when they see him" (Lk. 20:13). But Isaiah 53 had prophesied that when Israel saw Him, they would see no beauty in Him and crucify Him. Yet God restrained that knowledge, in His love and positive hope for His people. Likewise Jesus, it seems to me limited His foreknowledge of Judas. He knew from the beginning who would betray him. One of the 12 was a traitor. Yet Judas was His own familiar friend in whom He trusted.

20:15 The Lord's initial Palestinian hearers were well used to the scenario of absentee landlords. The parables of Israel would have been easily understood by them. The landlords lived far away, were never seen, and sometimes their workers took over the whole show for themselves. The Lord's parable of the absentee landlord in Lk. 20:9-16 alludes to this situation. He sends messengers seeking fruit from the vineyard, but the tenants abuse or kill them, and he does nothing. When his son shows up, they assume that he's going to do just as before- ignore whatever they do to him. After all, they'd got away with not giving him any fruit and ignoring his messengers for so long, why would he change his attitude? He was so far away, he'd been in a "far country" for a very long time (Lk. 20:9), they didn't really know him. The Lord asked the question: "What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). The obvious answer, from the context provided within the story, would be: "Judging on past experience, not much at all". But then the Lord presented the element of unreality in the story, as a sudden, biting trick of the tail: No, the lord of the vineyard would actually personally come and destroy them, and give the vineyard to other tenants. Even though his experience of having tenants farm his land had been a fruitless and painful experience that had cost him the life of his son. And it was that element of unreality that brings home to us the whole point of the story. The Father does appear distant and unresponsive to our selfishness, our rebellion, and our refusal to hear his servants the prophets. But there is a real judgment to come, in which He will personally be involved. And yet even His destruction of the Jewish tenants hasn't taken away His almost manic desire to have workers, in His desperate desire for true spiritual fruit. The parables of Israel surely speak encouragement to each of us. The parable of the absentee landlord has a telling twist to it. Absentee landlords who had never visited their land for ages, and found the people they sent to the property beaten up, would usually just forget it. They wouldn't bother. In the parable which draws on this, the Lord asks what the landlord will do (Lk. 20:15). The expected answer was: 'Not much. He got what he could, he was never bothered to go there for years anyway'. But *this* landlord is odd. He keeps on sending messengers when any other landlord would have given up or got mad earlier on. But God's patience through the prophets was likewise unusual. And then, when the tenants thought they must surely be able to get away with it because the Lord seemed so distant and out of touch... He suddenly comes Himself in person and destroys them. He doesn't hire a bunch of people to do it. He comes in person, as the Lord will in judgment. And instead of deciding he'd had his fingers burnt and giving up vineyards as a bad job, this Lord gives the vineyard to others- He tries again. And so the Lord is doing with the Gentiles.

20:18 A passage in Ps. 118 is referred to in Lk. 20:18; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8. One wonders if this was a proof text which the early believers would have known by heart. And one wonders likewise about Psalm 2- it is referred to so often.

20:25 The memories of the Maccabean heroes and their rebellion were strongly in the minds and consciousness of first century Israel. Their exploits were recited yearly at the feast of Hanukkah. Yet the Lord purposefully subverts the history of the Maccabees. Mattathias had taught violent resistance to Gentile occupation in the slogan: "Repay the Gentiles in their own coin" (1 Macc. 2:68 N.E.B.). But the Lord alludes to this, at least to the LXX form of the saying, when He advocated paying the Roman temple tax, giving the coin to them, and not violently resisting. See on Heb. 5:6.

The Lord taught that whatever bears God's image must be 'rendered' to God, just as what bore Caesar's image must be rendered to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Seeing that the human body bears God's image, He was clearly teaching that we should 'render' to God our whole being in the course of our human lives. But the same idea of rendering to God is picked up in 1 Pet. 4:5, where we are told that in the final judgment, we will 'render' [s.w.] ourselves to God. By the way we live now, the manner in which we render to God all that is not Caesar's, we are effectively rendering to Him our judgment account. And so we also find this Greek word for 'to render' in Rev. 22:12; Mt. 16:27; 20:8; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Rom. 2:6- at the day of judgment, where we render ourselves to God, He will "give" [s.w. 'render'] to every man according as his works have been. We're rendering ourselves to God right now, here in this life. And He will render that back to us in the last day- for we are right now giving our account to God. And there are times in life where perhaps God specifically intervenes in order to give us a taste of that final day of 'rendering' of ourselves to God- hence in the parable of Lk. 16:2, the man is asked to 'render an account' of his stewardship [s.w.]. It may be through illness, tragedy, loss, the intense introspection of depression, conviction of sin... in these things we are led to a specific preview of the 'rendering an account' which lies ahead. And we should be grateful that we have such opportunities.

20:32 "Should we give tribute to Caesar?" was likewise answered with the comment that whatever has God's image on it should be given to God- and seeing we're made in God's image, the Lord was asking that they gave their very personal selves to God, every part of their mind and body- rather than worrying about the 'guilt by association' that might come from paying your taxes to Caesar (Lk. 20:23-25).

20:33 'Who will be married to whom in the Kingdom?' was well answered by the Lord, but His final cut was that God is the God of the living and "all live unto Him", i.e. the fact *we* are alive means we are responsible for our actions to Him right now- and we must be moved by that, rather than by speculation about the physicalities of how *others* may be in God's Kingdom (Lk. 20:33-38).

20:37- see on Heb. 11:27

God is His word (Jn. 1:2). Moses is likewise spoken of as if he is his word (Acts 15:21; 21:21; 26:22; 2 Cor. 3:18), so close was his association with it. The words and commands of Moses were those of God. "In the bush God spoke unto (Moses), saying, I am the God of Abraham... Isaac and Jacob" (Mk. 12:26; Mt. 22:31; Ex. 3:6). Yet Lk. 20:37 says that "that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when *he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham*" etc. Yet this was what God said of Himself.

20:38- see on Rom. 14:8,9.

21:3 The Lord condemned how the Pharisees "devoured widow's houses"- and then straight away we read of Him commending the widow who threw in her whole living to the coffers of the Pharisees. It wasn't important that the widow saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and didn't 'waste' her few pennies; her generosity was accepted for what it was, even though it didn't achieve what it might have done, indeed, it only abetted the work of evil men.

The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion.

21:7 Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

If none of us can know the time of the Lord's return, the whole spirit of the Olivet Prophecy is hard to come to terms with. When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent.

'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23). See on Lk. 19:11.

21:8 "Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers Christ spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

21:11 During their holocaust, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Deut. 32:24). This extraordinary level of paranoia will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau - representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon my people" (Ez. 21:12). Likewise our Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel (Luke 21:11).

21:12 "The synagogues... the prisons" - implying both a religious and civil persecution of the saints?

21:13 Lk. 21:13 speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". What does this really mean? For me, the most satisfactory explanation would be that the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk.21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the

tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk.21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk.21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet.4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness.

21:15 "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay". This is alluding to Ex.4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (v.31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal.4:5). This suggests that the 3.5 year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt.24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

21:16 Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "the son dishonoureth the father...a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ. See on Mk. 13:13.

"Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too.

"Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends and some of you shall they cause to be put to death". This indicates that the persecuting power will infiltrate the ecclesias, as the Jews and Romans did to the early church in order to bring about their persecution.

21:17 "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake". This hating by all men may imply a world-wide persecution.

21:18 "There shall not an hair of your head perish" - primarily concerning the disciples, seeing that some believers were to die for their faith in the period around AD70 (cp. v.16). The figure of not a hair of the head perishing is used in the Old Testament concerning sudden deliverance from what seemed like certain death, e.g. Jonathan in 1 Sam.14:45. This is fitting, seeing that "except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved" (Mt.24:22). It is also the language of the faithful few among an Israel who wouldn't stand up and be counted being miraculously preserved from Babylonian tribulation (Dan. 3:27). There are many instructive parallels here with the latter day tribulation, which the majority of natural and spiritual Israel may try to avoid by some tokenistic acquiescence to the dictates of the King of Babylon.

"Saved" here ("there should no flesh be saved") implies 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet.3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

We must lose our lives, one way or the other. If we lose them for Christ, we will find eternal life. If we keep them for ourselves, we will lose that eternal life. This teaching is picked up by the Lord in Lk. 21:16-18, in stating that some of His people would be put to death, but actually, not a hair of their heads would perish. Surely He was saying that yes, they would lose their lives, but in reality they would find eternal life. Those men and women who died on crosses, were burnt as human torches, were thrown to the lions... the Lord foresaw them, and implied that their sacrifice was *in principle* the process that must be gone through by each of us: a losing, a resigning, of our life and all the things that life consists of in everyday experience. Either we die to sin now, living out in practice the theory of baptism, or we will die to sin in rejection at judgment day; sin has its end in death (Ez. 21:25; Dan. 9:24), either now, or then. So we may as well die to the things of sin in this life.

21:20 Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then (Lk. 21:20,21 RV).

21:20-24 We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfillment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of

Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfillment in AD70- the final fulfillment will be in our last days.

21:21- see on Rev. 11:1.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk.21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen.19:17).

"Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" means that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has a latter day application. Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry.

21:24, 25

Does The Olivet Prophecy Have A Break In Fulfillment?

Some have tried to impose a break in the Olivet prophecy between Lk.21:24 and v.25, saying that only after v.24 the prophecy applies to the last days. The following problems have to be tackled if this is done:

- Mt. 24:14 is located in the first half of Lk. 21 (i.e. before v.24, in the so-called AD70 section): "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall *the end* come". The first century fulfillment of this was only typical of the major, latter day fulfillment. "The end" can hardly refer to AD70!
- The 'gap' between Lk. 21:24 and 25 is matched by Mk. 13:24: "But in those days, after that tribulation" - there is no room here for a gap of 1900 years! The prophecy flows straight on!
- v.24 is quoting Zech.12:3 (LXX) concerning the last days.
- In what sense were "the times of the Gentiles" fulfilled in 1967? Plenty of Gentiles, especially in the developing world, are still being baptized.
- The signs of v.9-11 are obviously being fulfilled now and will be to an increasing extent, given the irreversibly worsening world situation.
- V.22 "These be the days of vengeance that all things that are written may be fulfilled" - language of the last days. "All things" were not fulfilled in AD70. also come true. For many readers approaching the Olivet prophecy seriously for the first time, what has been laboured at such length above may seem painfully obvious. It will seem strange to them that some argue so strongly and even aggressively that the Olivet prophecy has no relevance to our days. I have often wondered *why* there has to be such enthusiasm to disprove this relevance. Is it not something to do with the fact that deep down, far beyond our conscious thought processes, we just can't brook the idea that we could be in for a persecution which will shake our little cosy world inside out?

Valid Interpretation?

We need to examine more carefully how we have used the Olivet prophecy in our preaching to the world. For ease of reference we will stick mainly with Luke 21. As with many Bible prophecies,

this had an initial fulfillment in AD70 as well as a latter day one. The clarity of its reference to the last days before Christ's return is frequently hammered home by Christian preachers. Time and again we put the graphs on the Powerpoint, show the ghastly slides from Oxfam- and then read Luke 21:9-11: "Wars and commotions... nation shall rise against nation... great earthquakes, famines and pestilences... fearful sights and great signs". And yes, we make a convincing case. The lecturer then does a dramatic Biblical leap-frog to v.24: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" - cue to talk about the present position of Israel. Next, v.25,26: "Distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear" - plenty to talk about there. "And then shall they see the Son of man coming" (v.27)- the real crunch point of the lecture.

Now there is nothing wrong with interpreting Luke 21 this way. Only someone blind to reason could deny that there is a marked correspondence between this chapter and the present world condition. Indeed, what we are now seeing is but a prelude to the real time of trouble and persecution: "Wars... famines... pestilences and earthquakes...all these are the beginning of (the) birth pangs" . These labour pains will result in the glorious birth of the Spirit into the Kingdom (Mt.24:6-8). But we must not overlook Lk.21:12-23, which are all about the persecution of God's people "before all these (things)", v.12. It seems that the real time of world crisis will only be seen after a period of active persecution, and we are therefore only experiencing a very small fulfillment of these prophecies now. In the same way, we quote Ezekiel's prophecies regarding the fruitfulness of Israel and the return of Israel in the Kingdom as having some fulfillment now, in the present re-establishment of the Jewish state.

The greatest signs

The watchful student will note that the persecution of God's people spoken of in Lk. 21 is hard to slot in as coming before the earthquakes and famines in the parallel records of Mark 13 and Matthew 24. A glance at Strong's concordance will reveal that the Greek for "before" can also mean 'more importantly than'. Now this fits the lock even better. Jesus is saying "The greatest indication that I will soon be back is when "they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you" - a far more important and obvious sign to you who suffer it than earthquakes, famines etc...'. So if there is no period of persecution, will there be a second coming? Notice that in v.12-20 Jesus is not talking to the natural Jews but to the believers. They were to be delivered up to the synagogues (i.e. Jewish powers), and the descriptions of being given the right word to speak in courts, and being betrayed and put to death, find ample fulfillment in the record of the early church in Acts. It is at this time that "ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies" (v.20), a situation clearly foretold in the prophets as occurring before the second coming. It could be that the latter day witness to Israel that takes place within the land results in the Jewish synagogues brutally persecuting the preachers (Lk. 21:12). Orthodox Jewish response to some Christian preaching makes this not hard to believe. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (v.24) is a direct quote from the Septuagint of Zech.12:3. This is a prophecy of the latter day invasion of Jerusalem just prior to Christ's intervention. This treading down of Jerusalem is probably that predicted in Zech.14:1,2 also. "The times of the Gentiles" connects with the 42 months downtreading of Jerusalem in Rev.11:2, thus suggesting a 3.5 year period of Gentile domination of Jerusalem in the last days- and an identical period of persecution of the saints?

We have tended to think that wars, famines, plagues etc. are the clearest signs of the second coming. Yet this view of the Olivet prophecy fails to appreciate the context. The preceding Lk. 20 and Mt. 23 concern the weaknesses of the ecclesia of Israel at the Lord's time. The parables which follow directly on from the Olivet prophecy are *all* concerning the state of the ecclesia *at the time of the Lord's coming*. The prophecy itself has the state of *the ecclesia* as its main focus. Again, notice how the Lord turned the disciples' question round. They were so worried about when the temple would be destroyed. He gave them some relevant signs, but basically said: 'Don't worry so much about the

physical temple. Watch for the well being of the ecclesia, the spiritual temple. Weep not for the temple, but for yourselves. Don't get too caught up with the feeling that the world / age has come to an end when the temple's destroyed; look instead for the day of my coming'.

- V.25,26 were fulfilled prior to AD70, not just in the last days. The description of Heaven and earth passing away is highly applicable to the ending of the Jewish heavens and earth in AD70; 2 Peter 3 uses similar language about this.

- The suggested break in fulfillment between AD70 and the last days runs into particular difficulty at Mk.13:24: "In those days (of v.6-23, which some limit to AD70 alone), after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened..." - i.e. the tribulation of the first part of the prophecy is in the "days" of the second part of it. Thus the entire prophecy must have reference to both AD70 and the last days.

So it appears that we have to face the uncanny conclusion: if the whole of the Olivet prophecy applies to the last days, then the verses about persecution of the saints must

21:24 The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appears to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25.

Zech. 12:3 "In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to by Jesus in His description of Jerusalem being captured by the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arabs, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies.

It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk.21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk.21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

"The times of the Gentiles" are often taken to have finished in 1967. But at least three major problems arise with this:

- 1) The temple site, Biblical 'Zion', is still not totally under Jewish control due to the presence of the Mosque there.
- 2) "Trodden down" has clear links with Dan.8:13 and Rev.11:2, which describe the temple being blasphemously desecrated for certain periods of time. How can they have ended in 1967, seeing the 'Dome of the Rock' still stands there? And 1967 minus 2300 day/years (Dan.8:13) or 1260 day/years (Rev.11:2) do not appear to yield any significant starting points.
- 3) The times of Gentile opportunity, as some read it, are still with us now as much as they were in 1967. If anything, numbers of baptisms have mushroomed *since* 1967, notably in distant Gentile lands.

21:25 There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the Arab nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-Arab conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering (Lk. 21:25) is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the Arab nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each

other. However, the outstanding inter-Arab conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem.

It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

21:28 Ps. 24:9 clearly states that when the gatekeepers of Zion lift up their heads [to God in truth], then the King of glory will come in. And the Lord applies these words to His true people of the last days in Lk. 21:28- they are to likewise lift up their heads [so that] their redemption will draw nigh, or be hastened.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. *un-bend*), and lift up your heads" may suggest that the believers will be bowed down in bondage in some sense. Alternatively, we can read it simply as a command to stand up (as NIV), which would connect with the slumbering virgins, *none* of them standing ready to welcome their Lord as they should have been. It is evident from a close reading of the Olivet prophecy that the Lord is using his pronouns carefully. Sometimes he speaks of "ye", sometimes of "they". It seems that the "ye" refer to the disciples and the faithful remnant in the latter day ecclesia, and the "they" either to the natural Jews or to "the many" (majority) in the ecclesia who will fall away. "*They* shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud... when these things (leading up to the Son of man coming) begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up *your* heads" (Lk. 21:27,28). This may suggest that the majority, the "they" category, are shocked by the coming of the Lord, but the faithful minority stand up from their slumber and are expecting his coming.

"When these things begin to come to pass, then look up (Gk. *'unbend'*- as if the depression of the faithful is partly lifted by discerning the nearness of Christ's return), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh". These are words which can only apply to the last generation; and they self-evidently imply that therefore that last generation does know for sure that Christ is about to come. Just two verses later, the Lord spoke of how in the Spring "*Ye see and know of your own selves* that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh" (Lk. 21:30,31). There is an instinctive sense within us concerning the change of the seasons; and this will be the same in the minds of the faithful as they sense the Lord's return approaching. There will be no need for magazine articles expounding "signs of the times"; we will not need any man to say unto us "The time draweth near" because we will know *of our own selves* that the coming of Christ is near (Lk. 21:7,8 should be read in the context of v.30,31). The relationship between Solomon and his bride in the Song of Solomon is typical of that between Christ and His church; and significantly, therefore, she senses his approach, she hears his voice telling her that he is coming, even before she sees him (Song 2:8).

We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

21:29- see on Mt. 24:15.

21:30- see on Mt. 24:32.

21:31 The Lord introduces his Olivet prophecy by saying that it was no use listening to those who said "The time draweth near"- instead, he went on to say, 'You must personally match the spiritual and physical situation you find yourself in with what I'm describing'. And at the end of the

prophecy, he hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Perhaps the very last generation *will* know the time of Christ's return. "Likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, *know ye* that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:31). As surely as trees bud and then Summer comes, so when we see the signs of Lk. 21:24-26 in Israel, we will know that the Lord is really at hand. It is only to the unworthy that the Lord comes unexpectedly. The majority of generations, including the disciples to whom Christ primarily spoke those words concerning not knowing the hour, have of course not known the day or hour. But there seems absolutely no point in the Lord giving us *any* signs if in fact the last generation cannot foresee with some certainty the time of His coming. Surely Yahweh has revealed all His plans to His servants the prophets? As a woman knows within herself the approximate time of childbirth although not the day or hour, so we should know that the day of new birth is approaching- so Paul's reasoning goes in 1 Thess. 5. He warns that for those who do not watch, the day of Christ's coming will be a day of "sudden destruction... as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). Surely the picture here is of a woman whose time of delivery comes unexpectedly upon her, with complications that result in her dying in childbirth. As a woman who knows the time of delivery is very near will behave in an appropriately careful way, so will the faithful of the last generation who likewise know that the Lord's coming is nigh. The same mixture of seriousness and joyful anticipation will be seen in us too, who are watching and loving the appearing of Christ.

21:32 The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk.21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk.13:28) and tender branches (Mt.24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk.11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk.21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk.21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

21:34 "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for

us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

21:36- see on Lk. 18:5; Rev. 8:1.

"Watch ye therefore and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things... and to stand before the son of man". "Escape" can mean 'to suddenly flee away from'- the same idea of sudden deliverance from persecution which cropped up in our notes on v.18. Those who do not watch and pray will be unable to flee out of the tribulation, as Lot's wife was unable to. This idea of escaping connects with 1 Thess.5:3 (this is just one of many links between the Olivet prophecy and Thessalonians): "When they shall say (in the ecclesia) Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them... and they shall not escape". The language of "peace and safety" is often used in the Old Testament to describe the calm words of Israel's false teachers, as they confidently asserted that all was spiritually well within Israel (Jer.6:14; 5:12; 14:13; Mic.3:5; Ez.13:10; Dt.29:19). Those who do not think that there is peace and safety in the ecclesia and who face up to the reality of 'watching and praying' to spiritually survive the last days, are those who will 'escape'.

Jacob's wrestling with the Angel was really a clinging on to him, pleading with tears for the blessing of forgiveness; and in this he was our example (Hos. 12:4-6). Lk. 21:36 RV speaks of the believer 'prevailing' with God in prayer. The 'struggles' of Moses in prayer are an example of this; through the desperation and spiritual culture of his pleading, he brought about a change even in God's stated purpose. See on Col. 2:1.

If our prayers really can help others' on their salvation road- how we should use this! Remember Lot's deliverance for the sake of Abraham's prayers, whilst he unknowingly went about his daily life in those last hours. Reflect too how the Lord told us: "Pray ye may be accounted worthy to... be stood before the son of man". Not 'pray for thyself', singular, but for the whole community of the last days.

Angelic appearances to men have so often included an encouragement to "fear not" that we have every reason to imagine that those same words will be repeated to us when the angel calls. The Greek text of Lk. 21:36 further fills out the place of the angels in our judgment: "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to be stood before the Son of man". This creates the picture of our guardian angel literally standing us up in acceptance before our Lord, as happened to Daniel. Ps. 1:5 can now take on a literal aspect: "The ungodly shall not stand [up] in the judgment". It is so fitting that the angel who is with us now in our every situation, will be with us in that supreme moment too.

Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of

others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must "watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

22:3 It was the Jewish 'Devil' that put the idea of betraying Jesus into Judas' mind, so Lk. 22:2,3 implies: "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him...then entered Satan into Judas". The Jewish ideas of an immediate Kingdom and the throwing off of the Roman yoke by a glamorous, heroic Messiah entered Judas, and caused him to become so bitter against Christ's Messiahship that he betrayed Him. The Jewish Satan, in the form of both the Jews and their ideology, was at work on the other disciples too: "Satan hath desired to have you" (plural), Jesus warned them. Especially was the High Priest seeking Peter: "I have prayed for thee (Peter – singular), that thy faith fail thee not" (Lk. 22:31–32). Could Jesus foresee the Satan – High Priest later arresting Peter and his subsequent trial in prison? Throughout the first century, the Jewish and Roman Devil sought "whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

22:3

Satan Entered Judas

Note how "enter" is used in a non-physical sense in Mt. 25:21 "enter into the joy of your Lord", entering in at the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13), entering into another's labours (Jn. 4:38). 'Satan' enters a man's heart in the sense that "the lusts of other things enter in" (Mk. 4:19); in this sense we can "enter into temptation" (Lk. 22:46).

The link between Judas and the 'Devil' is brought out by a consideration of Luke's comment that Judas "sought an opportune time [*eukairan*] to betray Jesus" (Lk. 22:6). But Luke earlier used this word in Lk. 4:13 to describe how the "Devil" in the wilderness departed from the Lord "until an opportune time" [*achri kairou*]. The Lord's victory in the wilderness prepared Him for the victory over the 'Devil' which He achieved in His final passion. Just as the temptation to 'come down from the cross' was a repetition of the temptation to throw Himself down from the temple. John's Gospel often repeats the history of the other Gospels, but in different language. In Mt. 26:46, the Lord comments upon the arrival of Judas: "Rise, let us be going; my betrayer is coming". But Jn. 14:30,31 puts it like this: "The prince of this world [a phrase understood as meaning 'the evil one', the Devil] is coming... Rise, let us be going". John is picking up the mythological language of the 'Satan' figure, and applying it to a real person with real attitudes and sinful intentions – i.e. Judas, who is presented as a personification of the 'Satan' / 'Devil' / 'Prince of this world' principle.

We can easily overlook the huge significance of Mk. 14:21 recording the Lord's words that Judas personally was guilty for betraying Him, and would suffer accordingly – even though Lk. 22:22 says that Judas did this because the Satan [i.e. the Jews] 'entered him'. *Whatever* that means, it doesn't mean that Judas nor anyone is thereby not personally responsible for their actions.

The translation of the Greek text in Jn. 13:2 has been problematic. "The Devil having put into the heart of Judas" doesn't quite do justice to what the Greek is really saying. The respected expositor and Greek student C.K. Barratt insists that strictly, the Greek means 'the Devil had put into his own [i.e. the Devil's] heart, that Judas should betray Jesus' ⁽¹⁾. This translation is almost impossible to make any sense of given the orthodox understanding of the 'Devil'. And so most popular translations ignore the obvious difficulty by glossing over the strict meaning of the Greek.

Understanding the 'Devil' as the innate source of temptation within the human heart, the picture becomes clearer. The idea is surely that the thought of betraying Jesus began within the Devil-mind of Judas; he 'put the thought in his own mind', as if to stress how Judas conceived this thought totally of himself and within his own mind, just as later Ananias and Sapphira [in an analogous incident] 'conceived this thing within their heart'. So properly translated, Jn. 13:2 actually supports our general thesis about the Devil – it is stressing that the heart of Judas was itself responsible, that heart put the idea of betraying Jesus into itself – and nobody else was responsible. Note how the Lord addresses Judas as if Judas had full responsibility for his actions and control over them – e.g. "What you are going to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27), and Mk. 14:21 "Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born". Those two passages alone surely make it clear that Judas was no robot, no puppet on a satanic string. He had full responsibility and choice over his actions, hence these words of the Lord to him. Summing up, we are left with the question: Did *Judas* betray Jesus, or did *Satan*, working through Judas, betray Jesus? The answer, surely, is that it was Judas, and he must bear full responsibility for that.

Note

(1). C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) p. 365. Barratt's view of the Greek is confirmed in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981) p. 131.

22:15 It was 'with desire that He desired' [a real emphasis] to ate the passover with His men (Lk. 22:15). He so wants us to break bread with Him; He so wants us to try to understand the cross. See on Jn. 17:24.

22:16 The Lord told us that the Passover feast would "be fulfilled in (i.e. by?) the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:16). This is confirmed by the description of "the marriage supper of the lamb" in Rev. 19:9. Likewise the parable of Lk. 14 speaks of "a great supper" at the beginning of the Millennium. As we share this feast together now, we are acting out a parable of the feast to be kept at the Lord's return. In the light of this, how important it is to ensure that there is no bitterness and disunity at the breaking of bread meeting! To be invited to sit at the King's table is an honour indeed (cp. 2 Sam. 19:28). Remember that we are reaffirming our covenant. "This is the blood of the covenant" is a reference back to the blood of the Old Covenant being sprinkled upon the people, with their response of vowing obedience unto the end (Ex. 24:7). The solemnity of that distant moment should be ours, weekly.

22:17- see on Mk. 14:23.

22:19 By inviting the disciples to share His cup and His baptism, He was offering them there and then a part in the life of self-crucifixion, which found its natural and final articulation in the death of the cross. He deftly poured out the wine as a symbol that His life was even then being poured out (Lk. 22:19).

The breaking of bread is intended as a special gift to us. Let it have its intended power. “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19) is an inadequate translation of the Greek text – “the words do not indicate a mere memorial meal in memory of a man now dead, but strictly mean “making present reality” of Christ’s saving death”. So let the bread and wine truly be an *aide memoire*. That on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill outside Jerusalem, around 2000 years ago, Jesus died for me. Three days later, a man dressed as a working man, a humble gardener, walked out of a tomb, perhaps folded His grave clothes first, and saw the lights of early morning Jerusalem twinkling in the distance. And 40 days later ascended through cotton wool clouds and blue sky, with the necks and throats of watching disciples moving backwards as they gaped at the sight; and will just as surely come again, to take you and me unto Himself. These things, and the endless implications of them, are what will fill our minds if they impress us as having really happened. If we believe the Bible is inspired, it will have the result of what Harry Whittaker called “Bible television”; we will see these things as if they happened before our eyes.

22:20- see on Mk. 14:23.

22:24 Even after the acted parable of the feet washing, there was still a strife amongst them about who should be greatest. They’d clearly not grasped the Lord’s teaching and example about not worrying about what place we take at a dinner (Lk. 22:24).

22:25 We must be aware that in helping people, be it in teaching them the Truth of Christ, or in materially supporting them in their needs, we must never allow our position of ‘superiority’ become a vehicle for abusing their person, however unintentionally. The Lord in Lk. 22:25 spoke of how in the world, “benefactors” have power over people. His idea seems to have been: ‘If you show generosity in the world, you have authority over others; but you, after my example, must show generosity to others in humble acts of service but not expect authority over others as a result of this’. The giving of help or welfare in any form should therefore never become a source of control over another person. Their integrity and independence as a person must never be in this sense ‘abused’ by us or simply lost sight of, because we have helped them.

22:26 The Lord was addressed as ‘Rabbi’ and to some extent acted like one. It was the well known duty of a rabbi’s pupils to serve their teacher and do menial chores for him; the Jewish writings of the time and the Mishnah are full of references to this. Yet the Lord treated His ‘servants’ radically differently- His behaviour at the Last Supper was just the opposite (Lk. 22:26). And He even taught that He, the Lord of all, would be so happy that His servants were waiting for Him that He would “come forth and serve them” (Lk. 12:37). He was a most unusual “Lord and Master”, one who served His servants, and whose death for them was His ultimate act of service.

22:27 The disciples slept in Gethsemane, despite being asked to stay awake and encourage the Lord in His hour of need (Lk. 22:45). Yet He thanks them for being those who continued with them in His temptations (Lk. 22:27). When the Jews agreed at a council to kill Him, the Lord went to be alone with the twelve (Jn. 11:53,54). He took such comfort from them even though they did not or would not understand the reality of His upcoming death. He, like us, could only take such comfort from His brethren if He viewed them positively.

22:28 The disciples’ persistent failure to grasp our Lord’s teaching must have been a great source of trial and frustration for Him. Despite His warnings about His coming sufferings, the disciples failed to comprehend this; perhaps partly due to Jesus Himself fluctuating between talking of his death in both literal and then figurative terms. In His time of greatest need of encouragement He found them sadly lacking in any real degree of spirituality beyond a fanatic allegiance to Him. And yet He graciously thanked them for continuing with Him in His temptations, even though they fell asleep (Lk. 22:28). We can under-estimate how sensitive He is to our feeble spirituality, and how even the basic will to be loyal, no matter how much we fail in practice, means so much to Him. Yet their lack of comprehension must have been especially tragic, since one of the reasons for the gift of the

disciples was to help Jesus through the pain of His ministry, and this was to culminate in the cross. After the Jews' first council of war against Christ, He prayed for strength and was answered by being given the twelve (Lk. 6:11-13).

22:30 This is an allusion to the happiness of Solomon's servants as they sat down to food and wine; they listened to Solomon's wisdom as they ate. Lk.14:15 speaks of us as happy servants.

Joseph celebrates his brothers' repentance with a meal together, at which they sit in their proper places (Gen. 43:16). Likewise the marriage supper of the lamb, with each in his proper place (Lk. 14:10; 22:30; Rev. 19:9).

It was apparent that in the breaking of bread meetings, there had to be a host. The host was a vital figure. And yet herein lay the huge significance of breaking of bread meetings being held in homes- presumably the home of a richer believer- and yet it was the table *of the Lord*. *He* and not the master of the house was the host of that meeting. It's for this reason that it was unthinkable for any invited by grace to their Lord's table to turn away other guests- for it wasn't *their* table, it was the table of another One, and they were but guests. Attempts to bar others from the Lord's table in our own time are equally rude and deeply lacking in basic spiritual understanding. There are evident similarities between the breaking of bread experience and the marriage supper which we shall eat with the Lord Jesus in His Kingdom. The breaking of bread assembly is called "the table of the Lord"- and yet He says that we shall eat at "My table" at His return (Lk. 22:30).

22:31 The fact an Angel was called 'satan' in Num. 22 and in Job's case means we can maybe have another look at Luke 22:31, where Jesus tells the disciples "satan hath desired to have you (lit. : 'demanded you for trial') that he may sift you as wheat". Wheat is normally a symbol of the righteous after a process of tribulation or judgement. The satan here could be an Angel, demanding them for trial from God, as Job's satan Angel did. The Lord's comment that satan had demanded to have the disciples, especially Peter (Lk. 22:31) is clearly based upon the experience of Job, whom satan also demanded. The Lord saw a similarity between Job and Peter, in that Job's sufferings were to be repeated in their essence in the experience of Peter. Only through that bitter weeping and reflection upon it, corresponding in the Lord's analogy to all that Job went through, would Peter like Job emerge triumphant.

The Old Testament prophecies also give insight into the actual process of the betrayal. The Hebrew for "equal" in "a man mine equal" (Ps. 55:13) is invariably translated elsewhere as 'price' or 'estimation'; possibly implying that the Jews had set the same price on Judas' head (in the sense of a bribe offered to them) at one stage as they had on Jesus. The Jewish satan seeking Peter and the other disciples ("Simon, Satan hath desired to have you", plural, Lk. 22:31) implies an organized attempt to subvert each of the twelve, perhaps by offering a financial reward for becoming a secret agent for the Jews. Judas having an equal price in the Jews' eyes as Jesus indicates how highly he was seen to rank among the disciples in the public eye- as important to the Jews as Jesus himself. This further strengthens the impression that Judas was highly esteemed by both Christ and the other disciples. It would appear that the love of this money was a significant factor in Judas' downfall; in the same way as Joseph's brethren were blinded by a money motive in betraying him rather than being interested in his death for its own sake. In addition, Judas' motives seem to have also been from being influenced by the thinking of the Jewish satan, offering the chance of an immediate Kingdom. He is alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:19 (cp. Jn. 13:30) as the prototype of all who left the true faith to be influenced by Judaist doctrine.

22:31- see on 1 Pet. 5:8.

Peter and Satan

It is noteworthy that the Lord had previously warned that the Jewish Satan would be actively trying to influence the disciples away from the Truth: "Woe unto the world (often referring to the Jewish

world in the Gospels) because of the offences!... but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!... whoso shall offend one of these little ones (the disciples – Zech. 13:7 cp. Mt. 26:31) which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned” (Mt. 18:6,7). This invites comparison with “Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed... it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Mt. 26:24). Notice that this stumbling of the disciples at the hand of the Jewish world and its servant Judas was to be around the time of Christ’s capture (Mt. 26:31); which is what Luke 22:31 is warning the disciples (“you” plural) about, and which proved to be so relevant to Peter in the hours after the Lord’s capture. Further proof that “the world” that was to cause these offences was the Jewish world is found by comparing Mt. 13:38,41. It’s also been pointed out that ‘Satan desires to sift you as wheat’ “is a proverbial expression” ⁽¹⁾. Schleiermacher therefore observes about this passage: “There is no intention to teach anything with regard to Satan or to confirm that older belief” ⁽²⁾.

There’s also some evident allusion back to the record of Job in the Septuagint version. “The Lord said to the Devil, ‘Behold I give him over [*paradidonai*] to you; only preserve his life” (Job 2:6 LXX). *Paradidonai* and related words are very frequently used of how the Lord Jesus was ‘handed over’ to the systems of the Roman and Jewish Satan (e.g. Mk. 14:41), and yet ultimately His life was preserved by God. Here in Lk. 22:31 we have the Jewish Satan desiring to have the disciples, just as Job’s ‘Satan’ desired. If the disciples grasped the allusion, they would perceive that they were to be as Job, and believe that ultimately the ‘Satan’ was under God’s control, and through prayerful endurance they would come to victory as Job did.

Notes

(1) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 312.

(2) F.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Clark, 1999 ed.) p. 165.

22:32- see on Mt. 16:18; Lk. 22:3; Acts 3:19; 8:24; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Pet. 1:12.

Prayed. Not only did the Lord pray that Peter’s faith wouldn’t fail. He repeatedly made the point in the lead up to Peter’s temptations that His disciples really *did* know Him, therefore they should never deny this (Jn. 14:7,17; 15:21; 17:3), and He taught them that all men *must* know they were His disciples, if they truly were (Jn. 13:35). He was trying to strengthen Peter against the trial He knew would come: to deny that he knew Him. Likewise we may try to strengthen those prone to specific temptation, but the power of it depends on their recognition of their own weakness, and whether they have ears to hear. It would seem Peter didn’t, so confident was he of his own strength.

Paul referred to the Jews to whom he preached as his “brethren” (Acts 13:26), and it may be that Peter at least initially understood his commission to “strengthen thy brethren” as meaning preaching to his unbelieving Jewish brethren (although the same Greek word is used by Peter regarding his work of upbuilding the converts, 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12). Gal. 2:8-10 informs us that Peter had a ministry to the Jews of the diaspora in the Roman empire just as much as Paul did to the Gentiles living in the same area (Gal. 2:8-10). Because the Acts record focuses more on Paul’s work rather than Peter’s doesn’t mean that Peter was inactive. 1 Peter is addressed to Jewish converts living in the provinces of Asia Minor, and we can assume that Peter had spent years travelling around building up groups of believers based around the families of the individual Jews he had converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. It would seem from 1 Cor. 1:12 that Peter had made a number of converts in Corinth, and 1 Pet. 5:13 strongly suggests Peter lived for a while in “Babylon” and had begun an ecclesia there. Whether this be taken as a code name for Rome or as literal Babylon (where there was a sizeable Jewish community), this was somewhere else Peter reached. All through this remarkable life of witness, he was motivated by his own experience of the Lord’s greatness, and His all sufficient grace toward him in his weakness. And a similar life of powerful witness lies before any who are touched likewise.

“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lk. 22:32) found its fulfilment in the Lord’s interview with Peter in Jn. 21. Three times He asks him: ‘do you love me?’, and three times he invites Peter to care for the lambs and sheep- to strengthen his brethren. The triple denial and the triple re-enstatement and triple confession of love both occurred by a fire, a *charcoal* fire on each occasion (Jn. 18:18; 21:9) just to heighten the evident connection. Peter’s conversion can therefore be equated with his response to the denials- the repentance, the realization of his own frailty, and desperate acceptance of the Lord’s gracious pardon. Yet Peter invites his fellow elders: “feed the flock of God”, repeating the Lord’s commission to him, as if he saw in himself a pattern for each man who would take any pastoral role in Christ’s ecclesia. The implication is that each man must go through a like conversion. And Peter points out that we are “a royal priesthood”, as if he saw each believer as a priest / pastor. Peter is our example. We all deny our Lord, camouflage it and justify it as we may. We all stand in Peter’s uncomfortable shoes. We do in principle what Judas did.

“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lk. 22:32), the Lord told Peter. Yet Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn’t conversion: it’s a beginning, not an end.

Moses of his own freewill chose to intercede for Israel, concerning things which at the time they knew nothing about; things which were almost against their will, in fact. And this is the prototype of the Lord’s mediation for us who know not what to pray for as we ought. Consider how he prayed for Peter when Peter didn’t realize he was being prayed for (Lk. 22:32).

22:34 Peter’s problem with the cross was perhaps at the root of his denials of the Lord. Before the cock crowed twice, he denied Jesus twice (Lk. 22:34). It’s been pointed out that chickens couldn’t have been anywhere near the High Priest’s house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for ‘cock’ or ‘rooster’. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the ‘cock’ crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord’s warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

22:35 We are to realistically grasp the fact that His mission and ministry is in fact ours. And the total insecurity, exposure to danger, misunderstanding, slander, sudden calls of God to change direction and move way out of our comfort zone etc. are all part of participating in the short term fate and eternal victory of the One whom we follow. His call to each of us to preach Him is radical. He sent out His preachers with *no* money, *no* food etc. He didn’t tell them to go out without extra money, extra food nor clothes etc. He told them to take *none* of these things (Lk. 22:35). Why? Surely because He wanted them – and us- to understand that the preacher of Christ is to be *totally* dependent upon His provision for them. It was a high challenge. When the disciples faltered at the Last Supper, the Lord told them that OK, if you have a purse, take it; if you want a sword for protection, then buy one (Lk. 22:35). Surely He was saying, as He is to us today: ‘OK, I want you to rise up to the spirit of My ‘Let the dead bury their dead’ and ‘Take no money with you’ exhortations. But if you can’t, OK, take a lower level, but all the same, go forth and be My witnesses. *Please!*’.

22:41 A stone’s throw - an allusion to David and Goliath near the brook.

22:43- see on Ps. 80:15.

22:45- see on Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:27.

The manner of inspiration reflects how God sees His servants. Often the Spirit caused the Bible writers to portray God's children in an extremely positive way. Thus Lk. 22:45 says that the disciples fell asleep from sorrow, when in reality this was due to their lack of spiritual awareness and sense of spiritual urgency. Likewise, Lk. 1:18 records only a few (apparently harmless) of the many words which Zacharias doubtless said, not without strong disbelief, during the abnormally long time he remained in the temple. These examples illustrate how God looks so positively upon His children.

22:46 Without being ostentatious in the eyes of others, try to use a physical position in prayer which is conducive to concentration. There are Biblical examples of prayer standing, kneeling, sitting, sitting cross-legged, with hands uplifted... Remember how the Lord told the disciples to *rise* and pray; He could see that curled up as they were, they were more likely to nod off to sleep than intensely pray (Lk. 22:46). He had already told them to pray (v. 40), and doubtless they had obediently started praying, but had fallen asleep while doing so. "*Rise* and pray" surely suggests: 'Come on men, I told you to pray, but you can't pray lounging around like that!'. And I would bet many of us need the same words.

How He prayed is an example of the Lord's words being made flesh in His living. He taught His men to pray "Your will be done"; and in Gethsemane, He prayed those very words Himself, even though praying them meant an acceptance of crucifixion (Mt. 26:52). In that same context, the Lord asks His men to pray that they enter not into temptation (Lk. 22:46). He was asking them to pray His model prayer just as He was doing. His own example was to be their inspiration. I wonder too, in passing, whether the Lord's request at that time that the cup of suffering pass from Him (Mk. 14:35) was His way of praying not to be led into temptation- for perhaps He momentarily feared that He would finally spiritually stumble under the burden of the cross? This surely is the meaning of the hymn that speaks of living more nearly as we pray.

22:49 Peter's objection to the Lord's going to die at Jerusalem surfaced several times. He wanted to build tents so that Jesus wouldn't go down from the mountain to the strange *exodos* which the prophets declared. When he wanted to "smite with the sword" in the Garden, it was to get the Lord out of the cross. Peter was willing to suffer, to fight, to even die in what would have been a hopeless combat, outnumbered dozens to one. But he just didn't want the cross to be the way. It is recorded that when Peter saw "what would follow" in the Garden, he wanted to start a fight in order to at least have some slim chance of avoiding that inevitable crucifixion which now looked so certain (Lk. 22:49). He didn't want the path of events to "follow" to that end. He again denied the connection between following and cross carrying. Later, the Lord told Peter in categorical terms that he personally was to follow Him to the death of the cross. And Peter turns round, sees John following, and gets sidetracked by the question of what the Lord thinks about John. As with us, quasi spiritual reasoning and issues were allowed to cloud and dilute the essential and terrifying truth- that we are called to bear Christ's cross to the end.

An essay in unquestioning loyalty to the Lord and Master is found in Lk. 22:49: "When they which were about him saw what would follow (i.e. arrest and attack), they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?". That grim faced band of men standing in a protective circle around their Lord knew that they had no chance of victory against the mob with Judas, armed to the teeth as they were. Yet they were willing, to a man, to heroically sacrifice their lives- the inevitable result of starting a fight- as a token of loyalty to a man who humanly speaking was a lost cause, and whose demise seemed so unexpected to them compared to their hopes of a glorious Kingdom being established there and then.

22:56 *fire*- see on Jn. 3:14-21.

22:61- see on 2 Pet. 1:12.

The “day of *visitation*” is coming for us all (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek is related to the word describing how after the denials, Christ turned and *looked* upon Peter (Lk. 22:61). This was for him his day of judgment, which we must all pass through. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives).

Appreciating the extent of Peter's devotion to Christ's words enables us to more fully enter into the man's spiritual and emotional tragedy when he denied Christ. He paid no attention to Christ's words of warning concerning Peter's own spiritual weakness. After that third cock crow, "Peter remembered *the word* of the Lord , *how* he had said unto him..." (Lk. 22:61; "how" may refer to the physical manner in which Christ spoke to Peter, as well as to the content of his words).

22:62 Peter “went out” from the Lord. “Went out” is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30- in essence, Peter and Judas did the same thing at the same time). Other prototypes of the rejected likewise had gone out from the Lord. Cain “went out” (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Yet Peter in this life “went out” from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further “went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep... but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That ‘judgment’ will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now. See on Mk. 14:68.

22:64- see on Lk. 7:39.

22:70 The Lord’s sensitivity is revealed in how He comments upon the Jews’ question: “Art thou then the Son of God?”. He replies: “Ye say it because I am” (Lk. 22:70 RVmg.). The Lord perceived that men ask a question like that because subconsciously, they perceive the truth of the matter, and in their conscience, they already know the answer to their question. Perhaps for this reason He simply ceased answering their questions as the trial went on (Lk. 23:9). He realized that the questions they asked were actually revealing the answers which were already written in their consciences. For a man of this psychological insight to have lived and died amidst and for such a primitive rabble is indeed amazing.

23:9- see on Lk. 22:70.

23:26 Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as “coming out of the field” (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn’t a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else... until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

23:27 As unworthy people wailed before Him on the cross (Lk. 23:27- the Lord knew they would be condemned in the AD70 judgment rather than obey his words and flee the city), so they will wail (s.w.) before Him at the judgment (Mt. 24:30). The cross and the judgment are definitely connected. Men's feelings at the cross are a foretaste of our feelings before the enthroned, glorified Lord. And hence there is a connection between the breaking of bread, the judgment, the crucifixion, self-examination... it all comes together.

He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31);

who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

Reflect for a moment upon the fact that the women wept, and amongst them were the Lord's relatives (Lk. 23:27). Lamentation for criminals on their way to die was not permitted in public. Suetonius (*Tiberius* 61) reports that "the relatives [of the crucified] were forbidden to go into mourning". Likewise Tacitus (*Annals* 6.19), Philo (*In Flaccum* 9,72) and Josephus (*Wars Of The Jews* 2.13.3,253). This is all quite some evidence, from a variety of writers. So why did they make this great sacrifice, take this great risk? The cross has power. Whether we feel it is impossible for us to be emotional, given our personality type, or whether we feel so lost in our own griefs that we cannot feel for Him there, somehow sustained reflection on the cross will lead us out of this. We will mourn, come what may. Yet the tragedy is that those women who risked so much didn't necessarily maintain that level of commitment to the end. For the Lord had to tell them that they should weep for themselves given the calamity that would befall them and their children in AD70- for they would not listen to Him.

23:28- see on Lk. 7:9.

23:31 He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'. "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example. If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord's neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord's self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: "I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish". And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men's minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

23:33 Note the emphasis in the records on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it.

23:34- see on Acts 3:17.

23:34

Christ prayed that the soldiers would be forgiven [without repentance] because "they know not what they do". The fact He asked for their forgiveness shows that they were guilty of sin, although they were ignorant of it- and had therefore not repented. How could they repent of crucifying Christ while they were actually doing it? They may well have regretted doing what they were forced to do by reason of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Thus Christ knew that forgiveness was possible without specific repentance and forsaking. The reply 'But that only applies to sins of ignorance!' is irrelevant- Christ's attitude still disproves the hypothesis that forgiveness can *only* be granted if there is a forsaking of sin.

"Father forgive them"

Because the weight is on the arms, the crucified can't speak easily. The whole conversation between the thief and the Lord would probably have been whispered, with long intervals between words. The final two loud cries of the Lord must have been made with immense pain. It also explains why they confused His "Eli, Eli" with 'Eliyahu' (Elijah); He was probably speaking very quietly. There is no recorded reaction of the crowd to His prayers. Yet Ps. 22:1 speaks of His prayer as a lion roaring to God, and yet He felt that the abuse of the crowd was like the ravaging and roaring of a lion (Ps. 22:13). It may be that they hurled abuse back at Him in response to the roaring of His prayers.

Note the Lord's appreciation of the Fatherhood of God throughout His passion: Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44; Lk. 23:34,46. Throughout the Gospels, the Lord calls God His Father around 170 times (109 of them in John, as if he noticed this as especially significant). This was a real paradigm breaker for the Jews, who even from the 15 Old Testament references to God as Father, only understood His fatherhood in a national, not personal, sense. Yet the Son's relation to the Father has been passed on to us (Mk. 14:36 cp. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The closeness of the Father to the Son, prefigured by that between Abraham and Isaac, is something to be wondered at. "Into thine hand I commit my spirit... thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Ps. 31:7).

The Sayings From The Cross (1):

"Father forgive them"

The Seven Last Sayings Of Jesus From The Cross

Number of words in Greek

1. "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34)	12
2. "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43)	9
3. "Woman behold thy son!... Behold thy mother!" (Jn. 19:26)	4
4. "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)	3
5. "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28)	1
6. "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)	1
7. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46)	8

Introduction

The pain and difficulty of speech in the position of crucifixion was such that it is apparent that the Lord meant us to hear and meditate upon the words He uttered from the cross. Perhaps it would have been far easier for Him to have prayed those words to Himself, within His own thoughts; but instead He made the effort to speak them out loud. The passion of the Lord's intercessions on the cross is matchless. He roared to God in His prayer, regardless of whether there was light or darkness (Ps. 22:1,2). He reflected there that His prayer was offered to God "in an acceptable time" (Ps. 69:13). And yet this very passage is taken up in 2 Cor. 6:2 concerning the necessary vigour of *our* crying to God for salvation. That the intensity of the Lord's prayerfulness and seeking of God on the cross should be held up as our pattern: the very height of the ideal is wondrous.

It is worth noting that if the Lord's seven recorded utterances are placed in the conventional chronology, the number of words Christ actually spoke can be seen to steadily decrease until the final utterance (although it should be noted that in our reconstruction, saying 3 comes before no. 2).

Not only does this serve to illustrate the intensity of effort wrung forth from our Lord in His final utterance, but we also sense that He found physically speaking increasingly difficult. The picture of a man carrying his cross towards the place of death, the image of a man hanging upon a cross in his time of dying, these are images of a man who finds it *increasingly* difficult to carry on, a man who finds the way harder and harder. And yet these are the very images picked up by our Lord and applied to all those who seek to follow Him. The conclusion: life in Christ *in a sense* becomes increasingly difficult, it is increasingly difficult to truly hold on to the spirit of our crucified Lord. And yet as so many of us can testify, the possibility of turning back recedes further and further as the months and years go by. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" becomes more and more underlined in our Bibles.

"Forgive them"

"Father forgive them" were the first words said by the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems from the context that they were said soon after the cross was lifted up into a vertical position and dropped down into the hole prepared for it. Physically, this would have been the time of greatest shock and pain, as the body of Jesus came to rest with its full weight upon the nails, as they tore into the flesh and sinews of His hands and feet. As His nervous system began to fully react, He was in great pain and shock. And yet immediately His thoughts went to forgiving those who had brought this upon Him; and, as we hope to see, His thoughts were immediately with us, with the possibility of our salvation and forgiveness. In this we see a matchless example of being so concerned for the

salvation of others, so taken up with a desire to show love to those who hate us, that the physicality of our own sufferings, however immediately and insistently they press, becomes totally relegated.

We must face up to a fundamental question: Who was it that Christ was asking God to forgive? By eliminating who Christ did *not* pray for, we can come towards an answer. Christ did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

- Not The Romans

Forgiveness is related to repentance. There would seem little point in Christ praying for the Roman soldiers to be forgiven. It would be rather like a believer praying for some youths to be forgiven for vandalizing a bus shelter; to what point would this be? Would such a prayer really lead them towards salvation? Would it be an appropriate thing to pray for?

Throughout the Acts, both Peter and Paul accuse the Jews of having crucified Christ, even though the Roman soldiers physically did it. Peter even goes so far as to say that it was their *hands* which placed Jesus on the cross and nailed Him (Acts 2:23- notice how their physical contact with the Lord's body is stressed in Mk. 14:46,53). The Roman hands which did this were effectively Jewish hands. Psalms 22 and 69 outline in some detail the things done to Christ on the cross. Some were done by the Jews, others by the Romans. And yet the same pronoun "they" is used, as if these things were all done by the same group of people. This further suggests that the Spirit saw the actions of the Romans as being attributable to the Jews. There seems no reason to think that the Roman or Italian nation were held guilty by God for the part they played in the death of His Son.

Nor The Jewish Nation

The Jewish people generally were punished because they saw the Son of God coming to their vineyard, and yet they killed Him, despite recognizing who He was. "This is the heir", they recognized (Mt. 21:38). Pilate *therefore*, because of the Jews, ordered the death of the Son of God (Jn. 18:40 cp. 19:1). They must take full responsibility for it. The Roman soldiers set Christ at nought (Lk. 23:11); but this very act (the same word is used) is counted to the Jews (Acts 4:11). The Lord Jesus shouted out to them that He knew that they realized who He was: "Then cried Jesus in the temple as He taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am" (Jn. 7:28). His allusion to the memorial Name ("I am") suggests that He recognized that they knew His Divine origin and manifestation of His Father's Name. Christ was responding to their claim that they did not think He was Messiah (Jn. 7:27)- by saying 'You do know, deep inside, that I am He; but you won't face up to your conscience about it'. It was in this sense that Jesus frequently said in John's Gospel that the Jews did not know Him nor His Father. However, this does not mean that they did not recognize who He was. To "know" Christ in the Johannean sense is to believe in Him, not just to give Him cognizance. It would be a massive contradiction within the thinking of Jesus for Him to ask God to forgive the whole Jewish people *because* they didn't realize what they were doing. According to His parable of the men recognizing the heir and killing him, they did know, perfectly well, what they were doing.

If indeed Jesus was praying for the entire Jewish nation, His prayer went unanswered. He had said Himself that if the Jews did not repent and believe in Him, they would die in their sins; He said that an impressive three times (Jn. 8:21,24).

Prayer For A Minority

It seems that Christ was in some way praying for those among the Jews who would later repent of what they had done. This suggestion must almost certainly have some truth about it because of the way Peter alludes to Christ's words: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do" . He seems to apply these words to the Jews, and uses them to encourage the Jews to repent and thereby take unto themselves the forgiveness which Christ's prayer had made possible: "And now, brethren, I wot that

through (RV "in") ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers... repent ye *therefore*" (Acts 3:17,19). Paul makes a similar allusion in Acts 13:26,27: "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham (Paul seems to be repeating Peter's style of 3:17)... they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers (cp. 3:17), because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him" .

There is a clear principle throughout God's self-revelation that ignorance does not atone for sin. "Father forgive them *for* they know not what they do" therefore does not mean that their ignorance plus Christ's prayer equalled forgiveness and therefore salvation. We have to conclude that He was saying 'They don't *now* know what they are doing, please forgive them on account of my death, they'll repent and realize later'. Despite Peter's allusion to Christ's prayer for their forgiveness, Peter still asks the Jews to repent so that they could be forgiven and saved. Therefore Christ's prayer for their forgiveness was not offered or answered in the sense that they would be forgiven without repentance. That forgiveness was only granted in prospect. They had to 'claim' it by their own repentance. However, it is still wondrously true that Christ understood that God was willing to grant forgiveness to people in prospect, even though they had not actually repented. If God is willing to do this, to forgive in hope of future repentance in response to such great grace, how much more should we behave likewise to each other. And yet we struggle with this, even though we each have received such grace ourselves.

"Them" - Us?

The death of Christ was fundamentally for the salvation of Israel. His prayer was gloriously answered in that soon afterwards, 8,000 Jews were baptized (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Such is the power of anguished, heartfelt prayer for others- even when it seems there is no chance it will be heard. And such is the power of prayer for a third party. The Lord's attitude was not that they simply had to decide. He prayed they would be converted. It only applies to us insofar as we unite ourselves with the Israel of God. That minority within Israel who were crucifying Christ in ignorance ("they know not what they do") were the same category into which we fall. Christ praying on the cross for men to be forgiven ought to send the mind back to Is. 53, which prophesied that on the cross, Christ would "justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities", be wounded for our transgressions, be bruised for our iniquities, make a sin offering for His seed, heal us through His stripes, achieve our peace with God through His chastisement, bear the sin of many, be numbered with the transgressors, be stricken "for the transgression of my people", and make "intercession for the transgressors". These are all broadly parallel statements. "The transgressors" are primarily "my people", Israel, who despised and rejected him (53:3). And yet they also refer to us, insofar as we become identified with Israel in order to be saved. The prophesy that Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" in His time of dying was surely fulfilled when He prayed "Father forgive them". There seems no other real alternative.

And so we come to an awe-inspiring conclusion: Christ was lifted up on the cross, and immediately His mind was full of us, all those who would repent and become the seed of Christ, full of our need, of the huge weight of all our sins. And He knew that through His death all that sin would be forgiven. It was by the Lord's one act of righteousness, one act of obedience, that we are justified (Rom. 5:18,19). He was obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8); and yet Heb. 5:8 and Phil. 2:8 RV imply that He only became obedient whilst He was actually on the cross. Was it that there, whilst hanging there, He more deeply perceived that really, this was indeed the only way to meet our need- and therefore He made that one-off act of obedience in death which Rom. 5:19 speaks about. And that supreme love for us, that willingness to die "for us", is still part of His wonderful character; for there He "loved us" [the love of Christ and the cross are so often connected ideas], and yet He still has that same "love of Christ" for us today (Rom. 8:35,37).

As soon as the cross was lifted up, despite the sudden searing pain, His mind was fixed upon our desperate need: "Father forgive them". Each one of us who have now believed down through the

subsequent years was forgiven then, in that moment, of all our sins we would ever commit. Through one act of righteousness [i.e. the cross], we were justified (Rom. 5:18 RV). There was such intensity of achievement in those moments of His death. Here on earth, on a mere speck of a planet in the outer suburbs of a galaxy that is only one of about a billion such galaxies in the observable universe, what happened on the cross determined the future of that universe. For all things both in heaven and in earth were reconciled by the blood of the cross. And yet throughout the Gospels Christ had taught that the Father would only forgive those who themselves live a forgiving life. Yet at that time we had not repented; "When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son" (Rom. 5:5-10).

Our Lord's prayer was heard; our sins, unrepented of, were forgiven, in prospect we were forgiven and saved. In the same way as Peter used the wonder of this to appeal to the Jews to repent, so we should heed the appeal. All our sins were forgiven as a result of that prayer, in prospect we were saved. God for the sake of that prayer of Christ forgave us all our sins then (Eph. 4:32), the whole concept of sin was ended in prospect (Dan. 9:24), one final sacrifice was offered for sins (Heb. 10:12). The result of this is that we should repent, search ourselves and confess as many of our sins as possible, knowing they have been conquered. And we too should forgive each other in the same manner as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32), not waiting for repentance, but learning the spirit of Christ and the attitude of our Father.

The extreme seriousness of our position prior to our reconciliation with God is easy to underestimate. We were "enemies... sinners". We have seen that "Father forgive them" refers to both us and the ignorant Jews who were crucifying Christ. And yet in the first instance, the "them" referred to the Roman soldiers; *they* crucified Christ, they parted His garments; and it is in that context that Christ asked for "them" to be forgiven. There is a certain relevance of Christ's words to those ignorant soldiers. And yet we have seen that they really refer to us, to all those who will truly repent of their sins. It follows that those soldiers represent us, as the Jews who rejected and despised Christ in Is. 53 represent us too. Truly do we sing that "*We* held him as condemned by Heaven", albeit in ignorance. The roughness and ignorance of those soldiers typifies our life before baptism. If we continue sinning, we crucify again the son of God, this time not in ignorance. The consequences of that are almost too fearful to imagine.

A guilt offering

Ignorance is no atonement for sin, as the Law taught. "Forgive them *for* they know not what they do" sounds as if Christ felt that He was the offering for ignorance, which was required for both rulers and ordinary Israelites (cp. how Peter and Paul describe both the rulers and ordinary people as "ignorant", implying they had a need for the ignorance offering of Christ, Acts 3:17; 13:27). Indeed, Is. 53:10 NIV describes Christ's death as a "guilt offering". And significantly, Heb. 5:2 describes Christ as a good priest who can have compassion on those (i.e. us) who have sinned through ignorance and want reconciliation. As we come, progressively, to realize our sinfulness, we need to make a guilt offering. But that guilt offering has already been made, with the plea "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

Once we begin to appreciate these things, we see the intensity behind those words of Christ. "Father forgive them" was uttered with His mind on all our future sins, He foresaw them all, He felt them upon Him, He saw they could not be forgiven without repentance, and yet He asked the Father to forgive them as sins of ignorance, believing that we would repent in the future. No wonder Peter and Paul use these words of Christ as the basis of their appeal to Israel to repent! And if we appreciate them, we will be inspired to truly examine ourselves, to realize our secret sins, to search the word in order to reveal our sins to us, to ask God after the pattern of David to reveal our weakness to us, to truly confess our sins, knowing that each and every one of them was recognized by the Father and Son as Christ hung on the cross. Every one of them was a weight upon Christ, and

every one of them was forgiven in the hope that we would later appreciate the wonder of such grace, and repent. This means that as with Israel in Acts 3, our repentance is what makes the cross of Christ powerful for us, it is what makes the victory of Christ all the greater if we accept it; for when we repent, "our unrighteousness commends God's righteousness", in the language of Romans.

Christ's awareness of us on the cross

In some sense, then, Christ was aware of each of us and each of our sins as He hung there. "Forgive them" was wrung out of this deep appreciation. Just one word (in the Greek) expressed such intensity of appreciation of our need. It seems that as Christ hung on the cross He had a vision of the faithful. How this was achieved is hard to imagine, but it is not beyond the realms of Divine possibility that somehow Christ was made aware of each and every one of us, and each of our sins. Consider the following hints concerning the Lord's vision of His ecclesia on the cross:

- "*When* thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed... he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. 53:10,11). "*When*" would suggest that Christ had some kind of vision of those He was offering Himself for, especially in their future, forgiven state.

- Psalms 22 and 69 describe Christ on the cross foreseeing "the great congregation" gratefully and humbly eating in memory of Him (cp. the breaking of bread), serving Him, inheriting Zion and declaring His righteousness and His victory on the cross to others down the generations. Let us remember this as we break bread and witness to Him (Ps. 22:30,31).

- On the cross Christ saw all His bones, which represented the future members of His body (Ps. 22:17 cp. Eph. 5:30).

- The Lord prayed just before His passion in a way which would almost imply that He had some heightened awareness of the redeemed as a group: "...for them also which shall believe in me... that they also may be one".

- "For the joy that was set before him" Christ endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). "Set before" can imply a vision, as if Christ saw something in front of Him as He hung on the cross. The spirit of Christ in Ps. 16:11 describes Christ looking forward to fullness of joy in God's Heavenly presence, because "at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore". Christ is now at God's right hand interceding for us. Therefore we suggest that the joy set before Christ in vision as He hung on the cross was the joy of His future mediation for our sins as we repent of them and confess them in prayer.

As we have said, the intensity of feeling behind those words of our Lord almost defies exhibition through the medium of human words or language. Heb. 5:1-7 describes Christ on the cross as a priest offering up a guilt offering for our sins of ignorance. He did this, we are told, through "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears". This must surely be a reference to "Father forgive them". Those were said with a real passion, with strong crying, with tears as He appreciated the extent of our sinfulness and offence of God. There is a connection between these words and those of Rom. 8:26,27, which describes Christ as our High Priest making intercession for us "with groanings". "Groanings" is surely the language of suffering and crucifixion. It is as if our Lord goes through it all again when He prays for our forgiveness, He has the same passion for us now as He did then. Think of how on the cross He had that overwhelming desire for our forgiveness despite His own physical pain. That same level of desire is with Him now. Surely we can respond by confessing our sins, by getting down to realistic self-examination, by rallying our faith to truly appreciate His mediation and the forgiveness that has been achieved, to believe that all our sins, past and future, have been conquered, and to therefore rise up to the challenge of doing all we can to live a life which is appropriate to such great salvation.

23:38 Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital

part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

23:41 The cross is capable of interpretation as some kind of judgment seat or throne. And significantly, there are men on the right hand and left of the Lord, one rejected, the other gloriously accepted. It is possible to translate the repentant thief as telling the other: "Do you not fear God *when* you stand condemned?". Before Jesus crucified, we all stand condemned. And he stresses that "we are condemned justly" (Lk. 23:41), for it was evident to all that here hung a just / righteous man. He, there, the just hanging for the unjust, convicts us of sin. Somehow the repentant thief came to know Jesus in the deepest possible sense. Truly could he address him as "Lord", perceiving already how the cross had made Him "Lord and Christ". The thief knew that judgment day was coming, and asked to be remembered for good there. He was surely alluding to Ps. 106:4: "Remember me, Lord, in the course of favouring your people. Visit me with your salvation". And this connection between the cross and the judgment was evidently impressed upon the thief. Doubtless he also had in mind the desperate plea of Joseph: "Have me in remembrance when..." you come into your position of power (Gen. 40:14 RV). The thief had perhaps meditated upon the implications of the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come". He saw it as now being certain because of the cross- "when you come in your Kingdom...". And yet he felt as if he was in prospect already there before the coming King, as he hung there before Him on the cross.

23:42 Note the Joseph allusions- in prison with two malefactors (one good and one bad?) as Christ on the cross with two thieves (one good, one bad). "Remember me when it shall be well with thee" (Gen. 40:14) = "Remember me".

23:43

"Today you will be with me in Paradise"

The thieves (and Barabbas) would have been tried along with Jesus; they would have been present at His trial. Roman law required that the death penalty be executed the same day as it was given. The crucifixion being quite early in the day, it seems almost certain that the four cases to be tried that day would all have been heard in the same room. The behaviour of the Lord must have really given those other three something to reflect on. An interesting point comes out of the Greek text of Lk. 23:39: "One of the criminals who were *suspended* reviled him" (Diaglott). Ancient paintings show the thieves tied by cords to the crosses, not nailed as was Christ. *Hanging* on a tree became an idiom for crucifixion, even if nails were actually used (Dt. 21:23 cp. Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39). If this were so, we see the development of a theme: that the whole ingenuity of man was pitted against the Father and Son. Christ was nailed, not tied; the tomb was sealed and guarded; the legal process was manipulated; the Lord was flogged as well as crucified.

The Sayings From The Cross (3):

"Today you will be with me in Paradise"

It is all too easy for us to see the thief on the cross as a pawn in the game of the Lord's crucifixion. But there is real New Testament evidence that we are to see in Him our personal representative. Thus Paul challenges us to be "co- crucified" with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20 cp. 1 Cor. 11:1). To be crucified together with Christ immediately sends the imaginative mind to the thief on the cross- the one who was literally crucified together with Christ. It is doubtful if the Spirit in Paul would speak of 'co- crucifixion' without deliberate reference back to the thief. Our Lord matched the idea of the word "Kingdom" in the thief's plea with the word "paradise". Occurring only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to resist the conclusion that in Rev. 2:7, our Lord's mind was back in the agonizing conversation with the thief: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God". It was to the thief on the cross, some years earlier, that Christ had made the same promise of paradise. It may be significant that Rev. 2:7 was

specifically addressed to those who were zealous by nature, hating laxity, yet who had left their first love. The thief may well have been a 'zealot' who had once turned to Christ, but whose real faith had slipped away. But to any who overcome, the same promise of paradise is made.

It has often been pointed out that the brief words of the thief encompass all the basic beliefs of the One Faith. He believed in the sinfulness of man, the supreme righteousness of Christ, salvation by grace, the second coming and judgment seat of Christ, and the Kingdom. Yet not only did he believe those things as abstract principles. As he beheld, at close range, the sufferings of God's peerless son, the reality of those principles really came home to him. Perhaps he was a slave who had committed a relatively petty crime, but as a slave he had to be crucified. All prisoners and most condemned men feel keenly their relative innocence and the unfairness of it all. But with quite some pain he gasped: "...and we indeed justly". He came to deeply understand the basic principles, and appreciate their personal bearing to himself. He knew the basic principles of the true Gospel, but it was his co- crucifixion with Christ that made him grasp hold of them for dear life. Job too went through the same process, thanks to his typical suffering together with Christ: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job 42:5). And us? The thief, not to say Job, represents us. If we are truly co- crucified with Christ, the basic elements of our faith will not be just a dry doctrinal skeleton. The coming of the Kingdom, the doctrine of judgment and the atonement, these will be all we live for! For they were all the thief had to live for, during his hours of co- crucifixion.

It is possible that the thief had a really deep Bible knowledge. "Remember me when thou comest in thy Kingdom" is almost certainly reference to Gen. 40:14, where Joseph desperately and pathetically asks: "But think on me when it shall be well with thee...". Joseph went on to say "...here also have I done nothing that they should out me into the dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). This is very much the spirit of "This man hath done nothing amiss...". It could be that when he asks to be remembered for good, he had in mind Abigail's words: that when David returned in glory in his Kingdom, "my Lord, then remember thine handmaid". This was prefaced by her asking: "Forgive the trespass of thine handmaid... a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God: and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out" (1 Sam. 25:29-31). And David's response was marvellously similar to that of the Lord to the thief: "Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person" (1 Sam. 25:35). It would seem that the thief saw in David a type of the Lord, and saw in Abigail's words exactly the attitude he fain would have. And the Lord accepted this.

It is recorded in the other Gospels that both the thieves "railed on" Christ, joining in with the crowd to "cast the same in his teeth" (Mt. 27:44). We must see the words of the repentant thief in Lk. 23 against this background. There he was, knowing the truth, having fallen away, now facing his death. In his self- centredness, he grew bitter against the one he knew to be his saviour. Despite the difficulty and pain which speaking whilst crucified involved, he made the effort to lambaste his saviour, as well as he knew how. But as he watched the Lord's silent response, sensing the deep spiritual communion with the Father which was then happening, he experienced a wave of even greater anger and remorse- this time, against himself. 'I could have made it, I could have repented, but now it's too late. I've added insult to injury, I've blasphemed and mocked my only possible saviour, in this my hour of desperate need'. So he fell silent, whilst (we may infer) the other thief kept up his insults and selfish pleas for immediate salvation. And he watched the suffering saviour, literally from the corner of his eye. Remember, the thieves were crucified next to Jesus. Indeed one wonders whether the other thief had also once been a believer when he says "Art not thou the Christ?" (Lk. 23:39 RV).

Such was the holiness, the supreme righteousness of the Lord, that the thought grew within him: 'Perhaps even now, while I've got life, I could ask for forgiveness, and a place in the Kingdom?' We can be sure that he grappled within himself with this thought, before ever presenting it verbally to

Jesus. He would have seen the Lord's demeanour under trial, and the beauty and graciousness of His character and essential being must have made a deep impact upon the thief. When he speaks about Jesus having "done nothing amiss", he is repeating what he had heard hours before (Mk. 14:56); and the Lord's confident words of Mt. 24:64 were still ringing in his ears when he spoke of wanting mercy when this crucified man came again in glory to establish His Kingdom (cp. Lk. 21:42). And yet this perceptive man had just blasphemed Jesus with all the vicious vitriol he knew ("cast the same in his teeth" is the forerunner of 'a kick in the teeth'). It was supreme faith in and appreciation of the love and mercy of Christ which led him to make his request. I see the very fact he could make that request as a wonderful triumph of human faith over the weakness of human flesh when afflicted. That request was born out of a healthy fear of God. Before speaking to Jesus, he rebuked the other thief: "Dost not thou fear God...?" (Lk. 23:40). Appreciating the enormity of his sin, the repentant thief had come to fear God, to imagine the day of judgment and condemnation of sin. We dare to imagine the nervous tone of voice in which he then spoke to Jesus: "Lord, remember me (i.e. for good) when thou comest into thy Kingdom" (Lk. 23:42). He was pleading for acceptance at the day of judgment, provoked to do so by a fear of God's coming judgments. This was surely a spiritual pinnacle. The pain of his own sufferings, coupled with his close observation of the supreme holiness of Christ as he hung on the cross, had led him to appreciate his own sinfulness, and had inspired one of the greatest levels of faith in the mercy of Christ which mankind has reached. And so he received the ultimate assurance: You *will* be with me, in the Kingdom. The question of where the comma should be placed becomes irrelevant when we imagine how the Lord would have gasped for each word. There would, as it were, have been a comma between each word.

Day by day, we must imagine *even for a few moments* our Lord's vertical body as it hung there, that perfect mind within it, fighting to maintain that ultimate spirituality which He had achieved. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom". Perhaps we could silently pray those words day by day, night by night, for the next while. Perhaps we could unite with other believers in discussing and tackling a failing which we each have: the failure to meditate upon the sufferings of the Lord as much as we ought to. Never a day, a morning, an afternoon, should slip by without a thought for Christ's cross. "Gethsemane, can we forget?". Yes, Lord, day after mindless, spiritually empty day.

The thief was confident, in faith, that he would be heard. But how he would have hung upon every one of the quiet words which the Lord muttered in response, travelling over the few meters which separated them. "Verily I say unto thee this day: with me shalt thou be in Paradise" (Rotherham). We believe that to have been the emphasis in His words. 'Yes, I can really tell you, here and now, you will be in the Kingdom!'. Think of the spiritual ecstasy which would have come over the thief! God had caused him to triumph in Christ! He, the lowest sinner, had entered the highest rank of saints- those who have been directly assured that they will be in the Kingdom. Daniel, the disciples and Paul seem the only others in this category- along with the thief.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Mercifully, our Lord died abnormally quickly. Remember how Pilate "marvelled that he were already dead". Normally men lingered in agony for days before death. The thief lived a little longer. He would have seen Christ's death, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen"; the men taking the body from the cross. We can infer that he was still conscious when the soldiers broke his legs- if he was obviously dead, they would not have bothered. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already..." (Jn. 19:33) seems to imply this. The reason for breaking the legs was to stop the criminal having any chance of running away. Surely, amidst the waves of his pulsating pain, he would have marvelled at the way in which Christ was truly the lamb of God, seeing that "not a bone of him (was) broken". There he was, assured of the mercy of Christ at judgment day, hanging on the cross, in physical agony which it is hard for us to enter into. In some ways, he continues to be a type of us. Whether we are dying of cancer, crippled with arthritis, emotionally trapped in a painful relationship, chained to a demanding job, we too can have every

assurance of Christ's mercy. "To him that overcometh", Christ has promised the paradise of the Kingdom, just as he did to the thief.

But like the repentant thief, our mind must be full of the vision of our dying saviour, triumphing in His holiness, freely confessing our sin and the justice of God's condemnation of it, thrilling with the certainty of our Hope- of being in the Kingdom with Christ. Not for the repentant thief the increasing bitterness of the other man. As his bitterness grew, so the serenity and hope, and anticipation and joyful expectancy of the Kingdom rapidly increased for our crucified brother. The bitterness and disillusion of the world should not be ours, as the pain rages within and around us. Ours should be the strength and (somehow, amidst it all) *peace* of Christ's example. And the thief is alluded to later on in the NT as a symbol of us all. The Lord's promise to him that he would 'be with him' is the very language of 2 Cor. 5:8 and 1 Thess. 4:17 about us all.

Notes

(1) Always in the OT, "I say unto thee this day" was used as a Hebraism to bring home the utter solemnity of some great truth (e.g. Dt. 4:26,39; 8:19).

23:44 The way the sun was eclipsed at the Lord's death is recorded in terms which clearly contrast with the prevailing view that at the demise of the emperors, the light of the sun was eclipsed. Both Plutarch (Caesar, 69.4) and Josephus (Antiquities 14.12.3,409) speak of eclipses of the sun at the death of Julius Caesar. The Lord Jesus in His death is thus being proclaimed as the true Caesar. Likewise Cassius Dio *History* 51.17.5) claims that at the fall of Alexandria to the Romans, "the disembodied spirits of the dead were made visible". Similar claims were made for other Roman victories. And yet this is clearly put into context by the record that around the Lord's victory, the graves were opened and the dead actually came forth.

23:46 this day- see on Dt. 30:15-19.

23:46

The Sayings From The Cross (7):

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"

"Father"

These were the final words of the Lord Jesus. It must surely be significant that this final statement addresses God as "Father", just as the first of His seven last sayings did ("Father forgive them"). He used the same title in His agony in the garden (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 26:39,42,44). Putting those four passages together we can visualize the prostrate figure: "Father... Father... Father... Father". Evidently the Fatherhood of God was something which the Lord found extremely appealing and comforting. We have seen that if we place the seven last sayings of Christ chronologically, we find that the number of words Christ uttered runs 12-9-4-3-1-1-8. We have suggested that this indicates that Christ found speaking increasingly difficult on the cross. This final cry therefore involved supreme effort, every word was meaningful, and surely our Lord intended us to closely meditate upon the implication of every valuable word He uttered here.

"My spirit"

There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was not just saying something like 'Well, that's it, my life force is going back to you, Father'. We need to pause for a moment to consider exactly what we mean by the spirit of man. It is perfectly true that often, the spirit refers to the life force and / or the mind, and the soul refers to the physical body. However, this is not true in every case. We have discussed this problem elsewhere ⁽¹⁾ in a study to which I would refer you. The conclusion of that

study was that *sometimes* the soul basically means 'you / me, the whole person in every sense'. The soul and spirit are therefore interchangeable in this sense. The spirit / mind *is* the fundamental person, the soul, in that sense. The spirit which returns to God does not *always* refer to merely the life force; it can refer to the mind and personality too. Likewise the Spirit of God is not just naked power, but power that expresses His Spirit / mind. When the Lord Jesus commended His Spirit to the Father, He was offering Him not just the life force which is in every animal and plant, but His character and personality too, the result of the supreme spiritual effort made throughout His life.

The Lord Jesus *commended* His spirit to the Father's hands. The Greek translated "commend" means literally to place beside, to lay down beside. The Lord Jesus had a sense that His character would not be forgotten by the Father, it would take its' place beside the Father as it were, as He later would physically. This is not, of course, to give any support to the notion of disembodied spirits. Existence can only be in an animate, bodily sense. Yet the word "commend" in the Greek does suggest that Christ felt that the place He would soon take beside the Father was due to the fact that His spirit / mind had found acceptance with Him first. The Father's hands no doubt is an idiom for His care, His preservation (cp. Mt. 4:6). Christ was taking comfort in the fact that His character, those endless minutes of spiritual effort, of struggle to develop and preserve a spiritual mind, would surely not be forgotten, it would be preserved in the Father's hands.

"All live unto Him"

It is possibly true that we have gone too far in reacting against the apostate dogma of the immortality of the soul. Whilst this is an evidently false doctrine, it is equally untrue that the Father forgets His children between the point they die and the resurrection. Therefore God thinks of Abraham as if he is still alive, speaking of "those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16,17). God is the God of Abraham here and now, even though Abraham is dead and unconscious, because "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all (His people) live unto him" (Lk. 20:36,37). Because the dead are unconscious, because our memories of them fade and distort, we tend to think subconsciously (and even doctrinally, according to some lectures on the state of the dead) that this is how God too sees the dead saints. But "all live unto him", the souls under the altar cry out to Him for vengeance; in other words, His constant, detailed awareness of their characters provokes Him to act in world affairs even now (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). The Heavenly Jerusalem with which we are associated in Christ is composed of "the spirits (characters) of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). As we strive to develop a spiritual character now, our spirit becomes associated with those pleasing characters ("spirits") who reached a level of spiritual completion ("perfection") and were then absorbed into God's consciousness.

The hands of God are also connected with the Angels, the means by which God performs His actions. More detail of this has been provided elsewhere ⁽²⁾. Moses' hands being upheld by the hands of others can be seen as a type of the Lord Jesus being sustained by Angelic hands on the cross, connecting with the Messianic prophecy of Gen. 49:24 concerning the hands of Messiah being strengthened for His mediation by the hands of God. Throughout Scripture, God's hands are associated with His creative work in the natural creation (e.g. Ps. 8:6; 95:5; Heb. 1:10)- work which was and is performed through the Angels. The Lord Jesus was aware of the Angels in His final agony; He was painfully aware that they were at His command to lessen the physical torment (Mt. 26:53). And yet He seems to have felt their absence when He complained that His God (His Angel?) had forsaken Him- or so He felt. Perhaps He felt that His spirit / mind was not being taken care of by them, that His mental being was being placed beside the Father, in the company of the surrounding Angels. Our struggle to remain aware of Angelic presence in the midst of intense pain and trial should surely be inspired by this; in His very last words, our Lord was demonstrating His awareness of His relationship to the Angels, and His belief that although they seemed so distant from Him in His agony, yet surely He believed that ultimately they would take care of Him.

Laying Down Life

There were several times in the Lord's ministry when He chose to escape from death. This adds significance to the fact that finally the Lord gave up His life rather than having it taken from Him. By His Divine power, He passed through the crowd who sought to throw Him over a cliff (Lk. 4:29). Several times the Lord withdrew from an area that opposed Him because He knew they sought to kill Him (Mk. 3:7; 7:24; 9:30; Jn. 4:1-3; 7:1-9; 10:40); and He almost goes into hiding from His persecutors for a while until the final reappearance in Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54). What all this means is that He could likewise have avoided His final death; but He chose not to, and in this sense He willingly gave His life rather than had it taken from Him. The death of human beings can be seen as a result of physical processes over which they have no control. They are killed, often against their will, or disease takes hold of them and eventually forces them to a point where they breathe their last. There is never a conscious giving up of the last breath as an act of the will. Death either occurs in a state of semi-consciousness or unexpectedly, in a moment. We usually, in the final analysis, cling to life at all costs, throwing our feeble best into the fight we have no chance to win. Truly did Dylan Thomas observe that men do not "go gentle into that good night" but "rage, rage against the dying of the light". The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether different- and the death of the thieves next to Him would have highlighted this. It is so often emphasized that He gave His life for us:

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" in itself suggests that the death of Christ was an act of the will

Christ gave His flesh for us (Jn. 6:51)

Moses and Elijah spoke of the cross as "the Exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:31)- He would accomplish it to Himself, the Greek suggests.

The breaking of bread (a highly conscious act) recalls how Christ gave His body for us (Lk. 22:19)

Christ's death was the result of His obedience to God's command to die on a cross (Phil. 2:8)

Christ poured out His soul unto death as a conscious act performed to enable our redemption (Is. 53:12). Materially, this may refer to the way in which every respiration of the Lord would have scraped His sensitive skin against the rough wood, so that there would have been constant blood flow from His back. This was sometimes a cause of death through crucifixion: blood loss through repeated agitation of the wounds by lifting up the body to breathe and exhale. In this sense He poured out His soul unto death. Muscle cramps would have tended to fix the muscles and make respiration difficult without a wilful yanking of the body weight upwards on the wounded nerves.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13)

The Lord was at great pains to emphasize this aspect of His death, saying the same thing time and again: "I lay down my life for the sheep...therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life...no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself...this commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:15-18).

The death of Christ was therefore a conscious act of giving, it was not simply a result of being murdered by the Jews or Roman soldiers. No man took Christ's life from Him, He laid it down of Himself, i.e. of His own will. It is therefore apparent that Christ's death was not solely a physical result of being impaled on the stake. The fact He died abnormally quickly is proof enough of this. And it explains why the centurion when he saw how the Lord *so* cried out was by this fact persuaded that He was the Son of God (Mk. 15:39). That last outbreathing, that death as an act of the will, was something phenomenal. We are therefore driven to the conclusion that Christ was in a position to give His life at a certain point in time chosen by Himself. "He poured out his *soul* unto death" (Is. 53:12) suggests that the actual point of His death was a result of mental activity within the mind of the Lord Jesus. He was the servant who "*makes himself* an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). Physically this would be explicable by the way in which His life of intense physical and mental

trauma had resulted in Him coming to an early death, quite probably through heart-related problems. "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Mt. 26:38) suggests that the mental agony in the garden almost killed the Lord Jesus. Such was the intensity of His mind in His final suffering for us. Such was His awareness of our need, of the problem of our sins, and the majesty of God's righteousness. In the physical agony of crucifixion, it was only His will to live which kept Him alive. He was therefore able to keep Himself alive until He had said what He wanted to, and then He was able to consciously give His life for our sins, to offer *Himself*, as both sacrifice and priest, to the Heavenly Sanctuary. This means that Christ did not just hang on the stake waiting to die, and the process of death was mercifully speeded up by the Father. Every moment there was necessary for the perfecting of His character, making Him perfect through suffering, and once He knew He had reached that point of total spiritual completeness, He was able to give up His life as a conscious act of love for us and sacrificial dedication to the Father. The strength of will power which enabled Him to give up His life force at a specific time is something to be marvelled at. Occasionally we glimpse it in His ministry; the way He sent the people away, walked through the crowds who wanted to kill Him (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59; 10:39), spellbound His would-be arresters, "suffered no man to follow him" (Mk. 5:37)- His strength of will and personality shines through.

The Lord Jesus 'commended' His spirit to the Father. The Greek *para-tithemi* means literally to place or lay down beside. *Tithemi* is the same word translated "lay down" when we read of Christ laying down His life for us. It is the word used to describe the palsied man being laid down at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 5:18), or the laying of a foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11). It is also translated to bow down. The point at which Christ laid down His life, bowing down before the Father, was therefore when He commended His spirit to the Father. When Christ "*yielded up* the spirit" (Mt. 27:50), He was commending His spirit to God, laying down His life for us. The Greek for "yielded up" is *para-didomi*, to yield or give beside, and is evidently related in meaning to *para-tithemi*, to commend, to lay down beside.

Our example

So the idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us therefore refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". And therefore, Paul goes on, fornication, covetousness, foolish talking etc. should not even be *named* amongst us, "but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4). That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which are earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later in the chapter: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

Another thought arises from Eph. 5:25,26. Christ *gave Himself* for us in that final breath, "*that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing (laver, baptismal bath) of water by the word". This is the language of Tit. 3:5 concerning baptism and spiritual regeneration. Is it too much to believe that the Lord in His final moments had visions of men and women being baptized into His triumphant death, being regenerated by His Spirit / word, and thereby being saved?

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died... the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We perceive the humility of God, fantastic concept that that is. No wonder then that we should lay down our lives for each other. No wonder than that we *must* achieve a true humility in service to each other. Christ (and God, in Him) laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

It seems likely that Peter was at the cross, and therefore his letters are packed with allusions to it. What he saw there had a lifelong impact upon him⁽³⁾. He makes at least two allusions to the words of Christ on the cross, and bids us enter into the spirit of it. "Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps... who... when he

suffered, threatened not; but *committed himself* to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). This is the same word as used about Christ commending His spirit to God in that final agony. *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. Christ overcame the temptation to react wrongly to His sufferings by *instead* committing Himself to God. This idea of laying Himself down for us was what enabled Him not to get bitter. The antidote to our own bitterness is likewise to enter into this spirit of laying down our lives.

1 Pet. 4:13-19 likewise invites us to enter into Christ's final sufferings: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings... let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer (cp. the two thieves next to Jesus on the cross)... yet if any man suffer as a Christian (i.e. with Christ), let him not be ashamed (as Christ "despised the shame" on the cross, Heb. 12:2) ...wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God (as Christ did, Acts 2:23; Is. 53:10; Lk. 22:22) *commit* the keeping of their souls (same word as Christ *commending* His spirit to God) to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator". *We really are bidden enter into His example and follow Him*. I want to stress this point. The sufferings of Christ are so deep that we can shy away from them, gaping in incomprehension at the records without grasping this sense that we really are invited to enter in to them. It has been suggested that since the Lord's last words were "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit", His first words on resurrecting would have been a continuation of the Psalm 31:5 which He had quoted: "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth". But this verse was the usual evening prayer of Jews in the first century. It could well be that the Lord had prayed those words every evening of His mortal life, and said the rest of the verse each time He awoke. In this we see yet again that the cross was a living out of patterns and attitudes which He had already developed during His life. It also needs to be noted that David didn't say Ps. 31:5 on his deathbed, but rather it was an expression of his desire to commit his soul to the Father in gratefulness and praise. There was something of this in the mind of Jesus at His end.

Notes

(1) See 'The Problem of Soul and Spirit' *in James And Other Studies*.

(2) See 'The Language of Angels' *in Angels*.

(3) See A.D.Norris, *Peter: Fisher of Men* and H.A.Whittaker *Studies in the Gospels*. Peter was "a witness of the sufferings of Christ" (1 Pet. 5:1).

23:48 Contemplation of the death of the Lord Jesus is intended to stimulate our self-examination and self-knowledge. Those who saw it "smote upon their breasts" (Lk. 23:48), an idiom only used elsewhere for true penitence and realization of personal sinfulness (Lk. 18:13). See on Mt. 27:5.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. People 'beheld... the sight' (Lk. 23:48) - the verb *theoreo* and the noun *theoria* here suggest that people 'theorized', what they saw inevitably made them think out a response. See on Mk. 15:33.

The disciples kept changing the subject whenever the Lord started speaking about His death. As He hung in ultimate triumph and suffering on the cross, men came and looked, and turned away again (Is. 53:3; Lk. 23:48). The spiritual intensity of it couldn't be sustained in their minds, as it cannot easily be in ours. The more we break bread, the more we try to reconstruct Golgotha's awful scene, the more we realize this.

Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records (23:48). The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own sinfulness? Their "return" to their homes uses the Greek word usually translated 'to repent'. The cross inspired their repentance. The records of the

crucifixion are framed to focus upon the response of individuals to the cross. The response of those who beat their breasts is very similar to that of the Centurion:

Centurion	Crowds
Having seen	Having observed
Happening	Happenings
Was glorifying	Returned / repented
Saying	Striking breasts

The parallel is between his glorifying God, and their returning / repenting. The need for repentance is a strong theme in Luke (10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 16:30; 17:3,4)- as if he perceived that the ultimate motivation to repentance was in the cross. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* 4.5 claims that "all the crowds who were gathered together for the observation of this...returned striking their breasts and weeping awful tears". And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross).

Appreciation of the cross will create unity between us; a common sense of failure, and yet also a common appreciation of the utter grace which we have been invited to behold and actually taste of. "All the people that *came together* to that sight" (Lk. 23:48) uses a word which really means to bond together in close association. This is the effect of the cross. Those who stared in wonder, yearning for a deeper appreciation, were somehow bound together by their experience of the cross.

The people 'coming together to that sight' might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

23:49 It was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified. The way Joseph of Arimathea is described as doing this is juxtaposed straight after the description of the Lord's natural family standing afar off from Him (Lk. 23:49,52). The effect of the cross had brought forth a new family in that the Lord had now broken all His natural ties, not least with His beloved mother.

23:53 Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasize his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

23:55 It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord (:49) and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

24:5 Meetings with two separate Angels didn't make the women understand ; now two Angels appear together and tell them the same words as the other Angels had said.

24:6 After He rose, the Angels pointed out this sense to His men: "...remember *how* [the Greek sense is: 'with what urgency'] he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6-7). Like us, they heard and saw the compulsion, that Messianic *must*, but didn't really appreciate it. The Lord was no fatalist, simply reflecting that what was to be 'must' be. Rather He meant that it 'must' be and therefore He strove to fulfil it. There was no fatalistic compulsion about the cross- for He need not have gone through with it. But He 'must' do so for the sake of that indescribable compulsion to save us, to glorify Yahweh's Name, which He felt within Him. He reminded the two on the way to Emmaus: "*Ought* [s.w. 'must'] *not* Christ to have suffered these

things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). And consider Heb. 2:17: "Wherefore in all things it *behoved him* to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". It was in His death that the Lord's blood acted as a reconciliation for the sins of the people- an evident reference to the ritual of the day of atonement, which the same writer shows spoke so eloquently of the cross. And yet he was "behoved" to do this, it was an obligation He felt intrinsic within His very being. The same word occurs later: "And by reason hereof he *ought*, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ..." (Heb 5:3-5). See on Mk. 14:49.

24:7- see on Mt. 27:26.

24:9 Note how these references to Joanna, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10, all occur within Luke's writings. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women. See on Lk. 8:2.

24:11 Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. Luke's account of the rich man in the parable of Lk. 16 has several consciously-inserted connections with how he later describes the disciples:

Lk. 16

Lk. 24

Disbelief in the face of meeting the resurrected man (Lk. 16:31)

"They did not believe...slow of heart to believe" (Lk. 24:11,25,41)

Double mention of Moses and the prophets as proofs of resurrection (Lk. 16:29,31)

Ditto in Lk. 24:27,44

"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 16:31)

"Should rise from the dead" (Lk. 24:46)

"They will repent" (Lk. 16:30)

Forgiveness of sins was to be preached because of Christ's resurrection, as Luke brings out in Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20.

Thus the tragedy and foolishness of the rich man in the parable is seen by Luke as applying to the disciples in their disbelief of the resurrection. And yet the purpose of Luke's Gospel, as all the Gospels, was to proclaim the need for belief in the resurrection.

24:18 The zeal of Mary to be an obedient witness is remarkable. All Jerusalem knew the story of the risen Jesus still on "the third day" after His death- only someone totally cut off from society would have not heard this news, as Cleopas commented (Lk. 24:18 Gk.). If the whole of Jerusalem knew the story about the resurrected Jesus on the third day after His death, and the male disciples were evidently still nervous and doubtful about everything, it must be that this tremendous spread of the news had been achieved by Mary and the women.

Even after His resurrection, in His moment of glory and triumph, the Lord appeared in very ordinary working clothes, so that He appeared as a gardener. The disciples who met Him on the Emmaus road asked whether He 'lived alone' and therefore was ignorant of the news of the city about the death of Jesus (Lk. 24:18 RV). The only people who lived alone, outside of the extended family, were drop outs or weirdos. It was almost a rude thing for them to ask a stranger. The fact was, the Lord appeared so very ordinary, even like a lower class social outcast type. And this was the exalted Son of God. We gasp at His humility, but also at His earnest passion to remind His followers of their common bond with Him, even in His exaltation.

24:21 The two on the way to Emmaus commented that they thought Christ would have "redeemed" Israel (Lk. 24:21). A.D. Norris makes a powerful case for one of those two being Peter (*Peter: Fisher Of Men* p.109). The only other time the Greek word is used is (again?) by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:18,19, where he reassures his weary sheep that "Ye were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ"- as if to say 'it's really all wonderfully true! I too doubted it, as you know. But I know now that it is true; even I was redeemed, from the shame of those denials, and so much else. Believe it with me!'. After all the Lord had taught about salvation, the eloquent and yet simple explanation of salvation in the Kingdom through His death, Peter and the others thought that His cross ("precious blood") hadn't brought redemption. How weak their understanding was, how slow they were. And Peter again is gently prodding from his own example and pattern of growth: 'Can't you see the reality of it all? Or are you still as inexplicably slow to see it all as I was?'.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the 'chance' they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

The Jewish public looked for Jesus to release them from Roman bondage; but He patiently and repeatedly explained that His Kingdom was not of this world, rather would it come in a political sense at His second coming; and the essence of the Kingdom and liberation He preached was spiritual and internal, rather than physical and external. Yet the disciples didn't get it- they thought Jesus would've redeemed Israel there and then (Lk. 24:21). Their total lack of attention to the Lord's words is brought out by their lament that now was "the third day" after His death- when this ought to have been the very day they were looking for His resurrection!

24:22 The disciples were "astonished" (Lk. 24:22) and "marvelled" (Lk. 24:12,41). The same two Greek words recur together in Acts 2:7,12, describing how the crowd to whom the disciples preached soon afterwards were likewise "amazed and marvelled". Perhaps this was how and why the disciples (and Peter especially) could achieve such a rapport with that crowd- because they had experienced those very same feelings when their faith and understanding was so weak.

24:23 The women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23). They like the disciples later (Lk. 24:37) wished to spiritualize everything rather than face the fact that the real Christ had risen in concrete and actual reality.

24:27- see on Mt. 24:14; Acts 8:35.

24:31 After His resurrection He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke bread. The way He handled the loaf, His mannerisms, His way of speaking and choice of language, were evidently the same after His resurrection as before (Lk. 24:30,31). The Lord is the same today as yesterday.

24:33 Note that the great commission to preach is given to "the eleven and those with him" (Lk. 24:33, i.e. the women. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of "the eleven and the women"- the same two groups.

24:34- see on Mt. 17:1.

The graciously unrecorded appearing of the risen Lord to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34) may have involved the Lord simply appearing to Him, without words. It was simply the assurance that was there in the look on the face of the Lord.

24:35 The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. In like manner He was made known to the disciples "in the breaking of bread" (Lk. 24:35), perhaps because it was usual for the host to say the blessing before the meal, and yet Jesus the stranger, the guest, presumed to lead the prayer.

24:39- see on 1 Cor. 5:5.

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones* (Lk. 24:39). In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now. The Buddhist belief that we will ultimately not exist, that such 'Nirvana' is the most wonderful thing to hope for, appears at first hearing a strange 'hope' to be shared by millions of followers. But actually, it's the same essential psychology as that behind the idea that 'I will not exist in the Kingdom of God, I will be given a new body, person and character. It's actually saying the same- I won't exist. And it's rooted in a terribly low self-image, a dis-ease with ourselves, a lack of acceptance of ourselves as the persons whom God made us and develops us into. Whilst of course our natures will be changed, so that we can be immortal, it is *we* who will be saved; our body will be resurrected, made new, and our spirit "saved" in that day, reunited with our renewed and immortal bodies. We have eternal life in the sense that who we are now, in spiritual terms, is who we will eternally be. Our spirit, the essential us, is in this sense immortal; it's remembered with the Lord. In this sense, not even death itself, nor time itself, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). Just as we still love someone after they have died, remembering as they do who they were and still are to us, so it is with the love of God for the essential us. Hence 1 Pet. 3:4 speaks of how a "gentle and calm disposition" or spirit is in fact "imperishable" (NAB)- because that spirit of character will be eternally remembered. This is why personality and character, rather than physical works, are of such ultimate and paramount importance. How we speak now is in a way, how we will eternally speak- I think that's the idea of Prov. 12:19: "The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment". Our "way" of life and being is how we will eternally be- and for me that solves the enigma of Prov. 12:28: "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death". In Jeremiah 18, God likens Himself to a potter working with us the clay. We can resist how He wants us to be, and He can make us into something else... we are soft clay until the 'firing'; and the day of firing is surely the day of judgment. The implication is that in this life we are soft clay; but the day of judgment will set us hard as the persons we have become, or have been made into, in this life.

The disciples thought the resurrected Christ was a spirit, a ghost. They returned to their old superstitions. Yet He didn't respond by lecturing them about the death state or that all existence is only bodily, much as He could have done. Instead He adopted for a moment their position and reasoned from it: "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (Lk. 24:39). The essence of His concern was their doubt in Him and His resurrection, rather than their return to wrong superstitions.

Note that whilst flesh and *blood* cannot inherit the Kingdom, the risen, immortal Lord Jesus described Himself as flesh and *bones* (Lk. 24:39). In fact, we find that "flesh and bones" are often paralleled (Gen. 2:23; Job 10:11; 33:21; Ps. 38:3; Prov. 14:30), and simply mean 'the person', or as the Lord put it on that occasion, "I myself". We ourselves will be in the Kingdom, with similar personalities we have now [that's a very challenging thought of itself]. "Flesh" doesn't necessarily have to refer, in every instance, to something condemned. Who we are now is who we will essentially be in the eternity of God's Kingdom. Let's not allow any idea that somehow our flesh / basic being is so awful that actually, the essential "I myself" will be dissolved beneath the wrath of God at the judgment. The Lord is "the saviour of the body" and will also save our "spirit" at the last day; so that we, albeit with spirit rather than blood energizing us, will live eternally. Understanding things this way enables us to perceive more forcefully the eternal importance of who we develop into as persons, right now.

The disciples mistakenly thought that they had seen a ghost. Such things do not exist, seeing the Bible teaches that all existence is in a bodily form. Yet Jesus did not begin scolding them for their doctrinal weakness. Instead he calmly demonstrated the ridiculousness of such ideas: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have" (Lk. 24:39). Jesus spoke about "a spirit" as if such a thing existed, even though he did not believe in it. By all means compare this with how faithful Jephthah spoke of the idol Chemosh *as if* he existed (Jud. 11:24). Thus Christ's attitude here and in the entire demons issue is an indication of His personality: patient, positive, powerful, intellectually rigorous, hoping to win others round, not mocking or pejorative.

24:41 The disciples are described as sleeping for sorrow, not believing for joy (Lk. 24:41). Both their unbelief and their sorrow and failure to support the Lord in His time of need are not really excusable by either sorrow nor joy. And yet the Lord generously imputes these excuses to His men, such is His love for them. They are described as being "glad" when they saw the risen Lord (Jn. 20:20). Yet actually they didn't believe at that time- for Lk. 24:41 generously says that they "believed not for joy". And they assumed that Jesus was a phantom, not the actual, concrete, bodily Jesus. Placing the records together doesn't give a very positive image of the disciples at this time. And yet the record is so positive about them. The disciples are said not to have believed "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief. They slept, we are told, "for sorrow"- when they should have stayed awake as commanded.

One hallmark of the spiritual way of life is an indomitably *positive spirit*. Not a simplistic naivety, blindly hoping for the best in an almost fatalistic way. But as the Father and Son are so essentially positive, so will we be, if we absorb something of His Spirit. Thus the disciples are said not to have believed "for joy" (Lk. 24:41). But the Lord upbraided them for their arrant foolishness and plain unbelief.

Joy isn't really a cause for disbelief. It's the grace in the inspired record which makes that excuse for them. They preferred to spiritualize everything, as many do today, rather than face the actual implications of a Lord who is for real. They accepted it was Jesus, and yet they still disbelieved. Note in this context how the women said they had seen "a vision of Angels" rather than actual Angels (Lk. 24:23).

This incident of eating was to yet again reassure them that He was for real. Note how later on, by the sea of Tiberias, Jesus again ate before them- He had to keep repeating Himself to get it home to them, that He was for real. If those men, who had heard the many predictions of resurrection from the lips of the Lord Himself, found it hard to believe He was for real when He stood before them- how understandably hard it is for us to grasp that He is for real.

24:44 As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: "These are my words which I spake unto you" (Lk. 24:44 RV), and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted

throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. He didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh.

24:45 The parallel record to the preaching commissions of Mk. 16 and Mt. 28 is found in Lk. 24:45-47. There we read how Christ explained to the disciples that their preaching of the Gospel "among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" was foretold in the Psalms and prophets. So the Bible student asks: *Where* in the Psalms and prophets? The Lord spoke as if the prophecies about this were copious. There do not seem to be any specific prophecies which speak of the twelve spreading the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century. Instead we read of the Gospel being spread from Jerusalem *in the Kingdom*, and often the phrase "all nations" occurs in a Kingdom context, describing how "all nations" will come to worship Christ at Jerusalem (Ps. 22:27; 67:2; 72:11,17; 82:8; 86:9; 117:1; Is. 2:2; 66:18,20; Jer. 3:17; Dan. 7:14; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23). This selection of "Psalms and prophets" is impressive. Yet the Lord Jesus clearly interpreted these future Kingdom passages as having relevance to the world-wide spreading of the Gospel. "All nations" also occurs in many passages exhorting us to praise Yahweh among all the nations of this world. The reason for this is that God's glory is so great it should be declared as far as possible by us. 1 Chron. 16:24,25 is typical of many such verses: "Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. *For* great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised... for all the gods of the people are idols". World-wide preaching is therefore an aspect of our praise of Yahweh, and as such it is a spiritual work which is timeless. Because the Kingdom is to spread world-wide, we should therefore spread the Good News of this coming Kingdom world-wide. In prospect- and no more than that, let it be noted- the Kingdom has been established in that Christ has all power in Heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). This is the language of Dan. 7:14 concerning the future Kingdom. The believer must live the Kingdom life now, as far as possible (Rom. 13:12,13). In the Kingdom, we will be spreading the Gospel throughout this planet. In this life too we should live in the spirit of the Kingdom in this regard.

Prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words. Thus "the Scripture" prophesied Christ's resurrection after three days (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 15:3,4); but nowhere is this explicitly prophesied. It is implied in the spirit behind the types, e.g. of Jonah and Gen. 22:4. So as 'prophecy' is not just the words but the spirit behind them, so prayer is not just the words, but the spirit in the man's heart who prays, even if the words come out wrong. See on Acts 10:4.

24:47- see on Acts 10:35,36.

The preaching of the Gospel was prophesied as *beginning* at Jerusalem, Jesus said. If this world-wide preaching abruptly finished at the end of the first century, to begin again at Jerusalem in the Kingdom, surely this would be prophesied in the Old Testament? The impression one gets from the Old Testament passages listed above is that the Gospel would begin to spread from Jerusalem, and would *go on spreading* until the full establishment of the Kingdom. This explains why Christ's command to get up and go world-wide with the Gospel stands for all time. The command to preach to "all nations" would ring bells in Jewish minds with the promises to Abraham, concerning the blessing of forgiveness to come upon "all nations" through Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). Therefore God's people are to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ to "all nations". The offer of sharing in that blessing did not close at the end of the first century. Putting the "all nations" of the Abrahamic promises together with Christ's preaching commission leads to a simple conclusion: The Hope of Israel now applies to all nations; so go and tell this good news to all nations.

24:47 Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10;

17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the 12 as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18. See on Acts 1:1.

As Christ appeals to all nations, so should we. The prophecies which Christ interpreted as referring to the church spreading the Gospel world-wide are specifically described as prophecies about Christ personally (Lk. 24:44,47: "All things which were written in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning *me* ... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached..."). Thus the preachers of the Gospel would personally manifest Christ; which accounts for the special sense of His presence which they experience as they do this work (Mt. 28:20).

Our Lord's final Bible class showed how the Old Testament prophets described the preaching of the Gospel world-wide from Jerusalem (Lk.24:47) in the first century. He must surely have been referring to 'Kingdom' passages like Is.2:2-4.

Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled. As if to bring this home, the New Testament quotes several passages evidently prophetic of the future Kingdom as having their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel today:

- Is. 2:2-4 (the word of Yahweh *will* go out from Jerusalem) = the ecclesia's witness to the world today, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). This, the Lord said, was in fulfillment of the OT prophets- and He could only be referring to those like Isaiah.
- Am. 9:11,12 had its fulfillment in the work of preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18; 26:16-18).
- Likewise Is. 54:12 = Gal. 4:27; we extend the joy of the Kingdom to our hearers.
- Is. 52:7 = Rom. 10:15.
- Is. 11:10 = Rom. 15:12.

The apparent inappropriacy or lack of context of these quotations need not worry us. It is not that they have no future fulfillment They evidently will have, at the Lord's second coming. But God sees that which shall be as already happening; His perspective is outside of our kind of time. The ecclesia's preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the world is effectively a spreading of the Kingdom to them; in that those who respond properly will ultimately be in God's Kingdom. But God sees through that gap between their response and the final establishment of the Kingdom; He invites us to see it as if we have spread the Kingdom to them. As we present the Gospel to men and women of all races, we are enabling the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. The more we preach, the more glorious is their fulfillment This is the power of our Gospel and the preaching of it. Let's not treat it as something ordinary or optional or to be fitted in to our spare time.

24:47

The Great Commission In Luke

Luke records how the Angel summarised the Lord's work as good news of great joy for *all men* (Lk. 2:10). The Gospel concludes by asking *us* to take that message to *all men*. Straight away we are challenged to analyze our preaching of the Gospel: is it a telling of "great joy" to others, or merely a glum 'witness' or a seeking to educate them 'how to read the Bible more effectively', or a sharing

with them the conclusions of our somewhat phlegmatic Biblical researches? Whatever we teach, it must be a joyful passing on of *good* news of “great joy”. The Lord began His ministry by proclaiming a freedom from burdens through Him (Lk. 4). And He concludes it by telling the disciples to proclaim the same deliverance (Lk. 24:47). Consider how He brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach [proclaim] [Heb. ‘call out to a man’] the acceptable year of the Lord”.

This combines allusions to Is. 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); Is. 58:6 LXX and Is. 61:2.

Is. 58:6 AV: “To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free (cp. Dt. 15:12 re freedom of slaves, s.w.), and that ye break every yoke?” is in the context of an insincerely kept year of Jubilee in Hezekiah’s time, after the Sennacherib invasion. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions- the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for “preach” in Lk. 24:47 and for “preach / proclaim the acceptable year” in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. And the LXX word used for ‘jubilee’ means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed in the lives of those who accept it. It’s as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off... and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them. And the very fact that *Yahweh* has released others means that we likewise ought to live in a spirit of releasing others from their debts to us: “The creditor shall release that which he hath lent... *because* the Lord’s release hath been proclaimed” (Dt. 15:2RV).

We can’t have a spirit of meanness in our personal lives if we are proclaiming Yahweh’s release. This is one of many instances where the process of preaching the Gospel benefits the preacher. The jubilee offered release from the effects of past misfortune and even past foolishness in decisions; and our offer of jubilee offers this same message in ultimate term. Incidentally, the Lord had implied that we are in a permanent Jubilee year situation when He said that we should “take no thought what ye shall eat ... Sow not nor gather into barns” and not think “What shall we eat?” (Mt. 6:26,31 = Lev. 25:20). There must be a spirit of telling this good news to absolutely *all*. And yet according to Luke’s own emphasis, it is the poor who are especially attracted to the Jubilee message of freedom (Lk. 6:20-23; 7:1,22,23; 13:10-17). There are several links between Is. 58 and Neh. 5, where we read of poor Jews who had to mortgage their vineyards and even sell their children in order to pay their debts. The “oppressed” or “broken victim” of Is. 58, to whom we are invited to proclaim deliverance, were therefore in the very first instance those under the throttling grip of poverty, who had become bondslaves because of their debts and now had no hope of freedom, apart from the frank forgiveness of a year of Jubilee. We take a like message to Westerners overburdened with mortgage payments, to those suffering from absolute poverty in the developing world, and to all those with a sense of debt and being trapped within their life situation. We pronounce to them a year of Jubilee, a frank forgiveness, a way of real escape and freedom.

To preach [proclaim] the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:19) is thus parallel with “You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev. 25:10). Likewise there are to be found other such allusions to the proclamation of Jubilee: “We as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive... the grace of God... a time accepted... in the day of salvation [the Jubilee] have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time” (2 Cor. 6:1,2) “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached [proclaimed, s.w. 4:19] in his name among all nations” (Lk. 24:47)

24:48- see on Lk. 1:45; Acts 5:32.

He died and rose as the representative of all men; and therefore this good news should be preached to all kinds and all races of people. Men from all nations were in prospect sprinkled by His blood (Is. 52:15); and therefore we must extend the knowledge of this to all men, both in our collective and personal witness. Lk. 24:48 simply comments that the disciples were witnesses to the resurrection and the fact that forgiveness and salvation was therefore potentially available to all men. The parallel records in Mt. and Mk. say that they were told to go out and witness to the resurrection world-wide. Putting them together it is apparent that if we are truly witnesses of the resurrection in our own faith, then part and parcel of this is to take this witness out into our own little worlds.

Matthew and Mark record how the Lord told the disciples to go world-wide with the message of His death and resurrection; He commanded them to do this. Luke's account is different. He reminds them of His death and resurrection, and simply adds: "And ye are witnesses of these things" (Lk. 24:48). Not 'you *will be*, I'm telling you to be, witnesses...'. The very fact of having seen and known them was of itself an imperative to bear witness to them. This is the outgoing power of the cross.

Lk. 24:46-49 records Luke's version of the great preaching commission given in Mk. 16 and Mt. 28. He doesn't record that the Lord actually told the disciples to go out and preach. Instead He says that the OT prophets foretold the world-wide preaching of the Gospel of His death and resurrection, "and ye are witnesses of these things". It's as if He's saying, 'If you are a witness to all this, you must be a witness of it to all' (cp. Acts 1:8). If we are witnesses, we will bear witness; we will naturally. We have to; and note how Lev. 5:1 taught that it was a sin not to bear witness / testify when one had been a witness. This may well be consciously alluded to in the language of witness which we have in Lk. 24:48.

24:49 The disciples returned from Galilee to Jerusalem [unrecorded].

“In the beginning was the word”

Every Bible student will inevitably be involved at some time in seeking to explain the opening verses of John’s Gospel. And all who have done so will probably have felt a slight dis-ease at beginning the discussion by saying that “the word” in Greek is *logos*... because it is always far better to make a point from the Bible text that one has in front of them, rather than claiming to know Greek. Remember that the majority of us don’t even know the Greek alphabet, so arguments based on Greek ought best to be avoided where possible. In recent times I have slightly changed my approach to explaining this passage and I submit it for your reflection. The key is to get our contact to let us systematically explain the phrases one by one. Of course you can’t make *all* of the following points to a person in a conversation, but it’s as well to have the background clear in one’s own mind.

1 “In the beginning was the word”

“The word”

Just look at the many times this phrase occurs in the Gospel records. It doesn’t mean ‘the whole Bible’. It means clearly enough and without any dispute ‘the Gospel message’ (e.g. Mk. 2:2; 4:33; 16:20; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 12:48; 14:24; Acts 4:4; 11:19). The Gospel was preached to Abraham in that it comprises the promises to Him and their fulfilment in Jesus (Gal. 3:8). That word of promise was “made flesh” in Jesus; “the word of the oath” of the new covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, “maketh the son” (Heb. 7:28). This is just another way of saying that the word— of the promises, of the Gospel— was made flesh in Jesus. Note how in Rom. 9:6,9 “the word” is called “the word of promise”— those made to Abraham. The same Greek words translated ‘Word’ and ‘made’ occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54— where we read of the word [AV “saying”] of the Old Testament prophets being ‘made’ true by being fulfilled [AV “be brought to pass”]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The ‘word was made flesh’, in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was “*made*... of the seed of David according to the *flesh*” (Rom. 1:3)— i.e. God’s word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for “made” and “flesh” only occur together in these two places— as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us. But note the admission of a leading theologian: “Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word... in terms which compel us to regard it as a person” (1).

"In the beginning was the word"

John’s Gospel tends to repeat the ideas of the other gospel records but in more spiritual terms. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the message by giving the genealogies of Jesus, explaining that His birth was the fulfilment, the ‘making flesh’, of the promises to Abraham and David. And Mark begins by defining his “beginning of the gospel” as the fact that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. John is really doing the same, in essence. But he is using more spiritual language. In the beginning was the word— the word of promise, the word of prophecy, all through the Old Testament. And that word was “made flesh” in Jesus, and on account of that word, all things in the new creation had and would come into being. Whilst John is written in Greek, clearly enough Hebrew thought is behind the words. “The Hebrew term *debarim* [words] can also mean ‘history’” (2). The whole salvation history of God, from the promise in Eden onwards, was about the Lord Jesus and was made flesh in His life and death.

Luke’s prologue states that he was an “*eyewitness* and minister of *the word*... from *the beginning*”; he refers to the word of the Gospel that later became flesh in Jesus. John’s prologue is so similar: “That which was from *the beginning*, that which we have heard, which we have *seen with our eyes*, that which we *beheld*... *the word* of life” (1 Jn. 1:1 RV). Jn. 1:14 matched this with: “*The word* was

made flesh, and *we beheld* his glory". John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person. Luke's Gospel makes the same point as John's but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context. He saw the whole of the OT as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

In passing, it is interesting to reflect upon the Lord's comment that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in their midst. For this evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be.

In confirmation of all this, it has been observed that "The numerical use of *logos* in the Johannine writings overwhelmingly favours "message" (some 25 times), not a personified word; and elsewhere in the NT the use of "word" with genitival complement also support the message motif: "word of God" ... "word of the Kingdom" ... "word of the cross" " (3). So our equation of "the word" with the essence of the Gospel message rather than Jesus personally is in harmony with other occurrences of *logos*. That said, there evidently is a personification of sorts going on. Personifications of the word of God weren't uncommon in the literature of the time. Thus Wisdom of Solomon 18:15 speaks of how "Thine all powerful word leaped from heaven down from the royal throne". Because "for the Hebrew the word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence of its own" (4), e.g. a blessing or curse had a kind of life of their own, it's not surprising that *logos* is personified.

One way of understanding the prologue in Jn. 1 is to consider how it is interpreted in the prologue we find in John's first epistle. It appears that John's Gospel was the standard text for a group of converts that grew up around him; John then wrote his epistles in order to correct wrong interpretations of his Gospel record that were being introduced by itinerant false teachers into the house churches which he had founded. For example, "God so loved the world..." (Jn. 3:16) seems to have been misunderstood by the false prophets against whom John was contending, to mean that a believer can be of the world. Hence 1 Jn. 2:16 warns the brethren that they cannot 'love the world' in the sense of having worldly behaviour and desires. On the other hand, John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that "You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community "who have come to know the truth" (2 Jn. 1), i.e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. This thesis is explained at length in Raymond Brown (5).

With this in mind, it appears that the prologue of 1 Jn. is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

In the beginning was the word	What was from the beginning
The word was with God	The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God
In [the word] was life	The word of life
The life was the light of men	God is light
The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh	This life was revealed
And dwelt amongst us	
and was manifested to us	
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

Notes

- (1) G.B. Caird, *Christ For Us Today* (London: SCM, 1968) p. 79.
- (2) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 261.
- (3) Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 164.
- (4) C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1960) p. 264.
- (5) *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) and in his *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). These are lengthy and at times difficult reads, and I can't agree with all the conclusions, and yet I'd heartily recommend them to serious Bible students. One

pleasing feature of his writings is his frequent admission that trinitarian theology is an interpretation of what the NT writers, especially John, actually wrote- and they themselves didn't have the trinity in mind when they wrote as they did. He comments on the hymn of Phil. 2 about Christ taking the "form of God": "Many scholars today doubt that "being in the form of God" and "accepting the form of a servant" refers to incarnation" [*The Community Of The Beloved Disciple* p. 46].

2 "The word was with God"

The Hebrew idea of being "with" someone can carry the idea of being 'in their presence'. 2 Kings 5:1,2 speak of how Naaman was "with" his master, and the RVmg. gives "before" or 'in the presence of' as a translation of this idiom. He is paralleled in the record with the maid who was "before" (RVmg.) her mistress, Naaman's wife. When we read that the word was "with" God, the idea is that the word was always before God, in His presence, in His perspective. Applied to an abstract idea like the *logos*, surely the idea is that God always had this plan for a Son before Him, in His presence / perspective.

Wisdom In Proverbs

The basic idea in John 1 is repeated in Proverbs 8. In the beginning, there was a *logos* / word / intention with the Father. His 'idea' of having a Son was not thought up at the last minute, as some sort of expediency in order to cope with the unexpected problem of human sin, as some of the critics and false teachers of the first century taught. In fact, it wouldn't be going too far to say that John actually has Proverbs 8 in mind when speaking about the *logos* being in the beginning with the Father.

Prov. 8:22-31 (ASV) reads: "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth; While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong, When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth; Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men".

The key issue is whether "wisdom" in Proverbs is in fact the Lord Jesus personally. A brief glance at Proverbs surely indicates that wisdom is being personified as a woman. Wisdom in Proverbs stands at the gates and invites men to come listen to her. She dwells with prudence (Prov. 8:12), and in Solomon's time cried out to men as they entered the city (Prov. 8:1-3). None of these things are intended to be taken literally. "Wisdom" is wisdom- albeit personified. Wisdom was "possessed" by God- and yet the Hebrew word translated "possessed" is defined by Strong as meaning 'to create'. When God started His "way" or path with men, He had principles and purpose. He didn't make up His principles as He went along. And this was what was being said by John's first century critics. Therefore John alluded to Proverbs 8 in explaining that the essential purpose of the Father was all summarized and epitomized in the person of His Son; and that *logos* was created / conceived by the Father from the very beginning. Note that Prov. 8:24,25 describes wisdom as being "brought forth" by the Father from the beginning. Again, God as it were hatched a plan. Even if we were to equate wisdom with Jesus personally, He was still created / brought forth from the Father. Somewhat different to the false Trinitarian notion of an 'uncreate' Jesus who 'eternally existed'. Wisdom was the "master workman" (Prov. 8:30), or 'the one trusted / believed in' (Heb.)- in the sense that all of God's natural creation was made according to and reflective of the principles of "wisdom". John's allusion to Prov. 8 shows that this "wisdom" was above all to be embodied and epitomized in God's

Son. From this it follows that the whole of the natural creation was designed with the Lord Jesus in mind. Somehow it speaks of Him; will be used by Him; and will in some sense be liberated and redeemed by Him from “the bondage of corruption” to share the glorious liberty of us God’s children (Rom. 8:21-24). And perhaps this is why we sense that the Son of God was strangely at peace with the natural creation around Him, and could so effortlessly extract deep spiritual lessons from the birds, flowers and clouds around Him. “Then I was by [Heb. toward] him” (Prov. 8:30) is the idea behind the Greek text of Jn. 1:1: “The word was [toward] God”. It wasn’t Jesus personally who was with God or God-ward; it was the word / wisdom / *logos* which was, and this was then “made flesh” in the person of the Lord Jesus. And this *logos* was the “wisdom” in Proverbs.

We’ve demonstrated that John’s Gospel begins with the idea that the “word” of God in the Old Testament was made flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus. But John actually continues that theme throughout his Gospel. He continually refers to things which the Jews saw symbols of the Torah- and applies them to Jesus. Examples include the bread / manna and water, and also light. The Assumption of Moses speaks of the Torah as “the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world”- and this is exactly the language of Jn. 1:9 about Christ. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discover that nearly all the phrases used in the prologue to John’s Gospel are alluding to what Jewish writers had said about the “Wisdom of God”, especially in Proverbs and the apocryphal writings known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (1). And they understood “Wisdom” to primarily refer to the Torah. For example, Jn. 1:14 RVmg. states that the Lord Jesus as the word made flesh “tabernacled amongst us”. Yet Ecclus. 24:8 speaks of Wisdom ‘tabernacling’ amongst Israel. *Skenoo*, the verb ‘to tabernacle’, is of course related to the noun *skene*, the tabernacle. As Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, God too came and lived with them in a tent- called the tabernacle, the tent where God could be met. The idea was that God wasn’t so far from them, He chose to come and be like them- they lived in tents, so He too lived in a tent. He didn’t build a huge house or palace to live in- because that’s not how His people lived. He ‘tented’ in a tent like them. This pointed forward to the genuine humanity of the Lord Jesus; for the human condition is likened to a tent in 2 Cor. 5:1. So rather than proving that ‘Jesus was God’, this whole prologue to John’s Gospel actually proves otherwise.

The language of pre-existence was applied by the Jews to the Torah and Wisdom, and so when John demonstrates that the ultimate Wisdom / Torah / *logos* / word which was from the beginning has now been fulfilled in and effectively replaced by Jesus, he’s going to reference that same ‘pre-existence’ language to make his point. As an example, the Mishnah stated (*Aboth Nathan*) that “Before the world was made the Torah was written and lay in the bosom of God” (2). John’s desire is that his fellow Jews quit these fanciful ideas and realize that right now, in Heaven, the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father (Jn. 1:18). He right now is the word-made-flesh. The uninspired Jewish writings spoke of the descent and re-ascent of Wisdom (1 Enoch 42; 4 Ezra 5:9; 2 Bar. 48:36; 3 Enoch 5:12; 6:3), and Philo especially connects Wisdom and the Logos. It seems that these wrong Jewish ideas found their ways into Christianity, and were taken over and wrongly applied to Jesus. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that John’s ‘Logos’ passage in Jn. 1:1-14 is in fact a deconstruction of those wrong ideas; he alludes to them and corrects them, just as Moses alluded to incorrect pagan myths of creation and shows a confused Israel in the wilderness what the true story actually was.

Notes

(1) This is shown at great length throughout Rendel Harris, *The Origin of The Prologue To St. John’s Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1917).

(2) Cited in C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1953) p. 86.

3 "The word was made flesh"

“Was with God”

The idea of a “word” being “with” God or even another person has an Old Testament background. Job comments: “Yet these things you have concealed in your heart, I know that this is *with you*” (10:13; NIV “in your mind”). Similarly Job 23:13, 14: “What his soul desires, that he does, for he performs what is appointed for me, and many such *decrees* are *with him*”. God’s essential plans are therefore ‘with Him’, in this figure of speech. When those plans are revealed in words, i.e. they are openly verbalized, it would be true to say: “I will instruct you in the power of God; what is *with* the Almighty I will not conceal” (Job 27:11). Wisdom, personified as a woman, was “with God” before creation- it was not ‘with’ the sea, but it was ‘with’ God (Job 28:14; 8:22,30). To hold a plan in one’s own mind is to have it ‘with’ them. The Hebrew text of Gen. 40:14 bears this out, when Joseph is begged: “Remember me with yourself”. So for the essential purpose of God in His Son to be ‘with’ Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally ‘with’ God in Heaven. Note the parallel between the word of God and the work of God in Ps. 106:13: “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel”. Whatever God says / plans comes to concrete fulfillment; and the idea of a Son was always in His mind. That word became flesh, became real and actual, in the person of Jesus.

“The word was made flesh”

So there shouldn’t be any problem with accepting that an abstract thing like the *logos*, the word, could become a person. For wisdom is personified in the Old Testament (e.g. Proverbs 7). And it is spoken of in James 3:17 as being easy to intreat, merciful, not hypocritical- all attributes of a person. “The word” is often put for ‘the preaching of the word’ (Acts 6:2,4,7; Tit. 2:5; Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 20:4). The man Christ Jesus was the word of the Gospel made flesh. He was and is the epitome of what He and others preached. This is why another title for Jesus was “the Kingdom”- He thus described Himself when He said that He, the Kingdom, was amongst them in first century Israel (Lk. 17:21). “The word of the Kingdom” is paralleled with “the word” (Mt. 13:19 cp. 20-23). The things of the Kingdom and the things of Jesus are inextricably linked. Likewise John calls Jesus “the eternal life” (1 Jn. 1:2). The life that He lived was the quality of life which we will eternally live in the Kingdom. The personality of Jesus was the living quintessence of all that He preached- as it should be with the living witness which our lives make. To preach “Christ” was and is therefore to preach “the things concerning the Kingdom of God”, because that Kingdom will be all about the manifestation of the man Christ Jesus (Acts 8:5 cp. 12). So, Jesus was “the word” in the sense that He epitomised the Gospel. This is why James 1:18 says that we are born again by the word of the Gospel, and 1 Pet. 1:23 says that the word who begets is the Lord Jesus. And it is why Lk. 8:1 describes the Lord as both preaching and “proclaiming” the Gospel of the Kingdom. Who He was and who He is [and ever shall be] is the shewing forth of the Gospel. We likewise must not only preach the doctrine of the Kingdom but proclaim it in our lives. For this is the essential witness to the good news of the Kingdom. Indeed, in all the teaching of the Lord, He was Himself the great exemplar of it. The Sermon on the Mount was the Lord unpacking His compelling vision for human life as He believed God intended, and as He Himself exemplified it. It was almost a self-explanation rather than a set of demands upon us. Yet the very fact that it was an explanation of Himself somehow makes it all the more compelling.

The word being made flesh was an act of the will on the Lord’s part. “The word was made flesh” isn’t just a piece of theological description of something that was effortlessly achieved. The principles of “the word”, the radical implications of the word of the Gospel spoken throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, had to be “made flesh” in the Lord, culminating in the crucifixion. There He was “The word was made flesh”. This was and is the ultimate outworking of the implications of the Gospel taught in Eden, promised to Abraham, developed throughout the prophets. And it didn’t happen automatically. That word was in the beginning with God, but not all ‘words’ / intentions that He ‘has’ become flesh, i.e. concrete reality here on earth. God has had various intentions which He

‘thought’ to do, but because of human weakness they don’t actually become reality. He told Israel about His plan / intention / *logos* of driving out the Canaanites: “If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land... I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them” (Num. 33:55,56). He ‘thought’ to do things to them through the agency of His people; but those ‘thoughts’ never became flesh.

The extent to which Jesus made the word flesh needs some reflection. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. John’s Gospel especially seems to speak of the “words” and “works” of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, issuing in the works / actions of this man who was “the word made flesh”. Consider how in Jn. 8:28; 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas in Jn. 8:28 He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. The parallel between the Lord’s words and works is again brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: “They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*... He said... let these *sayings* sink down into your ears”. There are no distinct ‘sayings’ of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected “to tell no man what was done” (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

“The word was made flesh” in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is perhaps reflected in Lk. 4:20: “He closed the book [of the words of God], and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him”. Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation’s eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father’s word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. Thus He was indeed “The word was made flesh”. The idea of words becoming flesh is a reflection of the Hebrew idea that a person’s words become their actions. Thus we read of Solomon’s “acts” or, RVmg., “sayings” (2 Chron. 9:5). There is no requirement for a person to exist in one form and then turn into another form. There was perfect congruence between the personality of Jesus, and the words of God which He preached. Thus the people marvelled at Him, commenting “What is this word?” (Lk. 4:36 RV). God’s word was made flesh, was made personal, in Him. In this sense there was almost no need for Jesus to say specific words about Himself- His character and personality showed forth that word, that *logos*, that essential message. The Jews pressured Him: “If you are the Christ, tell us plainly”. But He could respond: “I told you, and you believe not: the works that I do... these bear witness of me” (Jn. 10:24,25). Of course, they’d have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His “works”, His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was “the [plain] word” which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection.

It bears repeating that “the word was made flesh” in Jesus in the sense that there was absolute congruence between His teaching and His actions. Thus He not only *taught* that distinctions between clean and unclean were ended; He actually went and ate / fellowshiped with sinners and

touched lepers. The Old Testament prophets so absorbed the word of God that their emotions were His; they mourned and grew angry in the same way as He did. Their words were therefore both theirs and His at the same time; that's why it's hard at times in the prophets to decide whether we are reading the feelings / thoughts of the prophet, or of God. In the symbolic acts of the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 20, Jeremiah 19, Ezekiel 4 and 5) we see their actual lives and deeds being in a sense the Word of God embodied in them. Von Rad suggests that "the entry of the word into a prophet's bodily life... approximates to what the writer of the fourth Gospel says about the word becoming flesh" (1). The Lord Jesus was the greatest of the prophets and the ultimate example of God's word becoming identified with and in the very core personality of a human being. However, as a concept, the word could become flesh in men who were not the begotten Son of God- e.g. the prophets- and it's possible that Jewish minds in the first century would have actually understood John's language of "the word made flesh" in this kind of prophetic context.

As the resurrected Lord stood before the disciples, he says: "These are my words which I spake unto you" (Lk. 24:44 RV), and goes on to say that His resurrection had been predicted throughout the Old Testament words of God. He had made both His words and the words of God into flesh as He stood there. He didn't say 'Look everyone, I've risen!'. He just stood there, reminded them of the words of the prophets, and His own words, and said "These are my words". He was so powerfully and completely the word made flesh.

John opens his first letter by speaking about "the word" as if he refers to something neuter and abstract- and yet he speaks of how he personally touched and handled it. The grammar of 1 Jn. 1:1-3 refers to an abstract idea, the *logos*- but the reference is evidently to the real historical person of Jesus. It seems to me that this was John's inspired way of getting over the awesome extent to which "the word became flesh", all the ideas inherent in God and in His word were expressed seamlessly in Jesus; there was such perfect congruence between the word Jesus spoke and the person He was. No longer should these passages be seen as merely the battleground for the arian-athanasian, unitarian-trinitarian argument. The wonder of what is being actually said by John needs to be taken on board by us, and risen up to; for the word is to become flesh in us as it was in our Lord.

The Name / Word Becoming Flesh

There's a Hebrew grammatical feature known as the intensive plural, whereby one great, important, significant thing is spoken of in the plural. The AV margin in Is. 53:9 speaks of the *deaths* [plural] of Messiah- i.e. the one great significant death of Messiah. So with *elohim*. It can effectively mean the ONE great mighty one. The common Old Testament Name of God, Yahweh Elohim, then becomes - Yahweh will be through the one great ONE- i.e., a prophecy of the Lord Jesus who would manifest Him supremely. Bearing this in mind, we come to John's statement that the Word was with God, was God, and became flesh in the Lord Jesus, and we behold the glory of that. John's Gospel is evidently full of allusions to Jewish terminology and ideas. He also alludes to many surrounding pagan ideas, recasting them with reference to the Lord Jesus, demonstrating thereby their error. Philo's influence was significant in the first century. He had developed the idea that "the logos" was what he called the "archangel of many names," and the "name of God". The Logos is also designated by him as the "high priest". John's writings, and Hebrews, are at pains to show where these ideas were wrong, and in what sense they could have some truth in relation to the Lord Jesus. *He*, and not Philo's abstract 'logos', is the one ultimate high priest; He is greater than Angels; and He is the one who ultimately came in the Father's Name and revealed it to us (Jn. 5:43 etc.). The Son has now been given the Name of the Father (Phil. 2:6-11; Is. 9:6; Rev. 3:12); but the Son's Name is now "the logos of God" (Rev. 19:13). The logos that became flesh thus refers to the Name of the Father, Yahweh, which became the One special one in the person of Christ.

The ideas of the Name, the word and the glory of God are heavily interconnected. I've explored this at length at http://www.carelinks.net/books/dh/james/james_d05.html . Jn. 1:14 says that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was

made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the logos of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person (“flesh”) of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me” (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in “the world” didn’t perceive it (Jn. 1:14). John parallels the word becoming flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is in fact a reference to the declaration of Yahweh’s Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God. Remember the links between the Name, the glory and the word of God. Summing up, the reference to the logos / word becoming flesh in the Lord Jesus therefore speaks of the fulfillment of God’s Name in Christ, just as any father’s name is in a sense fulfilled in his son. And countless times in the Old Testament, this had been foretold- Yahweh would be elohim, one great one- the Lord Jesus, His Son.

"Dwelt among us"

"Dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14) can too easily be misread as meaning that the Word was once in Heaven but came to earth to live amongst us humans. But this (yet again) is to miss the Old Testament background. Time and again, the LXX uses the Greek word *kenosa* ("dwelt") to refer to how God dwelt in the sanctuary. The "us" amongst whom God now dwells through His *logos* is not humanity generally, the inhabitants of planet earth, but specifically we who believe and form His sanctuary / dwelling place amidst the unbelieving world. Perhaps this is John's equivalent to Matthew's reference to how where two or three are gathered together in His Name, there the Lord will dwell in their midst (Mt. 18:20).

Notes

(1) Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) Vol. 2 p. 274.

4 “The word was God”

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word “is” God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David “despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised me” (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is God. By *our* words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too ‘are’ our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: “It is the Lord” (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant ‘It is the word of the Lord’; but he saw God as effectively His word. “The word”, the “word of the Kingdom”, “the Gospel”, “the word of God” are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11-15) and “the word of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the “word of the Kingdom” means the word which *is about* the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. “The gospel of God” means the Gospel which is *about* God, not the Gospel which *is* God Himself in person (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet. 4:17). So, the word of God, the word which *was* God, the Gospel of God, was made flesh in Jesus. “The word of Jesus” and “the word of God” are interchangeable (Acts 19:10 cp. 20; 1 Thess. 1:8 cp. 2:13); as is “the word of the Gospel” and “the word of Jesus” (Acts 15:7 cp. 35). The word wasn’t directly equivalent to Jesus; He manifested the word, He showed us by His life and words and personality what the Kingdom was like, what God is like; for the word which He “became” was

about God, and about the Kingdom. He was the entire Gospel, of God and of His Kingdom, made flesh. He could speak of His words abiding in us (Jn. 15:7), and yet make this parallel to He personally abiding in us (Jn. 15:4,5; 14:20). "The word was God" can't mean that the word is identical with God- for the word "was with God", or "was in God's presence". The NEB therefore renders: "What God was, the Word was". G.B. Caird suggests the translation: "In the beginning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God's own being" (1).

In the person of Jesus, there was an uncanny and never before, never again experienced congruence between a human being and his words. And our witness should be modelled on His pattern- we should be the living embodiment of the doctrines we preach. The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh. It seems to me that many of us need to learn these things in our hearts; for our preaching has so often been a matter of literal words, Bible lectures, seminars, flaunting our correct exposition of Bible passages and themes. When the essential witness must be of a life lived, a making flesh of the word which is God. To ignore this will lead us into literalistic definitions of literal words, arguments about statements of faith, endless additions of words and clauses to clarify other words... whereas "the word" which the Lord Jesus manifested was not merely human words. There was far more to it than that. It was and is and must ever be a word made flesh. This is why nothing can replace personal witness and personal, one on one teaching as the way that conversions are really made. And yet increasingly we tend to try to use *media* to preach- TV, CDs, internet, video, tapes etc. There is nothing personally 'live' in all this; there can be no communication of truths through their incarnation in our own personalities. And yet this was how God communicated with us in His Son; and how we too reveal His word in flesh to others.

"The word was God". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person. And this, of course, was why the unbelieving Jews just didn't understand the literal words which He spoke. They asked Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person?

As the word of God, the message of God in flesh, Jesus was God's agent, and as such could be counted *as* God, although He was not God Himself in person. P. Borgen brings this out in an article 'God's Agent In The Fourth Gospel' (2). He quotes the halakic or legal principle of the rabbis, that

“An agent is the like the one who sent him”, and quotes the Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 43a: “He ranks as his master’s own person”. This, therefore, was how those in the 1st century who understood Jesus to be God’s agent would have understood Him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, observed that popular Christianity “says simply that Jesus was God, in such a way that the terms ‘Christ’ and ‘God’ are interchangeable. But nowhere in Biblical usage is this so. The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God, it says that God was in Christ, it says that Jesus is the Son of God; but it does not say that Jesus was God, simply like that” (3). And he goes on to apply this good sense to an analysis of the phrase “the word was God” in John 1. He argues that this translation is untenable because: “In Greek this [translation “the word was God”] would most naturally be represented by ‘God’ with the article, not *theos* but *ho theos*. Equally, St. John is not saying that Jesus is a ‘divine’ man... that would be *theios*. The NEB, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, ‘And what God was, the Word was’. In other words, if one looked at Jesus, one saw God”- in the sense that His perfect character reflected that of the Father (4). The lack of article [“the”] before “God” is significant. “In omitting the article before *theos*, the author intends to say that the Logos is not actually God but only... a divine emanation” (5).

“He came unto his own”

The context here speaks of both the word which was “in the beginning”, and of Jesus personally, whom John had witnessed to. Acts 10:36-38 RV puts this in simpler terms: “He sent the word unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by [in] Jesus Christ...that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth”. The sequence and similarity of thought between this and John 1:1-8 is so great that one can only assume that John is deliberately alluding to Luke’s record in Acts, and stating the same truths in spiritual terms: ‘In the beginning was the word of the Gospel which was with God. And then John came witnessing to Jesus, and then the word as it was in Jesus came to the Jews...’. Paul pleaded with his fellow Jews: “Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham...to us is the word of this salvation sent forth” (Acts 13:26 RV). Yet he also wrote that in the fullness of time, God “sent forth His Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). The Son of God was “the word of this salvation” / Jesus. “The word was God”.

Notes

- (1) G.B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 102.
- (2) In *Religions In Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 137-148.
- (3) John Robinson, *Honest To God* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 70.
- (4) *Ibid* p. 71.
- (5) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1971) p. 266.

5 “All things were made by him”

Speaking of the *logos* as a person was quite common amongst the Jews- and they in no way understood that God could have any other god in existence or equal with Him. One of the most thorough surveys of the *logos* theme concludes: “It is an error to see in such personifications an approach to personalisation. Nowhere either in the Bible or in the extra-canonical literature of the Jews is the word of God a personal agent” (1). It was the apostate Jew Philo who began to speak of the *logos* as “the second God, who is his *logos*... God’s firstborn, the *logos*” (2). And it was this interpretation which obviously came to influence Christians desperate for justification of their idea of a Divine Jesus; but such justification is simply not to be found in God’s word. All talk of a “second God” is utterly unBiblical.

However, whilst in a sense the *logos* was God’s word, plan and intent personified, it became actual flesh / concrete reality in the person of Jesus. That God created and accomplished the physical creation by His word was an obvious Old Testament doctrine (Is. 55:11). By the time John was

writing his Gospel [somewhat later than the others], the idea of believers being a new creation in Christ would have been developed in the early ecclesia (2 Cor. 5:17 etc.). The Greek translated “made by...” occurs often in John’s Gospel. It clearly describes how the Gospel of the Lord Jesus ‘made’ new men and women; lives were transformed into something new. The phrase is used in the immediate context of John 1: “to become [‘be made’] the sons of God” (1:12), in that grace and truth *came* [‘were made’] by Jesus (1:17). “All things” therefore refers to the “all things” of the new creation. Note how Jesus came unto “his own things” (1:11 N.I.V.), i.e. to the Jewish *people*. “All things” which were made by him therefore comfortably refers to the “all things” of the new creation- which is just how Paul uses the phrase (Eph. 1:10,22; 4:10; Col. 1:16-20). Quite simply all of us, in “all things” of our spiritual experience, owe them *all* to God’s word of promise and it’s fulfilment in Christ. This is how totally central are the promises to Abraham! “All things were made by him”!

Consider other occurrences of “made by” in John’s Gospel:

4:14 The water of the life of Jesus *shall be* [‘made’] in the believer “a well of water springing up into everlasting life”

5:9,14 the lame man “was made” whole

10:16 the believers *shall be made* (RV ‘shall become’) one flock

12:36 *may be* [‘made’], RV ‘become’, “the children of light”

15:8 So *shall ye be* [‘made’] my disciples

16:20 Your sorrow *shall be turned* [‘made’] into joy.

"*Apart from him* not a thing came to be" (Jn. 1:3) is a phrase repeated by the Lord Jesus in Jn. 15:5, where He says that "*apart from me*" we can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The things that came into being in Jn. 1:3 would therefore appear to be the things of the new life enabled and empowered in Christ. In this sense Jesus can be described as the creator of a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). But in practice, it is the word of the Gospel, the *message* of Jesus, which brings this about in the lives of those who hear and respond to it. We are born again by the *word*, the “seed” of the living God (1 Pet. 1:23 RV mg.). In this arresting, shocking analogy, the “word” of the Gospel, the word which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, is likened to the seed or sperm of God. We were begotten again by “the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creations” (James 1:18). In God’s word, in all that is revealed in it of the person of our Lord Jesus, we come face to face with the imperative which there is in what we know of Him to be like Him. In this feature of God’s word, as it is in the Bible record and therefore and thereby as it is in and of His Son, we have the ultimate creative power, the dynamism so desperately needed by humanity, to transform our otherwise shapeless and formless lives. And in a multitude of lives, “All things were made by him”.

As the Lord Jesus was sent into this world, so are we. We evidently didn’t personally ‘pre-exist’; and so we cannot reason that He did because He was sent by the Father. ‘Sending’ in Scripture can refer to being commissioned to speak forth God’s word (Is. 48:16; Jer. 7:25; Ez. 3:4,5; Zech. 2:8-11). Thus God is often described as sending forth His prophets. We too must allow ourselves to be sent forth as our Lord was, making the word of the Gospel flesh in us as it was in Him. For like Him, we personally are the message which we preach. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our probations as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as “the children of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord. The word of the Gospel is not, therefore, merely dry theoretical propositions; it elicits a life and a person. We will be changed; not just physically, but we will each be given our own, unique ‘body’, as Paul puts it. There will be

eternal continuity between who we now become, and who we grow into throughout eternity. This is the amazing power of the word of the Gospel; for this is the seed, which transforms the essential you and me into a seed which will rise up to great things in God's future Kingdom. In all this, the Lord was and is our pattern. "All things were made by him".

Notes

(1) G.F. Moore, *Judaism In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1 p. 415.

(2) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 221.

6 How Was The Logos / Word Made Flesh?

How exactly was the word made flesh in the person of Jesus? It was not simply a question of the nature of His birth. 'The word' was a title given to the Lord in recognition of His achievement in being and becoming the 'word made flesh'. It wasn't something which automatically happened to the Lord, as an irresistible process in which He played no part. The Lord's Old Testament allusions, His familiarity with and use of His Father's words doubtless had a lot to do with His becoming 'the word made flesh'. If Paul alluded to the words of the Lord Jesus once every four verses on average, it is to be expected that the Son of God quoted and alluded to His Father's word even moreso. And this is what we find, when we search the Lord's words for their allusions to the Old Testament.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

The level, depth and multiplicity of Old Testament allusions becomes the more amazing when we accept that these were spoken words, some of them clearly spoken unprepared and off-the-cuff. Literature can be crafted to pack multiple allusions. But when a speaker produces such a depth of allusion, one can only marvel at his intellectual depth. But with the Lord, it reflects His utter familiarity with the Father's word, grasping the real spirit of it all. He breathed it, thought it, spoke it, lived it. And in all He said, this was reflected. He truly was "the word made flesh". The following are just a few examples from the first words of Jesus; but the list can be continued. The simple fact is that on average, the Lord is alluding to the Old Testament at least 3 times in every verse! This means that every phrase of every sentence He is recorded as speaking- is alluding to His Father's word. It would've been like an orphaned son 'finding' his late father's words. He would read the words with such delight, and somehow eagerly pick up their sense in the way nobody else could.

The Words Of Jesus

Mt. 3:15 Suffer it to be so now: for

Old Testament Allusions

Ez. 18:19,21 fulfill righteousness

thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.

Mt. 4:4 It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God

Dt. 8:3 direct quote

Mt. 4:7 It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Dt. 6:16 direct quote

Mt. 4:10 Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Dt. 6:13 direct quote

Mt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ps. 40:17; Is. 41:17; 61:1

Mt. 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn:

Is. 61:1-3; 66:2

for they shall be comforted.

Is. 40:1

Mt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek:

Ps. 37:11,20; Is. 60:21; Prov. 22:24,25; 25:8,15

for they shall inherit the earth.

Gen. 15:7,8; Ex. 32:13

Mt. 5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Gen. 49:18; Ps. 17:15; 119:20; Jer. 23:6; Is. 45:24; 51:1; 55:1; 65:13

Mt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

2 Sam. 22:26,27; Ps. 18:25,26

Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Ex. 33:20; Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Is. 6:5; 38:3,11

If you follow through some of those allusions- and there are surely many more that I've not picked up- it becomes apparent that the Lord had a mind capable of operating on several different levels of allusion at once. So it was not simply that He was hyper-familiar with His Father's word. He had the intellectual ability, with all the intelligence of God's very own Son, to think and speak on several levels at once. Hence His words were absolutely *full* of God's thoughts and words. He was so fully and deeply "the word made flesh". And in analyzing *from where* in the Old Testament the Lord quoted, we find that He had His favourite places- just as we'd expect from a genuine man. He

appears to have been especially fond of the references to the “Servant” in the latter half of Isaiah; and also of the Psalms. He quotes from them both literally and freely, with all the confidence and appropriacy of a person who is thoroughly familiar with the text. But the way and extent to which He applied it all to Himself makes Him in very reality “the word made flesh”.

It wasn't only in words but in actions too that the Lord was the word made flesh. The Lord Jesus lived life; He didn't just let events happen to Him. Much as I respected Harry Whittaker both as an individual and an expositor, I can never understand why throughout his monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, he repeatedly makes the point that the Lord Jesus didn't go around consciously trying to fulfil Bible prophecy. My reading of the Gospels tells me that the Lord did do exactly this. The writers stress that He did action X or spoke word Y in order to fulfil Bible prophecy A and B. He consciously made the word flesh in Himself. A case can be made that He carefully planned out His ministry; He didn't just let events happen to Him. I don't find it hard to believe that He consciously engineered the timing of His own death to be at Passover time, after a three and a half year public ministry. He purposefully seems to have pressed all the buttons in Jewish expectations to lead them to revolt against the dashed expectations they had of Him. His actions in the temple could be read as almost asking to be killed. He knew what makes people tick and act to an extent we can't begin to understand. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:60). He laid down His life- it wasn't taken from Him.

1:1 The New Testament is full of very high adoration for the Lord Jesus. Since those words and phrases were chosen under the inspiration of God, His Father, we would be better advised to stick with them rather than try to invent our own terms and analogies in order to express His greatness. The structure of the original text of the prologue to John's Gospel regarding the word, and also Phil. 2:9-11 regarding the exaltation of Jesus, are arranged in such a way that they appear to be hymns which were sung by the believers. Pliny the Younger (*Epistle* 10.96.7) writes of the Christians "singing hymns to Christ as to a god"; surely he had in mind these passages. It can often be that we adopt the very position falsely ascribed to us by our critics; and perhaps that's what happened here. The critics of early Christianity wrongly claimed that the Christians thought of Jesus as God; and this eventually became their position for the most part, *although it was not originally*.

In the beginning was the logos... The logos was with God and the logos was God

The essential *logos* of the Gospel is the message of Christ crucified. There in the cross is the kernel of everything; there was the “beginning” of the new creation. John later speaks of the Lord Jesus as being the ‘faithful martyr’ in His death, and thereby being “the beginning [s.w.] of the [new] creation of God” (Rev. 3:14). The beginning was not only at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry; the essential beginning of the new creation was when the blood and water came out of His side. Yahweh Himself was totally bound up in the death of His Son. God was there with Him and in Him, to the extent that He was in Christ there, reconciling the world unto Himself. In this sense, the *logos* of Christ and the death of the cross “was God”. There the Father “was with” the Son [see notes under 16:25,32].

In Hebrew thought, it was quite common to speak of God as having an intention which was then fulfilled. Indeed, this kind of thing is found in the literature and epics of other Semitic languages. Thus the Exodus record records God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and then Moses' fulfillment of them. The prologue to John speaks of God's *logos*, His word or intention, coming to “flesh” in the Lord Jesus. This is classic Hebrew thinking, albeit written in Greek. We will demonstrate below that in Hebrew thought, a representative can be spoken of as being the person who sent them, or whom they represent. Thus the Hebrew way of reading John 1:1-14 would never come anywhere near interpreting it as meaning that 'Jesus is God'. This is a result of not reading the passage against its Hebrew background.

All things were made by him

The very same Greek words are used in 19:36 [cp. Lk. 24:21] in describing the cross: “these *things* were *done* [s.w. ‘made’]”. All things of the new creation were made on account of His cross.

1:5,9 The light shineth in darkness... That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

3:19-21 and 12:32-46 [see commentary there] suggest that one level of meaning of Jesus as “light of the world” was that in the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion, He upon the cross was the light of a darkened world. The Lord was “the beginning of the [new] creation of God” (Rev. 3:14); each believer who enters the spiritual world is enlightened by the light of Christ crucified.

John’s Gospel is full of reference to Essence concepts. It’s been widely argued that John’s language alludes to the threat of incipient Gnosticism, and this may be true. But it’s likely that John was written quite early, even before AD70. In this case, when John speaks of light and darkness, children of light and darkness, the Jewish ‘Satan’ / adversary to Christianity as “the ruler of this world”, he would also be alluding to these common Essene ideas. For John, following the light means following Jesus as Lord; the darkness refers to the flesh, the desires within us to conform to the surrounding world and its thinking. His point, therefore, is that instead of fantasizing about some cosmic battle going on, true Christians are to understand that the essential struggle is within the mind of each of us.

1:6 John’s Gospel uses exalted language to describe the person of Jesus- but actually, if one looks out for it, John uses the very same terms about all of humanity. Here are some examples:

About Jesus

About humanity generally or other human beings

Came into the world (9:39; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37)

1:9 [of “every man”]; 6:14. ‘Came into the world’ means ‘to be born’ in 16:21; 18:37

Sent from God (1:6; 3:28)

3:2,28; 8:29; 15:10

A man of God (9:16,33)

9:17,31

‘What I saw in my Father’s presence’ (8:38)

The work of ‘*a man* who told you the truth as I heard it from God’ (8:40)

God was His Father

8:41

He who has come from God (8:42)

8:47

The Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (10:37)

15:5-10; 17:21-23,26

Son of God (1:13)

All believers are ‘the offspring of God Himself’ (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:2,9; 4:7; 5:1-3,8)

Consecrated and sent into the world (17:17-19)	20:21
Jesus had to listen to the Father and be taught by Him (7:16; 8:26,28,40; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8)	All God's children are the same (6:45)
Saw the Father (6:46)	The Jews should have been able to do this (5:37)
Not born of the flesh or will of a man, but the offspring of God Himself	True of all believers (1:13)

1:7- see on Lk. 1:14.

1:8- see on Lk. 12:49,50.

1:10 John appeals for men to be baptized with the twice repeated personal comment: "...and I knew him not", in the very context of our reading that the [Jewish] world "knew him not" (Jn. 1:10, 31,33). He realises that he had withstood the knowledge of the Son of God, just as others had. See on Jn. 3:29.

Understanding "the world" as a world of persons rather than the physical world of material "things" is reflected in the way that John uses the term *kosmos*. So many interpreters have assumed that *kosmos* refers to the physical, literal world; whereas deeper reflection surely indicates that it refers rather to the world of *persons*. Thus "the world was made on account of Him [Christ], and the world did not know him" (Jn. 1:10; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) doesn't mean that Jesus created the literal planet; but rather that the world of persons was made on account of Jesus, but that world didn't know or accept / recognize Him. It is this "world" into which 'every man comes' (Jn. 1:18); and it is the "sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) which Christ bore- not the sin of the literal planet, but the sin of the world of persons. God sent His son into the world to save it, and loved this world through giving Christ for it (Jn. 3:16)- clearly referring to the world of persons rather than the physical planet. The Lord in Lk. 11:49-51 speaks of the creation of humanity as "the foundation of the world"- for He says that Abel was slain at "the foundation of the world"- i.e. of the world of persons. In the same way as these passages in John have been misread as referring to a literal, physical, concrete world, so we too tend to see this world more as a world of things than a world of persons. For seeing the world as a world of persons demands a huge amount from us, and the kind of sensitivity to humanity which leads ultimately to the death of the cross.

1:10,11 The world was made by him and the world knew him not... his own received him not - the new creation was brought into being by the cross. The Jewish world's rejection of the Lord was crystallised in the crucifixion.

1:11 The way conditions are not stated within the actual prophecy is similar to how blanket statements are made in Scripture, and yet there are exceptions to them. Thus Jn. 1:11 says that "his own received him not", but v. 12 makes it clear that some of them did receive Him.

Frequently in the New Testament we meet a juxtapositioning of language emphasizing Christ's humanity alongside terms which emphasize His Divine side. This is typical Hebraic logic, whereby blocks of material are placed next to each other, in order to create a dialectic between them which leads to the intended conclusion. Back in Exodus, we find Pharaoh's heart hardened by God, and yet

him hardening his own heart. Greek thinking panics here- for it works by step logic, logically reasoning from one statement to another. There appears to our European minds to be a crisis of contradiction, which many find worrying. But the Hebrew mind is far less phased. Rather the two seeming contradictions are weighed up and the conclusion reached- e.g. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God confirmed him in this. The language used about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament is similar. John Knox got somewhere close to understanding this when he wrote that "we do not experience the humanity and divinity of Christ in ways as separate as this language suggests; we are aware of them together". John's Gospel is maybe the most evident example. In the context of all the high, lofty language relating the Lord Jesus to the *logos*, that was God from the beginning, we read of Him coming "to his own", *eis ta idia*, his own heritage of people and place; and being rejected by "his own people", *hoi idioi*, the Jews of his time and setting (Jn. 1:10-12). It is the "son of *man*" who is spoken of as having descended from Heaven (Jn. 3:13; 6:62). Truly "the Christ of John is actually more human than in almost any of the other New Testament writings". So often does John's Gospel baldly speak of the Lord Jesus as "the man": Jn. 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5.

1:12- see on Jn. 3:3; 3:13.

1:13 The Lord's death was as a result of Him being given over "to their [man's] will" (Lk. 23:25 s.w.), but the birth of the new creation was by the will of God. This phrase is frequently associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). We were born by the will of God, i.e. the death of the Lord fulfilling that will. The later references in John to the Lord coming to do God's will refer to His coming in order to die the death of the cross. John's account of how blood and water issued from the Lord's pierced side is an evident allusion to childbirth; he saw the ecclesia as being born out of the pierced body of the Lord at the time of His death.

1:14 Because Jesus was the *only* Son of God, therefore He is *full* of the Father's grace and truth. Jn. 1:14 makes this connection between fullness and only Sonship. Because of the wonder of this, we should therefore hear Him, respecting and thereby obeying His word simply because of our appreciation of who He is and was- the Son of God (Lk. 9:35).

It seems that in the Lord Jesus alone we see the perfect fusion of "grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14); in Him alone mercy and truth met together, in His personality alone righteousness and peace kissed each other (in the words of the beautiful Messianic prophecy of Ps. 85:10). Somehow it seems that we both individually and collectively cannot achieve this. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ our Lord, without which we are "none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

It would seem that the Gospels were so clearly etched in the minds of the first century believers because the message of the Gospel was preached in the form of reciting a 'Gospel', a record of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is why 'gospel' as in the message and 'Gospel' as in the four Gospels are the same word, although this seems to be overlooked by many. The Gospel according to Matthew is the good news about Christ which Matthew preached and then wrote down. John of all the Gospel writers makes it openly apparent that his preaching of the Gospel is based around a recital of the things which he himself saw and heard in the Lord's life (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). His Gospel is full of what have been called "the artless notes of the authentic eye-witness" (e.g. his comment that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment").

The cross impels us to witness. John begins his preaching of the Gospel by saying that he had beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14)- and I suggest he was referring to how he beheld the cross and the Lord's manifestation of the Father's glory there (Jn. 17:24). The cross, the glory of the Lord shown there, was what motivated John's preaching, just as it should ours.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His “glory”. The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He ‘glorifies Himself’, He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. The Lord Jesus had that “glory” in what John calls “the beginning”, and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). “The beginning” in John’s Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father’s personality, it’s not a mirror personality, but it’s the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of the glory of God as being the Son’s glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah’s vision of God’s glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son’s glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His “own self”, His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title “God of glory” is applied to the Lord Jesus, “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God’s* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory, because He is the express image of God’s personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the “Father of glory”, the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only “one glory” of God. That glory refers to the essential “self”, the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been “glorified”, and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and ‘are’ that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God’s glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

It’s evident to even the most casual reader that there are many connections between John’s Gospel and the Revelation. John’s later writing, just like Paul’s, was shot through with references to the Gospels. The same phrases and words are used. But the question is, What is the connection between them? One comment I have in answer to this is to observe that much of the language of the Gospel of John relating to the *present* status of the faithful is repeated in Revelation and applied to the faithful in their *future* glorification. This observation is best explained by examples:

John’s Gospel	The Revelation
God tabernacled amongst us in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14 RVmg.)	“The tabernacle of God is with men” at the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 21:3)
Rivers of water flow now in the experience of the believer (Jn. 7:38,39)	The river of water of life bursts forth once Jesus is enthroned upon earth in the future (Rev. 22:1)
The manna / bread of life is given to the believer now (Jn. 6)	Those who overcome will be given “the hidden manna” to eat at the Lord’s return (Rev. 2:17)

At the crucifixion, the prophecy of Zech. 12:10 was fulfilled when the Jews looked upon the Christ whom they had pierced (Jn. 19:37)

The same Zech. 12:10 passage is quoted in Rev. 1:7 and given a future application, to the response of the Jews at the Lord's second coming.

I would suggest a chronological progression in Jn. 1:14:

"The word was made flesh"- His birth

"And dwelt among us"- His life

"And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth"- His death on the cross. Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). John thus begins his Gospel with the statement that he saw the Lord's death. However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son has *declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked, we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. Mark how the naked man, covered in blood and spittle, was there declaring God's glory. Aaron the High Priest bore the judgment for Israel's sins, in another anticipation of the cross, whilst arrayed in garments of glory and beauty (Ex. 28:30). And so was the naked Lord arrayed, for those with spiritual sight. Thus the word was manifested in glory through the cross; and thus 1 Cor. 2:1,2 links the crucified Christ with "the testimony of God". See on Jn. 19:19.

The essential *logos* of God in Christ was articulated not only in the birth of the Lord, not only at the start of His, but supremely in His death. John's Gospel is packed with allusion to Moses: Here the reference is to Moses cowering in the rock, beholding the glory of Yahweh and hearing the declaration of the Yahweh Name. Speaking of His forthcoming death, the Lord was to say: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). This second declaration of the Name was to be in His death. The same allusion back to the declaration of Yahweh in Ex. 34 is to be found in John 12:27-28: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again". This second glorifying of the Name was surely in the Son's declaration of the Name in His death. And this connects with the evidence elsewhere presented that the Yahweh Name was closely connected with the Lord's death, in that 'Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews' in Hebrew would have used words, the first letters of which spelt 'Yahweh'. John's claim that he beheld the glory of God's Son may therefore be a specific reference to the way he describes his own 'seeing' of the crucifixion in John 19:35: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe". He seems to be saying: 'I saw Him there. I really and truly did'. He uses the same kind of language in 1 Jn. 4:14: "we have seen and do testify [cp. "his record is true"] that the Father sent the son to be the saviour of the world" in the cross. "The only begotten of the Father" is a phrase nearly always used in the context of the Lord's death (e.g. Jn. 3:16). The love of God was defined in the way the Lord laid down His life in death (1 Jn. 3:16); but it is equally defined in that "God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live" (1 Jn. 4:9). God sending His son into the world was therefore in

His death specifically [see notes under 3:14-18]. And it was through this that life was won for us. As He hung covered in blood and spittle, as He gasped out forgiveness for His enemies, God's Son as it were came into the hard world of men. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not and does not overcome it. There, the word, the essential love and grace and judgment and mercy of Yahweh, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us. The common translation "dwell" can give the sense that John is merely saying 'Jesus lived in Israel'; but there is far more to it than that. In clear allusion to his Gospel, John opens his first letter by speaking of the Lord Jesus, whom "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled [a reference to the taking down of the body and embalming?], of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness [cp. 19:35] , and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (I Jn. 1:1-3). The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26). And John exalts that they saw this, and now they too declare / manifest it to the world. One cannot behold the cross of Christ and not witness it to others. John says that he beheld "his glory". Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son *has declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked; we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. All of God's word was made flesh in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus. The very essence of Yahweh and all His self-revelation was epitomised there. Therefore when the Son of man was lifted up, men knew the truth of all God's words [see notes on 8:21-28]. The Lord was "full of grace and truth". Yet according to Phil. 2:7 RV, on the cross the Lord emptied Himself. Yet there He was filled with the essence of Yahweh's own character; for the RV of Ex. 34 stresses that Yahweh is a God whose name is *full* of grace and truth. On the cross He was emptied of self and yet totally filled. The fact that the word was made flesh in the crucifixion explains why the atonement is described time and again with metaphors, as if it is a struggle for language alone to convey what happened. In the person of the crucified Christ, the ideas, the language, the words... became real and concretely expressed in a person. There is far more revealed by meditation upon the cross than can ever be put in words. There, the word, all the words, were made flesh. It is possible to see the fulfilment of the idea of the word being made flesh in Pilate's mocking presentation of the bedraggled Saviour: "Behold the man!". Rudolph Bultmann commented: "The declaration "the Word became flesh" has become visible in its extremest consequence". There in the spat upon Son of God we see humanity as it is meant to be; "the flesh", "the man" as God intended, unequalled and unmatched in any other human being.

1:15 John's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself (Jn. 1:15) contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4- Boaz told him that "I am after thee", but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

1:16- see on Eph. 3:19.

The Father's whole spirit / attitude is of wanting to lavish grace. Our spirit likewise must not be mean- totting up the cost of all the things the visitors have eaten, etc. But God's lavishing of grace is not only in material things, but supremely in His patient forgiveness and salvation towards us. Are we super abounding in forgiveness, or do we grudgingly offer it only upon evident repentance from others? Such legalism is associated with Moses, but grace and truth, "grace upon grace", came by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:16). Grace is 'ever increasing' ("grace upon grace") in that as we grow in Christ, we perceive that grace more and more. God not only forgives, but He *delights* in doing so (Is. 62:14; Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love.

1:18 See on Ex. 32:30-32; Lk. 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:4-6.

John parallels the word becoming flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is in fact a reference to the declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which *is* in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (1:18). John here makes clear allusion to Moses. This alludes to Moses being unable to see God, whereas Christ now is cuddled in the bosom of the Father- such closeness, such a soft image, even now in his heavenly glory! Christ declared God's character (alluding to the Angel declaring God's Name at the same time as Moses was unable to see God) in his perfect life and above all on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

1:20 John's Gospel features the Lord Jesus confidently stating "I am...". The context is set for this by the way John's Gospel begins by describing how John the Baptist said "I am not..." ("I am not the Messiah", Jn. 1:20; 3:28; "I am not [Elijah]", Jn. 1:21; "I am not worthy", Jn. 1:27. By confessing his own weakness, who he was not, John the Baptist was paving the way for the recognition and acceptance of Jesus. And our self-abnegation will do likewise.

1:21 John knew surely that he was the Elijah prophet- for he consciously was preparing the way of Messiah and calling Israel to repentance. He was preaching in the very wilderness area from where Elijah had been taken up at the conclusion of his ministry; and he surely consciously chose to dress with the hairy garment and leather belt which had been Elijah's badge of office (1 Kings 1:8; 2:13,14). It's also been pointed out that the Essenes and other Jewish groups at the time taught self-baptism, whereas John was consciously baptizing people himself, as if he saw himself as specifically preparing them for something. The Lord Himself of course understood John to have been the Elijah prophet. And yet- John denies he is Elijah, but focuses instead on how he is but a "voice". I therefore conclude that his humility was such that he was totally downplaying his office- as if to say 'I am so much a mere voice, that effectively I'm not the Elijah prophet- the message I preach is so far more important than the office I bear'. Those who bear 'offices' in the church of Jesus would do well to have his spirit. Perhaps this is why he seems to have made very few personal disciples- although thousands were baptized by him, having been so impressed by his message. The Epistles of Clement number his disciples at about 30; and Jn. 4:1 comments that the Lord Jesus made more disciples than John did. I take this as a fine reflection upon his selfless witness, focusing so much on his message rather than developing any personal following. He was 'the friend of the bridegroom', the one who arranged the marriage of the bridegroom and sought out the bride. And

that, really, is what we are about too, with all the sense of dedication and earnestness which a such a person has when aiming to find a partner for one they know to be a truly good man.

1:23 When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. See on Lk. 3:7.

1:25 The command to all in Christ to go forth and preach-and-baptize (the command is all one) would have been shocking to a first century Jewish audience, who believed that only Messiah Himself or "the prophet" could baptize (Jn. 1:25). The implication of the Lord's command was that all in Him are in fact Him, in their preaching of Him.

John's humility is brought out by the way John fields the question as to whether he is "the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" (Jn. 1:25). He could have answered: 'I am the Elijah prophet'- for the Lord Himself said of John that "this is Elijah", with perhaps conscious reference back to this question (Mt. 11:14). But John didn't answer that way. His reply was simply to speak of the greatness of Christ and his unworthiness to be His herald (Jn. 1:26,27). John's humility is brought out yet further by reflection on the fact that he clearly baptized huge numbers of people, and yet also had a group of people known as 'the disciples of John'. Clearly he didn't intend to found a sect, and was so taken up with trying to prepare people for the Lord's coming that he simply wished to lead them to some level of repentance and baptize them, without necessarily making them part of 'his disciples'. John's low self-estimation is seen in how he denied that he was "Elijah" or the "prophet" whom the Jews expected to come prior to Messiah (Jn. 1:21). The Lord Himself clearly understood John as the Elijah prophet- "this is Elijah" (Mt. 11:14), He said of John. John wasn't being untruthful, nor did he misunderstand who he was. For he associates his "voice" with the voice of the Elijah prophet crying in the wilderness, and appropriates language from the Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 to his own preaching. His denial that he was 'that prophet' therefore reflects rather a humility in him, a desire for his message to be heard for what it was, rather than any credibility to be given to it because of his office. There's a powerful challenge for today's preacher of the Gospel.

1:28 How terribly wrong it is for missionary service to be gloried in and somehow a reason for those who do it to become puffed up in self-importance. Perhaps John's Gospel purposefully inserts the comment that John the Baptist said this whilst he was baptizing so many people (Jn. 1:28)- as if to draw a link between his humility, and the success in preaching which he had. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV).

1:29 John the Baptist beheld the Lord Jesus walking, and commented that He *was then*, as He walked, the lamb of God (with all the sacrificial overtones of that phrase), that *takes away*, right then, three years before the cross, the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29).

John sees Jesus and says "Look! The lamb of God...". The three underlined words for "see", "says" and "Look!" are uniquely repeated in Jn. 19:26, where again we have the lamb of God, now sacrificed, on the cross.

1:30 John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is... essentially my superior- C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274. See on Jn. 8:58.

1:31 One obvious encouragement to be hopeful in our witness is the Biblical implication that all men and women, potentially, have the possibility of responding to the Gospel. It was so in the first century- John the Baptist had the *potential* to convert all Israel, for He came "that all men through him might believe" (Jn. 1:7), so that Christ "should be made manifest to (all) Israel" (Jn. 1:31). The entire nation *could* have converted; but they didn't.

For Israel to call upon themselves the Name of the Lord when they repent, it is fitting that Elijah baptizes them into His Name. Zech. 13:1 may hint at latter day baptisms among repentant Jewry: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David... for sin and for uncleanness". Israel will call upon themselves the Name of Yahweh our righteousness by being baptized into the Name of the Father and Son (Jer. 33:16). "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn.1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: " Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias?" (Jn.1:25). See on Mt. 17:11.

1:33 - see on Mt. 3:8.

1:35 When the disciples first encounter Jesus, they heap upon Him the Messianic titles of Judaism: Rabbi, Messiah, the one described in the Law and prophets, Son of God, King of Israel (Jn. 1:35-51). And yet the other Gospels bring out how Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God is in fact due to a special revelation from the Father, and was somehow a seminal point of faith and comprehension which Peter had reached (Mt. 16:16,17). Surely the point of the apparent contradiction is to show that over time, the disciples started to put meaning into words; the Jewish terms and titles which they had once so effortlessly used, they came to use with real appreciation. We have shown elsewhere that a mature appreciation of the name and titles of the Father and Son is indeed a mark of spiritual maturity.

1:36 We can read of the cross, speak of it; and yet totally fail to realize the powerful imperatives which abound in its' message. Andrew and John heard John the Baptist call Jesus the "lamb of God", and followed Him, in apparent acceptance that He was the Messianic sacrifice. And yet in reality, they could not at that time accept the saying that Jesus was to die at Jerusalem in sacrifice, and that they were to shoulder His cross and follow Him there.

1:38 Jn. 1:38 records how the disciples were asked: "What seek ye?", and they reply: "Where dwellest thou?". Remember that this is John, one of them, recording their response. It's as if he's pointing out how inappropriate was their response to Jesus; rather like the record of Peter wanting to build a tent for Jesus, Moses and Elijah so they stay a bit longer. *They* had responded inappropriately- and yet they urged their hearers and readers to respond appropriately.

'Abiding' is a major theme in John. Several times he records how the Lord Jesus 'abode' in houses or areas during His ministry (Jn. 1:38,39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6), culminating in the Lord's words that He was still abiding with them, but would leave them soon (Jn. 14:25). And yet the repeated teaching of the Lord is that actually, He will permanently abide in the heart of whoever believes in Him. And all the stories of Him 'abiding' a night here or there prepare the way for this. Those hearts become like the humble homes of Palestine where He spent odd nights- the difference being that there is now a permanent quality to that 'abiding', "for ever". This is how close and real the Lord can come to us, if His words truly abide in us.

1:39 Consider the way that Jesus says: "Come and see" (Jn. 1:39)- and somehow Philip finds himself soon afterwards using those very same words when talking with his friend Nathanael: "Come and see" (Jn. 1:46). And so a study of the actual words of Jesus, a love of them, allowing them to abide in us, is a major part of what it means to be a Christian. To speak, think and reason as He did; to have His spirit in us, both developing it consciously, and being open to receiving it. This

is where those red letter Bibles, which print the words of Jesus in red, are really a helpful focus for us.

In John, Christ often invites men to "come" (Jn. 1:39; 4:16; 5:40; 7:37; 21:12); and members of "the bride" also, quite naturally and artlessly, invite others to "come" too (Jn. 1:41,45,46; 4:29). My point is that the natural response of the one who hears is to say to others "come". It won't be something which has to be done as a great act of the will, we won't need to be fed with ideas by some preaching Committee; he that hears will say, "Come".

1:41 Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Mark's record of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by him as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Andrew "found" Christ and then [s.w.] 'finds' his brother for Christ (Jn. 1:41). What we hear and learn we naturally desire to spread to others.

1:41,42 There is reason to think that like Paul, Peter is held up as a pattern for all who would afterwards believe. The way Peter is brought to Jesus and named by him has evident connection with the bringing of Eve [cp. the whole bride of Christ] to Adam [cp. Christ] to be named (Gen. 2:22,23 = Jn. 1:41,42). The way he remembers the word of the Lord at the time of his denials comfortably links with the way the Comforter was to bring to remembrance the word of the Lord to all His people. It's as if all comforted by the Comforter find their representative in Peter in the heat of his denials.

1:42 Later on, it was Peter who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. It was evidently a huge paradigm break for Peter- to be responsible for Gentiles accepting baptism and thereby becoming brethren in fellowship, and members of the Israel of God. The key was for him to realize that God is no acceptor of persons. Reflection on God's acceptance of him after the denials must surely have been an important factor in inspiring him to preach to those whom previously he would have rejected out of hand as a worthy audience for the Gospel. The incident occurred in Joppa, where Jonah likewise had struggled with the problem of preaching to the Gentiles. The Lord's comment 'Simon bar Jona' (Jn. 1:42) may have reflected His understanding that Simon Peter had the characteristics of Jonah even then.

1:43 Jesus 'found' Philip, and he in his witnessing 'found' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). Our finding of men for the Lord reflects His finding of us.

1:45- see on Lk. 2:49.

1:46 The teaching of both Old and New Testaments concerning the ultimate value and meaning of the individual person was radical stuff, so radical that it was rarely fully understood even amongst the people of God. For example, it was important to know where a person was from- because people from certain areas were understood as being a certain person. Hence the Jewish refusal to accept that Jesus could be Messiah, because He was from Galilee, and "out of Galilee arises no prophet" (Jn. 7:52), indeed nothing good could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46). This led to what we would call today stereotyping and racism. People didn't travel very far, and so this of itself reinforced some of the stereotypes. Horizons were extremely limited for the average person. Vergil could say that "to know one Greek is to know them all"; and Philo likewise made total generalizations about Egyptians in his writings. Paul refers to the common maxim that "Cretans are *always* liars... lazy drunkards" (Tit. 1:12)- but goes on to appeal to the Cretan believers to *not* be like that, to challenge

and break the stereotype! It's the same with the Corinthians- the very term "Corinthian" meant a drunkard, shameless man. And yet it was in this very city that so many were called to the Lord, and He attempted to turn them away from that very stereotype they had been born into. And the very fact that the Son of God was from "that despised Nazareth" was the ultimate deconstruction of this understanding- that leaders, kings etc. could only come from some areas and not others. We need to ask ourselves whether we don't follow the same kind of stereotypes when we assume things about people- he's from *that* family, she's from *that* country, they're from *that* church / ecclesia... These attitudes deny the wonderful meaning and value of the individual of which our Lord showed us in His teaching, life, death and current work amongst us.

He was "despised and rejected of men", as Isaiah had foretold so long before. It's perhaps hard to feel from our distance the extent to which Galilee was despised by the Jerusalem Jews. Although Jerusalem to Galilee is only around 100 km., "only in exceptional circumstances will someone living in Jerusalem have travelled to the distant province of Galilee, as the *Life* of Josephus shows... a journey to Rome would be more likely for a better class Jerusalem dweller than one to provincial Galilee, which was the back of beyond... the people of Judaea despised the uneducated Galileans and were not particularly interested in this remote province". Yet it was exactly from *here* that the Son of God came! It was from the parochial, the ordinary, from the nothing special, that God's holy child came forth to change this world. So if you too feel a nobody, a cut below the rest, held back by your background... this is the very wonder of God manifestation. It's through you and me, the kids from the backstreets, the uneducated, the duffers, the duffers... that God Almighty reveals Himself to this world.

1:47 The Lord's basic understanding of us is that we are to become brethren *in Him*. He ever sought to teach the disciples to not only worship and respect Him, but to rise up to emulate His example, and to act and feel as part of Him. When He saw Nathanael under the fig tree, He commented that here was a man who had the good side of Jacob, an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. But the Lord then goes on to liken *Himself* to Jacob, saying that Angels would ascend and descend upon Him as they had upon Jacob (Jn. 1:47,51). What He was basically trying to say to His new disciple was that 'You're like Jacob! But, I'm like Jacob too. And you will powerfully realize the significance of this a bit later on'. He was seeking always to build up an identity between Himself and His followers. This is so different to admiring a man as one admires a picture, and assenting to him as a leader. This is about a unique and intimate relationship, bonding and identity with Him. Nathanael no doubt puzzled over the Lord's enigmatic words, as we likely have also done. His enigmatic style was to provoke just such reflection, to lead Nathanael to realize the force of the identification with Him which the Lord was inviting.

1:48- see on Mk. 7:29.

1:50 Our aim must be to make men and women sit at the Lord's feet and learn of Him themselves. Discipleship is to be what we are all our lives. Consider the contrast: 'disciples' in the schools of other rabbis expected to one day graduate and become teachers themselves, with disciples at *their* feet. But no, the Lord saw all of us, including those who have learnt of Him the longest and deepest, to always be disciples. For this reason we shouldn't call our teaching brethren 'rabbi', in the sense of a teacher in his own right. Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree when the Lord called him- and this was apparently the classic place where trainee rabbis sat and studied. If this is indeed the case, then the Lord's calling of him to be a disciple / follower was saying: 'Don't seek to be a rabbi. Be a disciple / follower of me, as a way of life, always'.

1:50,51 John 1:50,51 give a picture of the Angels' role in the ministry of Jesus: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And He saith unto them, Verily, Verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". The allusion to Jacob's vision of Gen. 28:18 is clear. That vision was to show Jacob the extent of

Angelic care of Him- and this was repeated for Jesus. However, the context of v. 50 is that Nathanael marvelled at Jesus' knowledge. Jesus seems to be saying that they would see even greater spiritual revelation ("Heaven open") because of the ministry of the Angels to Him, ministering spiritual knowledge to Jesus to communicate to His disciples. This would imply that apart from directly ministering spiritual revelation to Jesus, the Angels also imparted specific 'physical' knowledge to Jesus- e. g. about Nathanael under the fig tree.

1:51 Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these... you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And Christ's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

...you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man

This was a prophecy of what was to happen "hereafter", and it seems relevant to the cross. Heaven, in the sense of the Most Holy place, was opened by the veil being torn down at the Lord's death. By the blood-shedding of Jesus, the way into the Holiest was made manifest. There is evident allusion to Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching to Heaven; and surely the Lord is saying that He is going to become the ladder to Heaven, linking Heaven and earth, when Heaven is opened by Him in the future. And that point was surely the crucifixion. Significantly, He says: "You will see...", another hint that the disciples, especially John, saw the crucifixion. They may well have "seen" in the Johanine sense of perceiving that there, unseen, Angels were ascending and descending in ministration. John also records how the Lord saw Himself as the gate / door (10:9), just as Jacob described what he had seen as "the gate of heaven". The stone upon which he slept, lifted up and anointed with oil to become the corner-stone of the house of God, Beth-el, was all prophetic of the Lord's death and rising up again (Eph. 2:20-22).

2:1 The incident at Cana shows her lack of perception of the true nature of her son's work at that time. The *mother of Jesus* is said to be *there*, and not to be *called*, as Jesus and his disciples were (Jn. 2:1,2), which suggests that she was following Him around, fascinated and prayerfully concerned as He began His ministry. He hadn't done any miracles before, so was she asking Him to begin His ministry with a miracle? She knew He had the power to do them- she had perceived that much. When the Lord speaks about His hour not having yet come, He is clearly alluding to His death. For this is how "the hour" is always understood in John's Gospel (Jn. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; 17:1). So Jesus replies to Mary's nudge 'make them some wine!' by saying that the time for His death has not yet come. He assumes that by 'wine' she means His blood. He assumes she is on a higher level of spiritual symbolism than she actually was. He wouldn't have done this unless He had previously communed with her on this level. But apparently she was no longer up to it. She was correct in expecting Him to do a miracle [for Cana was His beginning of miracles]; and she was right in thinking that the need for wine was somehow significant. But she didn't see the link to His death. Her perception was now muddled. Yet even at this time, she is not totally without spiritual perception. When she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. The world had ground her earlier spirituality away, but not totally. For it would in due time revive, to the extent that she would risk her life in standing by the Lord's cross, and then later join the early ecclesia (Acts 1:14).

2:4 When He says "What have you to do with me?" (Jn. 2:4), He seems to be struggling to dissociate Himself from her; for the idiom means 'How am I involved with you?' (2 Kings 3:13;

Hos. 14:8). It can be that “My hour has not yet come” can bear the translation “Has not my hour come?” (Jn. 2:4), as if to imply that, as they had previously discussed, once His ministry started, their bond would be broken in some ways. And yet Mary understandably found this hard to live up to, and it took the cross to lead her to that level of commitment to her son’s cause.

mine hour is not yet come This evidently refers to the ‘hour’ of the cross, whereby the true wine / blood would be outpoured, that which had been offered before being inadequate. The governor of the feast, cp. the Jewish elders, “knew not whence it was” (2:9), using the same words to describe how they knew not from whence was the Lord, and didn’t ‘know’ / comprehend to where He was going in His death (7:27; 8:14; 19:9).

Perhaps when Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn. 2:4 RSV), He was trying to get her back to spiritual mindedness and is frustrated with her low level of spiritual perception. He tries to lead her back to a higher level by linking the giving of wine with His hour which was to come, i.e. the cross. In Lk. 1 her song shows how spiritually perceptive she was- now she seems to have lost that. She is concerned with the immediate and the material rather than the spiritual. "Woman" was a polite form of public address, but apparently it was unusual for a man to use it to his mother. The Lord felt and stressed that separation between her and Him right now at the start of His ministry, coming to a climax at His death where He told her that He was no longer her son but John was. She must have been *so* cut by this, if indeed as I have suggested it was the first time He had said this to her.

2:5- see on Jn. 2:1.

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do" (Jn. 2:5) uses three Greek words which recur in Mt. 7:24,26: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them". Mary had heard these words but applies them in a more material way rather than the spiritual, moral way which Jesus intended. Is this another indication she had slipped from her teenage intensity and spirituality by the time His ministry began?

The theme of John’s writings is that “the word” which was in the beginning, the word of the Gospel, the word of command which brought forth all creation in the first place, is the same word that has been made flesh in Jesus, and which can likewise work a powerful new creation in the lives of all who allow that word to abide in them. Hence the emphasis of John upon the manner in which the *word* of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to bring about amazing miracles. Even Josephus noted this unique feature of the Lord’s ministry: “Everything that he [Jesus] performed through an invisible power he wrought by word and command”.

2:10 The wedding feast at Cana had been going on for some time, to the point that men had drunk so much wine that they could no longer discern its quality. The Lord didn’t say, as I might have done, ‘Well that’s enough, guys’. He realized the shame of the whole situation, that even though there had been enough wine for everyone to have some, they had run out. And so He produced some more. He went along with the humanity of the situation in order to teach a lesson to those who observed what really happened (Jn. 2:10).

The real Christ must be the concealed basic pattern behind a person. But one of the problems in seeking to build up an image of the man Jesus is that He Himself didn’t proclaim so much about Himself in so many words. He never specifically announces that He is Messiah- that fact is stated by who He was in life. His miracles were a *phanerosis*, a rendering apparent, of His glory (Jn. 2:11). The glory of God is essentially His character (Ex. 33:18). The Lord started to reveal this, to let this show, after age 30- beginning, it seems, with His *arche-miracle* of making the wine at Cana (Jn. 2:11 Gk.). But even that was a revealing of His glory to only a few- because even the governor of the feast thought that it was the bridegroom, and not Jesus, who had somehow pulled out new supplies of wine (Jn. 2:10). The guests were drunk (Jn. 2:10- *methuo* = ‘to drink to intoxication’). The revealing of His glory, spoken of by John in such startling terms as His archemiracle, was in

fact only to the disciples and perhaps a few others who perceived what had happened. This, I submit, is how to understand the Biblical references to the glory which the Lord Jesus had "from the beginning"- i.e. of His life and His ministry, but which was only made apparent later. Certainly until that point at Cana, He somehow restrained that glory within His very ordinariness- to the extent that people were utterly shocked when He stood up in the synagogue and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah.

He clearly had no problem in making wine at Cana. Would He have shared a mug of wine with the boys when, say, someone had a birthday? And therefore would a 21st century Jesus have shared a beer with His fellow workers? Now in my image of Jesus I'm not sure He would have done. But perhaps in your image of Him, He would have. Apart from the memorial meeting, I don't drink, and haven't done for many years. I know how in many cultures this seems to erect a barrier between me and those I seek to make contact with. But when Jesus made the water into wine, He provided about 180 gallons [400 litres] of it. At a time when surely some were already rather the worse for wear from alcohol- for the master of the feast pointed out that the best wine [i.e. with higher alcohol content!] was brought out only when people couldn't tell the difference, because they had "well drunk" (Jn. 2:10- Gk. *methuo*, 'to drink to intoxication'). I wouldn't have done that. At least, not to that extent- for you can be sure, they drank it all up. But He did, so comfortable was He with His humanity. And this perhaps was what made all kinds of people so comfortable with Him, prostitutes and old grannies, kids and mafia bosses, saints 'n' aints. We seem so often ashamed of being human, indeed, some have taken their understanding of 'sinful human nature' to the extent that it's almost a sin to be alive. Whatever we say about human nature, we say about our Lord. Let's remember this. But Jesus was happy with who He was.

2:11 "Jesus... manifested forth his glory" (John 2:11) through his miracles. His miracles therefore were a demonstration of the character ("glory") of God, not just to relieve human grief as he came across it. Therefore they are all capable of allegorical interpretation. Contrast how the glory of God was manifested to Moses, who peeped at it from the rock. Yet Jesus was the glory of God, higher than the Angel who actually manifested the glory.

He manifested forth his glory- Just as the cross was to be a greater manifestation of his glory (see on Jn. 1:14).

2:13,17 And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem... And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. Just as He "went up" at the final Passover. A Psalm evidently relevant to the crucifixion is then applied to the Lord's behaviour; as if the disciples later realized that this early visit to Jerusalem was a living out in the Lord of the final one.

2:16 We are baptized into the Name of Jesus, and bear that Name in the eyes of men. The Hebrew concept of a name meant really a renown, an understanding of the person. The Bride comments that "thy name is as ointment poured forth" (Song 1:3), likening the name to the smell of perfume. The "scent" of a nation is likewise their reputation, the message they give out (Jer. 48:11; Hos. 14:7). We are the savour of Christ (2 Cor. 2:16), we bear His Name, and therefore anyone carrying the Name is thereby a witness to Him.

2:17- see on Mk. 10:38.

He knew himself that "the zeal of thine house hath *eaten me up*" (Ps. 69:9); the same Hebrew word is used as in Lev. 6:10: "take up the ashes which the fire hath *consumed*". Even in his life, he felt that he had reached this point of total consumption as a living sacrifice. (Jn. 2:17).

2:17-22- see on Jn. 14:29.

2:18 "What sign shewest thou unto us?" (John 2:18). Cynical Israel asked exactly the same of Moses, in effect; superficially, "the people believed" (Ex. 4:31) after they saw the signs. The

hollowness of Israel's 'belief' in Moses was matched by the experience of Christ. And yet they still both loved Israel.

Jesus' Raising Up Of Himself (Jn. 2:19-21)

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body" (Jn. 2:19-21).

I think the answer lies in Jn. 5:19-21: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father". This makes it clear that all power and possibilities that Jesus had, were in fact given to Him by God. In fact, whatever God is spoken of as doing, it would be appropriate to speak of the Son doing it. This was and is the nature of their relationship. The one thing that it would seem God did for Jesus, in a way that Jesus could not do for Himself, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God. It is emphasized so many times that God raised Jesus from the dead. And yet it's as if Jesus almost enjoys making the point that even in that, so connected is He with the Father, that in a sense, He raised Himself up- because whatever, literally whatever, God does, in a sense Jesus therefore does it too. This is why Jesus could say about His life in Jn. 10:18: "I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father". He was given this authority by the Father (1). But even in the very thing where it seems God would be separate from His Son- i.e. in resurrecting the Son- Jesus wanted to emphasize that in a sense, He was still united with the Father. Because the Father so loved the Son, that whatever the Father did, He wished His Son to somehow be associated with. And so Jesus can speak of how in that sense, He [Jesus] was involved in His own resurrection- even though the repeated and obvious Biblical emphasis is upon the Father resurrecting His Son back to life. We see this theme touched on again in Jn. 10:18, where the Lord teaches that He has received a commandment to lay down His life and take it again, and yet He says that He has been given the authority / empowerment to do this, and therefore He will not die merely because of being unable to avoid the machinations of His murderers. So we could conclude that He obeyed a command to die and rise again- but was empowered by God to do this.

Another consideration in Jn. 2:19-21 is that Jesus speaks specifically about the 'raising up' of His body as a tabernacle. The 'body' of Christ frequently refers not so much to His literal body as to His spiritual body, i.e. the body of believers. In a sense, it is Jesus who has raised them up.

Notes

(1) It has been suggested to me by Chris Clementson that the Greek word *exousia* translated "power" or "authority" in Jn. 10:18 can mean 'privilege'- and this is a possible meaning given for the word by James Strong in his concordance. Other N.T. usage of the word definitely suggests 'power' or 'authority', but this idea of 'privilege' is worth bearing in mind.

2:22 Both Matthew and Mark record how the people mocked Jesus over His comment that if the temple were destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (Mt. 27:40; Mk. 15:29). This had also been an issue at the Lord's trial (Mt. 26:60). Yet John records that when the Lord actually said those words, the disciples didn't believe those words and actually forgot them until the time of the resurrection (Jn. 2:22). The implications of that are tragic. The Lord's critics remembered His words more than His disciples did. And as He stood there in the awful loneliness of His trial, and hung

there in the desolation of crucifixion, and heard those taunts based around His earlier words... He would've known that His own men had forgotten those words and likewise disbelieved them. No wonder after the resurrection He raised the matter with them. My point in this context is that John's comment in Jn. 2:22 about the fact the disciples forgot those words until after the resurrection... is actually a conscious recognition by the disciples of their own tragic weakness in understanding and support of their Lord. And it is within their own preaching of the Gospel that they make this point.

2:23-25 Reflect a while on what is really being taught in Jn. 2:23-25: "Many *believed* on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he knew what was in man". When a person trusts / believes in the Lord properly, unlike those who believed only a surface level, then the Lord trusts Himself unto them. He believes in them as they have believed in Him. Paul often speaks of how the Lord has trusted / committed [s.w.] the preaching of the Gospel unto him (1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3). We believe, and therefore we speak forth the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:13). Perceive the parallels within the Jn. 2:23-25 passage:

He knew all men = He knew what was in man

Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them = because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man.

If we truly believe in Jesus, He believes in us, and we therefore bear witness concerning Him. If we don't truly believe in Him, He will not commit / trust / believe Himself unto us. But by grace we have truly believed. It is therefore axiomatic that we bear witness of Him. God has therefore trusted us with the job of preaching His Gospel. That He trusts us, believes in us, is a surpassing thought. If you trust someone completely with a task, to the point it is clear that now if they don't do it, it won't be done, they often respond with a maturity and zest which wouldn't be seen if they merely were given partial responsibility [children are a good example of this]. And so God has done with us.

2:24 There seems a purposeful ambiguity in how the process of calling upon the name of the Lord is described in the Greek text; it can mean both us calling upon ourselves His Name, and also His Name being named upon us by Him. Joel 2:32 says that all those whom *the Lord* calls will *call on His Name*, a prophecy fulfilled in baptism. In similar vein, the Lord Jesus lived, died and rose as the representative of all men; and those who know and believe this chose to respond by identifying themselves with Him in the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism, and subsequent life in Christ- they make Him their representative, as He has chosen to be theirs. They respond to His willing identification with them by living a life identified with Him. Likewise if a man truly believes in Christ, He will 'commit himself' unto him (Jn. 2:24)- the very same word for 'believe in[to]'. We believe into the Lord, and He believes into us.

2:25 One repeated theme of the Gospel records is that "Jesus perceived..." (Mt. 22:18). We read this so often. Now it could mean that a bolt of Holy Spirit informed the Lord of the contents of men's minds. But I prefer to think that He was so sensitive to people that somehow He was able to read minds, to read body language, to be perceptive to a very high degree (Jn. 2:24,25). And so as the mind and compassion of Jesus become ours, so it seems to me that we too will develop better people skills, become more perceptive of what a contact is really driving at, what their real hang ups are... what they really and truly seek and need. "He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:25) may be a description of how far the Lord got in this kind of thing; rather than an indication of some magical gift He was given. And so when I am asked 'How best to preach? What to say to people...?', there is no simplistic answer. It's a matter of who we are, of our own perception and reflection of Jesus, not the specific form of words we may use.

3:2 The Lord Jesus preached of the Kingdom of God. But "The Kingdom of God" is a title of Jesus in places like Lk. 17:20,21. As the King of the Kingdom, He was the personal embodiment of it. His

personality was the proclamation in itself of the reign of God, both as it can be now, and as it will be on earth at His return. There's another example of "the Kingdom of God" being used as a title for Jesus; it's in Jn. 3:2-5. There, Nicodemus says that he perceives that Jesus is "from God" because of His miracles. But the Lord replies that only if a man is born again can he see or perceive the Kingdom of God; and only if he is born again by baptism of water and spirit can he enter into the Kingdom. It's easy to overlook the fact that the context of the Lord's comment was about His being Messiah, and how men could perceive / recognize that. If we read "the Kingdom of God" as a title of Himself, all becomes clear. Through baptism, birth of water and spirit, we enter into Christ. He was then and is now, the very essence of the Kingdom; the ultimate picture of the Kingdom life. There was a perfect congruence between His message about the Kingdom, and His own character. And this is what will give our preaching of that very same Kingdom a like power and convicting appeal to men and women.

3:3 The extent of grace is reflected in the Lord's teaching about being born again in Jn. 3:3-5. A person neither begets nor bears himself; but the Lord says that this must happen. The born again person has to receive a new origin- evidently something we can't give ourselves. The new birth is therefore only possible through an acceptance of grace. Thus in Jn. 1:12,13 a parallel is drawn between "all who receive him" and those "who were born... of God". Going even further, 1 Jn. 5:1 and 1 Jn. 4:8 [noting the tenses and context] suggest that faith and love are the evidence of this new birth rather than the cause of it.

Dodd in *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* shows how constantly John is referring to Philo- e.g. Philo denied any possibility of spiritual rebirth, whereas John (Jn. 3:3-5) stresses how needful and possible it is in Christ. The very abstract views of Philo are challenged when John comments that the *logos* has become flesh- real and actual, handled and seen, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Philo claimed that the *logos* was an Angel- whereas John effectively denies this by saying that the *logos* became a real and actual human being. Those Christians who claim Jesus was an Angel- and they range from Jehovah's Witnesses to those who claim Jesus appeared as an Old Testament Angel- should all stand corrected by John's argument against Philo. In chapter 11 of his book, Dodd makes the observation that there was a tension between Jewish monotheism, and the many gods of Greek mythology. He shows how these ideas were reconciled by bringing the gods into some kind of family relationship with each- thus Hermes and Apollo became sons of Zeus, and all were seen as emanations of the one God. This is highly significant for any study of how the Trinity came into existence- the stage was set for the idea of a small family of gods to develop, all supposedly emanations of one God. See on Jn. 5:39.

In John 3:3,5, the Lord speaks of how a man must be born again in order to *see* and *enter* the Kingdom. He parallels *seeing* the Kingdom with entering it. Moses *saw* the land of the Kingdom of God, but couldn't *enter* it. This is surely behind the Lord's words here. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation.

Note the parallel in Jn. 3:3,5: "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* [perceive] the kingdom of God... he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God". If we truly see / perceive the things of the Kingdom in this life, then we will enter it in the future. Israel 'saw' the land physically through the spies (Num. 13:18; 32:8), but were told that they would "not see the land" (Num. 14:23; 32:11; Dt. 1:35). Again, as in the Lord's teaching, 'seeing the land' is put for 'entering' into it. Knowing facts about the future Kingdom doesn't mean we will enter it. But really 'seeing' the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom will by its very nature change us into people who will enter it. For we will be living

the essence of the Kingdom life right now. Israel through the spies went to ‘see’ the land (Num. 13:18), but could not *enter* it because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They didn’t ‘see’ it in the sense of perceiving what God’s Kingdom was all about. They only saw the physicality of the land; and this wasn’t enough to enter it. The synoptics’ formula that he who believes the Gospel and is baptized will be saved is matched by John in Jn. 6:40: “every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day”. Believing the Gospel of the Kingdom is matched by seeing / perceiving the Son. This is the basis.

3:4 When Nicodemus asked “How can a man be born [again]...?” (Jn. 3:4), he wasn’t being facetious. He was asking a genuine question, which we’ve all had in one form or another. Can a person really totally change? Aren’t the influences of our past life, our humanity, simply too great to break totally? Aren’t there human ties that bind, bind so closely that they can never be completely thrown off? “Truly truly I say unto you”, the Lord replied, ‘Yes’. There is a doctrine of a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), whereby we really can be made new people. This is a ladder to reach to the stars. We can overcome sin, bad habits and thought patterns. We may well think that we can’t; the way was set, the die cast, the destiny mapped out, the genes determined; our background, upbringing, life path was as it was, and so we are as we are. But we *can* be made new. Sin need no longer have dominion over us, as Paul says in Romans 6; or as early Genesis put it, “you shall rule over [sin]” (Gen. 4:7).

3:5 At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (Jn. 3:5; the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). See on 1 Cor. 12:13. It is Christ, not the actual baptizer, who actually does the moral washing of a person from their sins when they are baptized. Consider these simple parallels within John’s Gospel:

John 3:5	John 13:8
Unless	If
One is born of water and Spirit	I do not wash you
He cannot enter into the Kingdom	You have no part in me

Not only does this reflect the crucial importance of baptism; it indicates that it is the Lord Jesus who does the moral washing of a person when they are baptized. Once we accept that, then *who* performs baptisms becomes irrelevant.

3:8 A person was understood in connection with who their parents and ancestors were. Hence some Biblical characters are referred to as the son of X who was the son of Y who was the son of Z. Plato summed it up when he said that good people were good "because they sprang from good fathers". This is where the genealogies of Jesus would’ve been so hard to handle for some- because Matthew stresses how the Lord had whores and Gentiles in His genealogy. And it’s also where the New Testament doctrine of the new birth and the new family in Christ were radical- for it was your family and ethnic origin which were of paramount importance in defining a person within society. John’s Gospel especially emphasises the great desire to know from whence Jesus came (Jn. 3:8; 6:41,42; 7:27,28; 8:14; 9:29)- and the lack of any solid, concrete answer. To say that God was quite literally His Father was just too much for most people to handle.

3:9 The light of Christ lightens every man who is born into the spiritual world (Jn. 3:9), with the inevitable effect that he too becomes the light of the world for others (Mt. 5:14).

3:10 The very high standards which He demanded of His followers would only have had meaning if it was evident that He was Himself a real human who all the same was sinless. This was [and is] why the words of Jesus had a compelling, inspirational power towards obedience; for He Himself lived out those words in human flesh. The Lord of all grace was and is amazingly demanding in some ways. And He has every right to be. Just reflect how in Jn. 3:10, He expected Nicodemus to

have figured out the Old Testament's teaching about the new birth (presumably from Ps. 51:10; Is. 44:3; Ez. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Ecc. 11:5). And the Lord castigates Nicodemus for not having figured it out.

3:11 Note how the Lord changes pronouns in Jn. 3:11: "Verily, *I* say unto thee, *We* speak...". He clearly identifies the preaching of His followers with His own witness. We are the branches, we make up the vine, we make up the Lord Jesus. Thus He spoke of "we..." to mean 'I...' in Jn. 3:11, such was the unity He felt between Himself and His men. He asked Saul "Why persecutest thou *me*?" (Acts 9:4), again identifying Himself with His people.

3:13 "No man hath ascended up to heaven" except Jesus (John 3:13). Moses' ascents of the mountain were seen as representing an ascension to Heaven; but he had not ascended up to the "heavenly things" of which Christ spoke. Consider the spiritual loneliness of rising to heights no other man has reached, as far as Heaven is above earth. John the Baptist recognised this (Jn. 3:31).

This man Jesus standing before them was saying [in figurative terms] that He was in Heaven, had been in Heaven, had ascended there. Surely His abrupt shift of tenses and places is to suggest the Yahweh Name being manifested in Him. The language of 'coming down' is classically used in the OT in the context of Yahweh manifestation in theophany; yet it often occurs in Acts in the context of the preaching of the Gospel, as if our witness is a manifestation of the Name (Acts 8:5; 10:21; 12:19; 14:25; 18:22; 25:6).

John's Gospel especially makes many references to the idea of Christ's judgment being right now. Why is this? John was clearly written some time after the other Gospels. The early community of believers were expecting the Lord's return at any moment; but by the time John wrote, it was apparent that He hadn't returned as soon as they had hoped for. Perhaps his point was that much of what we are expecting at the second coming is in essence going on right now. The very 'coming' of Jesus was judgment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 16:28). Those who refuse to believe have already been condemned (Jn. 3:17-21). Whilst the other Gospels stress that we will receive eternal life at the second coming (Mk. 10:30; Mt. 18:8,9), John stresses that the essence of the life eternal is our present experience; we have passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24). We will be made children of God at the last day (Lk. 6:35; 20:36); but the essence of being God's children has begun now, when we are born again (Jn. 1:12). Yet John brings out his continuity with the other Gospels by speaking of both future and present condemnation (Jn. 12:48 cp. 3:18; 9:39); of future eternal life and present eternal life (Jn. 12:25 cp. 3:36; 5:24); and future resurrection and present 'resurrection' to new life (Jn. 6:39,40,54 cp. 5:21,24).

"No man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13)

The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passage highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. In any case, He speaks of how "the Son of man" will do these things, and not 'God the Son', as would be required by Trinitarian theology. To suggest that Jesus as Son of Man literally ascended to Heaven and descended to earth during His ministry is surely literalism's last gasp. There are many allusions to Moses throughout John's record, as if both the Lord Jesus and John were seeking to impress upon the audience that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messianic "prophet like unto" Moses predicted in Dt. 18:15,18. Jewish writings of the time [e.g. *Wisdom of Solomon*] spoke of Moses' ascent of Sinai as an ascension into Heaven, descending to Israel with the Law (1). This language is being picked up and applied to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus has just spoken of how believers in Him are to be "born from above" and "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3,5). However, the same Greek words for "born" and "Spirit" are found in Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35- in description of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate example of one "born of the Spirit". And yet John's Gospel applies the language of the virgin birth to believers. We have another example in Jn. 1:13- the believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"- i.e., they were born "of the Spirit". My suggestion is that the Lord Jesus is saying in Jn. 3:13 that of course, He is the only one fully born of the Spirit, the only one in Heavenly places; but the preceding context makes clear that He is willing to count believers in Him as fully sharing His status. Further, we need no longer complain that His virgin birth makes Him have some unfair advantages in the battle against sin which we don't have. The spiritual rebirth experienced by all those truly born again by God's word, His "seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), is such that we in some way are given all the inclinations towards righteousness which the Lord Jesus had by virtue of His birth.

Notes

(1) More references to this effect in Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) p. 100.

3:13-17 Any serious student of John's Gospel will have come across the problem of deciding what are John's inserted comments, and what are the actual words of Jesus (e.g. 3:13-17). The problem arises because the written style of John is so similar, indeed identical, to the style of language Christ used. The conclusion from this feature is that *the mind of John was so swamped with the words and style of the Lord that his own speaking and writing became after the pattern of his Master*. And he is our pattern in this. Not only are his comments within his Gospel exactly in harmony with the Lord's style, but also the style and phrasing of his own epistle reflects that of the Lord (e.g. compare Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 with 1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12). Perhaps he *so* absorbed the mind of the Master that he was used to write the most spiritual account of the Lord's life. In a different way, Peter also absorbed the Lord's words to the point that they influenced his way of speaking and writing (his letters are full of conscious and unconscious allusions back to the Lord's words). He seems to have noted some of the Lord's catch phrases, and made them his own (as an Englishman may say "I guess..." after prolonged contact with an American). Thus "of a surety / truth" was one of the Lord's catch phrases (Lk. 9:27; 12:44; 21:3; Jn. 1:47; 6:55; 8:31; 17:8), repeated by Peter in Acts 12:11.

3:14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the *serpent* represented Christ in this case. Moses "lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews "lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (Jn. 8:28). Moses drew attention to the serpent and its power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses "lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ).

Jn. 3:13,14 link the Lord's ascension to Heaven, and His 'lifting up' on the cross. They were all part of the same, saving process. Likewise the atonement is a function of His death and resurrection combined; it was only the empty tomb that gave the cross any power at all. It continues now, in that men can crucify Him afresh, and even now put Him to an open ['naked'] shame. They can strip Him naked and leave Him mocked before men- in their behaviour unworthy of His Name, in the schisms amongst them...

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did,

must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I Jn 3:16).

The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. "There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)... look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men. The Hebrew word *nasa* translated "forgive" is also translated 'bear' as in 'bearing / carrying iniquity'. When God forgave, He bore / carried sin; and the idea of carrying sin is obviously brought into visual, graphic meaning in the literal carrying of the cross by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the Hebrew word *nes*, translated "pole" in the record of the bronze snake being lifted up on a "pole", is the noun for which *nasa* is the verb. The essence of cross carrying had therefore been performed by God for millenia, every time He forgave human sin. It's understandable, therefore, that He had a special manifestation in the final sufferings and death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

'Belief in Him' therefore specifically refers to looking upon the cross in understanding, and believing it. 'He' was and is His cross. There we see the epitome of Him. Jesus "by himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3) and yet it was by His cross and His blood that sin was purged. But He Himself was epitomized in His blood / cross. And so to believe in Him is to believe in Him crucified (Jn. 3:15,16). God's so loving the world was in the giving of His son to die. His sending His Son into the world was specifically through the cross [see on Jn. 1:14]. One wonders whether we gaze enough upon the cross. Jn. 3:14 uses the Greek word *semeion* for the standard / pole on which the serpent was lifted up, representing as it did the cross of Christ. But *semeion* is the word which John seven times uses to describe the sign-miracles worked by the Lord in His ministry. Interestingly, the Jewish Midrash on Num. 21:9 likewise associates the pole with something miraculous: "Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it up by a miracle. He cast it into the air and it stayed there" (Soncino translation). Surely John's point is the same as Paul's in 1 Cor. 1:22-25: the Jews want signs / miracles, but Christ crucified is the power of God, the greatest sign. And maybe this is why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't record any miracle within the narrative of the crucifixion. The simple, actual death of Jesus was and is the greatest and most convicting sign.

3:13,14 follow straight on from the discourse about being born again. We earlier suggested that John very much saw the new birth of the believer as a coming out of the Lord's pierced side; this was what enabled the new birth [see under 1:1 and 1:13]. 2 Cor. 5:17 likewise speaks of the new creation in the context of expounding the Lord's death. "Lifted up" translates a Greek word usually translated "exalt", and is used about the Lord's exaltation after His resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Although "no man hath *ascended up* to heaven" uses a different word, the idea is just the same. The word is usually used by John to describe the Lord's 'going up' to Jerusalem to keep and finally fulfil the Passover (2:13; 5:1; 7:8,10,14; 11:55; 12:20). John's comment that only the Lord Jesus has "ascended up to heaven" may therefore be a reference to both His crucifixion and ascension. His 'coming down' may have a hint of how John records His body being 'taken down' from the cross.

Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to gather people together to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus.

3:14-21 One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in its most crystallised form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain... an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the *ensign* / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for "light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the "fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the "light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of "light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

3:16 "God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16) implies that the love of God for the world was channelled through the work of Christ. Biblically, this Gospel was not a social Gospel. Note the import of the word "*so*" - not 'so much', but 'so, in this way...'. There are just so many connections between the love of God and the death of Christ, that it is easy to overlook them. For example, "God loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins... hereby ('in this') we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 4:10; 3:16). The love of God is "*in* Christ Jesus". Likewise, the love of Christ is so often linked with His death. Christ

"Loved us, and washed us from our sins" (Rev. 1:5). He gave His life so that the world might have life (Jn. 6:51); and yet He gave His life for *us*. My conclusion is that the love of Christ was not for the whole world, or for the physical planet. It was for us whom God has called out of this world to benefit from the Lord's sacrifice; for us who *to God*, from His perspective, constitute "the world" with which He deals. "The world" in John's Gospel often means the Jewish world. The Lord died for *their* salvation fundamentally (Gal. 4:5), and we only have access to this by becoming spiritual Israel through baptism. See on 1 Jn. 2:15.

3:17 God's intention in giving His Son was that the world might be saved (Jn. 3:17). Why, then, the masses of humanity who never heard the name of Jesus? My comment is that it was potentially possible for the whole world to hear, it was God's wish and intention; but it was the dysfunction of His church, and His refusal to intervene to force us another way, His commitment to honouring our freewill, which left those masses without the saving knowledge of Jesus. And the tragedy continues to this day.

3:18 John 3:18 puts the issue clearly: "He that believeth on (Christ) is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already (before the judgment), because he hath not believed". It is in this sense that in prospect we can be assured that we are saved by being in Christ. We can therefore live as "the sons of God, without rebuke... blameless" (Phil. 2:15) in God's sight (being so in the eyes of the world is almost impossible for a true believer!), in the same way as at the judgment we will be presented "holy and unblameable and unreprougeable". It must be significant that the language of forgiveness in the New Testament constantly alludes to judgment: justification, appeal, counsel for the defence, advocate, accusation etc. are common ideas, especially in the Greek. The point of this may be to teach that the experience of forgiveness now does stand related to the judgment which we will receive at Christ's return. Thus if we are convicted of sin now, but aided by Christ as our advocate and therefore justified, we will have the same experience at the judgment seat.

3:19 The light coming into the world is parallel with God's son coming into the world in the cross [see on Jn. 1:5,9]. Men "came to that sight" and turned away from it (Lk. 23:48). Our natures likewise resist us concentrating upon the cross. Something in us makes our minds wander at the breaking of bread. There our deeds are manifested. Thus the breaking of bread naturally brings forth self-examination as we focus upon and reconstruct His death. There are our deeds reprov'd, and also made manifest. In murdering the Son of God, Israel showed how they hated the light; the same word is used in describing how "they hated me without a cause" (Jn. 15:25). John develops the idea in 1 Jn. 2:9,11, in teaching that to hate our brother is to walk in darkness; whereas if we come to the light of God's glory as shown in the cross, we will love our brother. The cross is the ultimate motivator to love our brethren; this was one of the reasons why the Lord died as He did (Jn. 17:26). The light of the cross is the light of all men in God's world (1:4). The Lord later associates His being the light of the world with following Him; and 'following him' is invariably associated with taking up the cross and following Him. To follow the light is to follow Christ crucified (8:12).

3:20 Whenever God's Truth is presented to a man, the raw nerve of his conscience will somehow be touched. He is in God's image, and knows somehow he should respond to this. He may react by flinching away, covering up his weakness; He will not come to the light, lest his deeds are reprov'd (Jn. 3:19,20). Or he may realise that he has been touched, and respond in humility. So often the introduction of the Gospel is treated by people with indifference: 'Oh, another leaflet', a woman may jovially respond when she's handed one of our tracts. But when she realises it's about Jesus... then, things will change. 'Oh, I see...' she may say, and her body language will change. She has been touched on the raw nerve. She may get angry because of this, or quickly change the subject- or let her conscience be touched.

3:21 A healthy conscience provides some foretaste of the final judgment. He who does truth comes to the light, "that his deeds may be made *manifest*" (Jn. 3:21), the reproof of a healthy conscience

makes our failings *manifest* (Eph. 5:13) as they will be made *manifest* at the future judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim. 5:25). This is why Solomon when reflecting on the human seats of judgment so wished that God would *now* make men manifest to themselves, make them realize the animal depravity of their natures, because there would be a *future* judgment of every purpose and work (Ecc. 3:16-18). If we love darkness and refuse to come to the light that our deeds may be manifest (Jn. 3:20), then we will be returned to the darkness in the last day. Therefore willing self-examination and self-correction now, a true response to God's word, a realistic coming to the light- this means we will not be thrown into the darkness in the end. But the question of course occurs: do we *really* let God's word influence our behaviour to the extent that we *really* change? Or are we just drifting through the Christian, church-going life...? The children of God and those of the devil are now made manifest (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:10), even in the eyes of other believers (1 Cor. 11:19). His judgments are now made manifest (Rom. 1:19) in that we know His word, His judgments; in advance of how they *will* be made manifest in the future judgment (Rev. 15:4). We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat, but we are made manifest unto God (s.w.) even now (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

There's a clear connection here with how Nicodemus came out into the light after the crucifixion. Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as Nicodemus was doing: "Men loved darkness... for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this.

Jn. 3:21: "He that doeth Truth (i.e. obeys the word, Jn. 17:17) cometh to the light" (the word, Ps. 119:105). Obedience to the word leads to more understanding of it.

3:27- see on Lk. 1:14.

3:28- see on Mt. 3:7.

3:29 Although John preached the excellence of Christ, he didn't even consider himself to be part of the mystic bride of Christ; for he likens himself to only the groom, watching the happiness of the couple, but not having a part in it himself (Jn. 3:29). See on Jn. 1:10.

3:30- see on Eph. 3:8.

3:31- see on Mt. 3:7.

3:32 He testified what he 'saw and heard' (Jn. 3:32), and we are called to do likewise (1 Jn. 1:1,3). For John's witness prior to the Lord's first coming is to be repeated by us prior to His second coming. Four times in the New Testament we read of John 'preparing the way' for the Lord's return; the only other time we meet that phrase is in Rev. 16:12, where in the very last days, the way of the Kings [or, the one great King- the Lord Jesus] is likewise to be prepared.

3:33 Speaking of the witness of Jesus to the words of God Himself, John comments: "He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true" (Jn. 3:33). By accepting words to be Divinely inspired, we set or affix our seal to them- we undertake to have them as binding upon us in daily life. Accepting the proposition that the Bible is inspired is therefore not a merely academic thing, assenting to a true proposition. It has to affect our lives. And note the humility of God here- that human beings can affix the seal of validation to the truth of God's word. This works out in the

way in which lives of obedience to God's word are actually an affixed seal and testament to the truth of those words. Thus it becomes our lives which are the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration.

We each have a personal seal, as it were, with our own personal characteristics on it; and we set to our seal the fact that God is Truth, that He is the God of our covenant ("Truth" is a word associated throughout the OT with God's covenant relationship with men; Jn. 3:33).

3:36- see on Eph. 2:3.

When we read of "eternal life" being granted to us now, we are reading about "the life belonging to the age", i.e. the Kingdom of God in the future. The idea is that we can live the life which we will eternally live- right here and now. We can experience the quality of that life now. And if we don't... we don't have the guarantee of eternity in the Kingdom. For in spiritual terms, in terms of essential spiritual experience, there will be a seamless transition between the spiritual life we now enjoy, and that which we will experience in the future Kingdom. The location of that eternity will be on earth; and yes, there must be death, resurrection, judgment and immortalisation of our body. But those more 'physical' realities don't figure so deeply in the message which John is putting across in his record of 'the Gospel'. Notice how in Jn. 3:36, 'having everlasting life' is paralleled with 'seeing life'; to perceive and live what God's Kingdom life is all about, is in a sense to 'have' it.

4:4 "He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he *must needs* go through Samaria" (John 4:3-4). This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. See on Lk. 2:49.

4:6 Incident after incident in the mortal life of Jesus had echoes of the crucifixion to come. Consider how He met the woman at the well "at the sixth hour" (Gk.), He was thirsty, a woman got Him something to drink and encouraged Him in His work (Jn. 4:6 cp. 19:14,28). No wonder He spoke of His meeting with her as a finishing of the Father's work, which is the very language of the cross. He lived out the essence of the cross in that incident, just as we do, day by day.

4:9 The woman of John 4 grew in her appreciation of Jesus, quickly. She addressed the Lord as: a Jew (4:9); "sir" (4:11); greater than Jacob (4:12); a prophet (4:19); the Christ (4:42); saviour of the world (4:42). M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies In The NT* Vol. 1 p. 113) has observed that Christ is progressively addressed as "Lord" as the NT record progresses; as if the community's perception of Him increased over time.

The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9).

4:10 Christ at a well met the Samaritan woman, and had a highly spiritual conversation with her; he gave her "living water", i.e. spring water, in return for her well water (Jn 4:7-10). Surely this contrasts with Moses meeting his Gentile wife by a well; a relationship in which he gave her very little, and which was an indicator of a spiritual weak cycle in his life. The Samaritan woman immediately recognised Jesus as Jewish (Jn. 4:9). Zipporah thought that Moses was an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19)- which is another comforting type of Christ's humanity.

We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. And this is what we give out to others- for "he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water" for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: 'What would Jesus do...?'

4:14 "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Is. 12:3) is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain

how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted". The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others.

It was from the smitten rock that springing water came out. There is an endless inspiration in the cross, an endless source of that spirit of new life. And the influence of the cross cannot be passive; we will also give out living water, *we* will become as the smitten rock, and through our share in His crucifixion we will give out to others that same new and eternal life.

Repeatedly, the Lord Jesus carefully worded His teaching in order to use the same words about Himself as about His disciples. He was the lamb of God; and He sent them forth as lambs amongst wolves; He was "the light of the world", and He stated that they too must be likewise. As He was the source of living water to us, so we are to be to others (Jn. 4:10,14). John grasped this, by using even some of the language of the virgin birth about the birth of all God's children. It's as if even the Lord's Divine begetting shouldn't be seen as too huge a barrier between us and Himself. The wonder of the virgin birth is something which elicits the "Wow!" mentality; but the miracle continues into *our* lives.

4:15 *Whoever* drinks of the water of life will have *within* them a spring that also gives eternal life (Jn. 4:15). The purpose of a spring is to give water to men. Experiencing the Lord's words and salvation *inevitably* leads to us doing likewise to others, springing from somewhere deep within. This was in fact one of the first things God promised Abraham when He first instituted the new covenant: "I will bless thee (i.e. with forgiveness and salvation in the Kingdom)...and *thou* shalt be a blessing", in that we his seed in Christ would bring this same blessing to men of all nations by our witness (Gen. 12:2,3). When the Lord offered salvation to the woman at the well, He spoke of how it would be a spring of life going out from her. She wanted it, but apparently just for herself. Therefore when she asked to be given such a spring, the Lord replied by asking her to bring her husband to hear His words (Jn. 4:15,16). Surely He was saying: 'If you want this great salvation for yourself, you've got to be willing to share it with others, no matter how embarrassing this may be for you'. In a similar figure, the Bible begins with the tree of the lives [Heb.], and concludes with men eating of the tree and there appearing a forest of trees-of-life.

4:17 The Samaritan woman was at best being deceptive when she said that "I have no husband / man / fella in my life" (Jn. 4:17). The Lord could have answered: 'Don't lie to me. You know you're living with a man, and that you've had five men in your life'. Instead, the Lord picks up her deceptive comment positively, agreeing that her latest relationship isn't really a man / husband as God intends. I find His positive attitude here surpassing.

4:18 The woman was evidently a sinner; and the Lord made it clear that He knew all about her five men. But He didn't max out on that fact; His response to knowing it was basically: 'You're thirsty. I've got the water you need'. He saw her need, more than her moral problem; and He knew the answer. When she replied that she had no husband, He could have responded: 'You liar! A half truth is a lie!'. But He didn't. He said, so positively, gently and delicately, 'What you have said is quite true. You had five men you have lived with. The one you now have isn't your husband. So, yes, you said the truth' (Jn. 4:16-18). He could have crushed her. But He didn't. And we who 'have the truth' must take a lesson from this.

4:18-20 Sin is serious. This is one of the most recurrent themes in the Bible. Yet with the characteristic blindness of human nature, it is one which fails to register with us as it should. 'Just'

one sin in Eden led to death- and so much more than death. Time and again people missed the Lord's attempt to convict people of their sin. When He tells the Samaritan woman of the five men she'd had in her life, she responds by ribbing Him about whether God should be worshipped on Gerazim or in Jerusalem. She tried to move off the delicate issue of her morality into theological argument and strife about conflicting traditions (Jn. 4:18-20).

4:19 We know from Acts 8 that people from Samaria formed a significant part of the earliest Christian community. Yet all converts are prone to return to their former beliefs in some ways at some times. The Samaritan view of Messiah was likewise that he would be the re-incarnation of a prophet, specifically Moses (Jn. 4:19,25). It therefore seems likely that the idea of a pre-existent Christ / Messiah developed as a result of the early Jewish and Samaritan converts returning to their previous conceptions of Messiah. For these were less taxing to their faith than the radical idea that an illiterate Jewish teenager called Marryam in some dumb Galileean village actually conceived a baby direct from God Almighty. Uninspired documents such as the *Preaching Of Peter* and the *Gospel Of The Hebrews* also make the false connection between Jesus and a re-incarnated Moses, Elijah etc. Clearly enough, the idea of a pre-existent, incarnated Jesus had its roots in paganism and apostate Judaism.

4:20 "The word was made flesh" in daily reality for Jesus. The extraordinary connection between the man Jesus and the word of God which He preached and spoke is perhaps reflected in Lk. 4:20: "He closed the book [of the words of God], and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him". Here we have as it were an exquisite close up of Jesus, His very body movements, His handling of the scroll, and the movement of the congregation's eyes. Notice that at this stage He had only read from the scroll, and not yet begun His exposition of what He had read. The impression I take from this is that there was an uncanny connection between Him and the word of His Father. The Son reading His Father's word, with a personality totally in conformity to it, must have been quite something to behold. He was the word of God made flesh in a person, in a way no other person had or could ever be. See on Lk. 4:36; Jn. 14:10.

4:21 We sense His eager hopefulness for response when He said to the woman: "Believe me, woman..." (Jn. 4:21 GNB). Even though she was confrontational, bitter against Jewish people, and perhaps [as it has been argued by some] pushing a feminist agenda... the Lord sought for *faith* in her above correcting her attitude about these things.

4:22 The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32 Gk.; 17:1; 19:27). Yet in a sense the essence of His death was ongoing throughout His life; the 'hour' was to come, and yet was. Then, through the cross, true worship of the Father in spirit and in truth was enabled, when the veil of the temple was torn down, and the system of Mosaic worship ended. The 'true' worship of the Father doesn't imply necessarily a 'false' worship prior to it; it is the 'true' in contrast to the shadow that had existed before it (cp. the true vine, the true manna).

4:23 There are many examples of where God and man are portrayed as being in some kind of mutual relationship. Consider Jn. 4:23: "The Father seeketh such to worship Him". The Hebrew / Greek idea of 'seeking' God implied to worship Him [Strong's lexicon gives this interpretation of the Greek word used here]. Understanding that, albeit through the mask of translation, we see that the Father is seeking seekers. We seek Him, He seeks us; and thus we meet.

4:24 "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (Jn. 4:23) was spoken by the Lord early in His ministry. Even at that stage ["and now is..."], there were some worshipping in spirit and in truth. If the Lord is referring to the disciples, and if the "truth" in Jn. 4:24 is to be understood in theological / doctrinal terms, then "the truth" which they at that time possessed was very far less than what we might think today. The disciples at that time had many misbeliefs and

misunderstandings; they believed in demons, were unclear about important aspects of the Lord's work, death and resurrection, and believed in ghosts. But they worshipped in spirit and in truth. However, I suspect that "spirit and in truth" doesn't refer to 'A spiritual attitude *plus* theological purity' (which none of us have anyway). That was how I once read the phrase. But "truth" would seem to me to refer more to truthfulness, and to reality as opposed to shadow- e.g. Jesus as the true light, the true bread refers not to His intellectual purity but to the way in which He was the fulfillment of the things of "the true tabernacle" as Hebrews puts it, and thus His truth / reality stood over against the shadows. In the context, the Lord is making a point to the Samaritan woman about where geographically God's house and place of worship should be- Zion or Gerizim. And as He often does, the Lord takes the question onto another level. 'The place of worship doesn't matter, the worship must be in spirit and in truth', i.e. the presence of God in the temple was to be ended, the Mosaic worship system with its need for geographical place and focus was about to end, and worship was to be internal, in the heart. And some, the Lord noticed, had already perceived that. So the context of Jn. 4:24 wasn't about the need for doctrinal / theological / intellectual truth. In Jn. 4:18 the Lord commends the woman because she "spoke truthfully / truly" about her marital state. As the Father was seeking "spirit and truth" worshippers, it was apparent to the disciples that the Lord Jesus was "seeking" this woman for God (Jn. 4:27). And so He goes on to encourage her to worship God in spirit and truth[fulness]; her humble recognition of failure was the "truth" required for worship. She had the spirit of David, who worshipped with 'truth in the inward parts' after recognizing his sin with Bathsheba. Notice how David says that God 'desires truth in the inward parts' (Ps. 51:6), and the Lord seems to be alluding to that when He says that God desires worship in spirit [inward parts] and truth. The context of sexual failure is the same for both the Samaritan woman, and David. If my reading of the allusions to David and Ps. 51 is correct, then the Lord wasn't talking at all about "truth" in the sense of pure theology. Rather was He referring to the "truth" of confession of sin and worship with a humble heart. It is the desperately repentant person who will fall down and worship God (Mt. 18:26 s.w.); this is the "spirit and truth" worshipper. And such a spirit is ultimately "the truth" which we are to finally arrive at.

The Jews and Samaritans had the idea that all they needed to do was to occasionally visit a place of worship in order to have a relationship with Him. The Lord, as His manner was, cut right across this by saying that as God is Spirit, so the true worshippers would worship Him in Spirit. If we believe that God is Spirit, if all He does and says constantly expresses His Spirit, then our lives likewise must be of non-stop worship, not through going occasionally into a temple or ecclesial meeting, but in living a spirit of life that worships Him in every situation (Jn. 4:20-24).

“God is a Spirit” (Jn. 4:24)

God's spirit is His power or breath by which His essential self, His being and character, is revealed to man through the actions which that spirit achieves. Thus “God is spirit”, as Jn. 4:24 should be properly translated (see R.S.V., N.I.V.), because His spirit reflects His personality.

God is described as being many things, e.g.

- “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)
- “God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5)
- “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8)
- “The word (Greek *logos* - plan, purpose, idea) was God” (Jn. 1:1).

Thus “God is” His characteristics. It is clearly wrong to argue that the abstract quality of love is ‘God’, just because we read that “God is love”. We may call someone ‘kindness itself’, but this does not mean that they are without physical existence - it is their manner of literal existence which reveals kindness to us.

The spirit being God's power, we frequently read of God sending or directing His spirit to achieve things in harmony with His will and character. Examples of this are numerous, showing the distinction between God and His spirit.

- "He (God) that put His Holy Spirit within him" (Is. 63:11)
- "I (God) will put My spirit upon him (Jesus)" (Mt. 12:18)
- "The Father give(s) the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 11:13)
- "The Spirit descending from heaven" (Jn. 1:32)
- "I (God) will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17).

Indeed, the frequent references to "the spirit of God" should be proof enough that the spirit is not God personally. These differences between God and His spirit are another difficulty for those who believe that God is a 'trinity' in which God the Father is equated with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Very importantly, a non-personal God makes a nonsense of prayer - to the point where prayer is a dialogue between our consciousness and a concept of God which just exists in our own mind. We are continually reminded that we pray to God who is in heaven (Ecc. 5:2; Mt. 6:9; 5:16; 1 Kings 8:30), and that Jesus is now at God's right hand there, to offer up our prayers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 9:24). If God is not personal, such passages are made meaningless. But once God is understood as a real, loving Father, prayer to Him becomes a very real, tangible thing - actually talking to another being who we believe is very willing and able to respond.

4:27 *Seek* for response in people. As the disciples came upon the Lord talking to the woman by the well, it looked as if He were *seeking* something (Jn. 4:27). But they didn't ask what - for it was obvious. His body language reflected how He was *seeking* her salvation. He seeks the lost until He finds them, even now (Mt. 18:12; Lk. 15:8); as He looked up into the branches of the sycamore tree seeking Zacchaeus, He was epitomising how He came (and comes) to seek and save *all* the lost (Lk. 19:5,10). Our preaching to others isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24).

The Rabbis taught that a man should not salute a woman in a public place. For Jesus to talk to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn.4) was therefore an indication of his studied disregard of local tradition concerning women when it clashed with spiritual principles. The incident was "a strange innovation on Rabbinic custom and dignity". The Talmud taught: "Six things are a disgrace to a disciple of the wise: He should not...converse with a woman in the street" (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth "Benedictions" 43b). A woman could only be alone with two men, never with one, and this was within a town; outside a town, she had to be in the presence of three men (Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 81a). But the Lord spoke to her alone. A woman could even be divorced for speaking to a man. "What conduct transgresses Jewish custom? If she...speaks with any man" (Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 7:6). There can be no doubt that the Lord didn't accept the prevailing view of women. The Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are recorded in an intentional parallel in John 3 and 4. The man doesn't get it, he fails to perceive the double entendre in the Lord's words, and struggles with their deeper meaning. The Samaritan woman gets it straight away, and even responds to the Lord with the same kind of language.

4:29 He let Himself be encouraged by her response to Him, even though her comment "Could this be the Messiah?" (Jn. 4:29) implies she was still uncertain. Raymond Brown has commented: "The Greek question with *meti* implies an unlikelihood" (The Gospel According To John, Vol. 1, p. 173).

4:32 Dehydrated at the well, very hungry, the response of the Samaritan woman revived His spirits to the point that the disciples assumed He must have been given a meal (Jn. 4:32,33). He goes on to say that working with a woman like that is His "meat", the doing of the will of him that sent me and to accomplish his work (4:34 RV). Yet the will of God and accomplishing of His work was evidently the cross (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:9,10). In preaching to that woman and converting her, the Lord was living out the essence of the crucifixion that awaited Him. Preaching work isn't glamorous. It is a living out of the cross.

4:34 After the Lord converted the Samaritan woman at the well, He commented to His disciples that such work was His food- "to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34). But soon afterwards He claimed that "the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me" (Jn. 5:36). It's tempting to think that the "works" He spoke of were His miracles- but the linkage with Jn. 4:34 suggests that they were also references to the change He achieved within people. These transformed people were His witness- and the Samaritan woman is a classic example. For when He had done the Father's work in her, she rushed off to witness to the world. In Jn. 6:28,29 the Lord seems to consciously steer us away from understanding His "works" as merely the miracles of e.g. feeding and physical healing. In response to the question "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He responds: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent".

The Lord saw His preaching work as a carrying of the cross. He spoke of how His witness to the Samaritan woman was a 'finishing of the Father's work' (Jn. 4:34). The 'finishing' was clearly only accomplished upon the cross, when He cried "It is finished", and He "fulfilled" or [s.w.] "finished" the Scriptures (Jn. 19:28). Thus in His life, He lived out the essence of His future cross by witnessing to others. Like Paul, we need to grasp what this means for us in practice. Crucifixion was a public, painful, sacrificial act; and true effort in witness will be the same. And this is exactly why Paul can speak of "the preaching of the cross", the preaching which *is* the cross (Gk.). In His preaching to the woman at the well, the Lord saw Himself as 'finishing God's work' (Jn. 4:32,34). And yet John evidently intends us to connect this incident with the Lord's final cry from the cross which he records: "It is finished!". Only on the cross was the work finished; but by pushing aside His own hunger, tiredness and desire for solitude in order to convert that woman, the Lord even then was 'finishing the Father's work', in that in essence He was living out the spirit of crucifixion. And so with us; the life of ongoing crucifixion demands that we consciously push ourselves in the service of others. The finishing of the Father's work was accomplished in the cross- hence the final cry of triumph, "It is finished!" (19:30). But this meat was not appreciated by them in His lifetime. The work of sharing in Christ's cross should be our meat and drink, to the eclipsing of the pressing nature of material things. For this was the context in which the Lord spoke; His men were pressing Him to attend to His humanity, whereas His mind was filled, even in tiredness and dehydration, with the living out of the cross unto the end. He saw that "meat" in the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He saw the connection between His cross and the conversion of that woman; thus "the meat... the will... [God's] work" was the cross, and yet it was also the conversion of the woman. The cross is essentially the converter of men and women, and thereby our crucifixion-lives are likewise the power of conversion.

4:35 The Gospel writers were preaching the words of the Gospels in response to their Lord's command to go preach. Yet Jn. 4:35,38 records them recognizing that they didn't appreciate how great the harvest was, and indeed the harvest was spoilt because of the weakness of the disciples.

The Lord Himself was of the persuasion that people are more interested than His brethren may think. "You say 'Four months from sowing to harvest: the time is not yet'... [But I say that] the fields are already white for reaping. Already the reaper is taking his pay" (Jn. 4:35). It seems that the disciples thought there had to be a gap between sowing and reaping, whereas the Lord is saying that people were more ready for harvest than His preachers thought. And it can be the same with us- our insistence that there has to be a respectable gap between sowing the Gospel and reaping the harvest isn't a concept upheld by the Lord. There's more of a harvest out there than we think. And perhaps the relatively poor response to the preaching of Jesus in AD30-33 was because His disciples didn't do their part?

4:36 There was perfect congruence between the personality of Jesus, and the words of God which He preached. Thus the people marvelled at Him, commenting "What is this word?" (Lk. 4:36 RV).

God's word was made flesh, was made personal, in Him. In this sense there was almost no need for Jesus to say specific words about Himself- His character and personality showed forth that word, that *logos*, that essential message. See on Lk. 4:20.

The experience of preaching is in itself a foretaste of the future world-wide Kingdom. The harvest is both at the end of the age, according to the parables of Mt. 13, but also is ongoing right now (Jn. 4:36) as we gather in the harvest of converts. The Lord in Jn. 4:35,36 took this figure far further, by saying that the harvest is such that the interval between sowing and harvesting is in some sense collapsed for those who engage in preaching. The reaper was already collecting his wages; the harvest was already there, even though it was four months away (Jn. 4:35). This clearly alludes to the promises that in the Messianic Kingdom there would also be no interval between sowing and harvest, so abundant would be the harvest (Lev. 26:5; Am. 9:13). And hence, we are impelled to spread the foretaste of the Kingdom world-wide by our witness right now.

The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

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There are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.). Those who reap the harvest of the Gospel will be rewarded with salvation (Jn. 4:36). Such work *isn't* just an option for those who want to be enthusiastic about it.

4:37 The Lord likened His preachers to men reaping a harvest. He speaks of how they fulfilled the proverb that one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37,38). Yet this 'proverb' has no direct Biblical source. What we *do* find in the Old Testament is the repeated idea that if someone sows but another reaps, this is a sign that they are suffering God's judgment for their sins (Dt. 20:6; 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic. 6:15). But the Lord turns around the 'proverb' concerning Israel's condemnation; He makes it apply to the way that the preacher / reaper who doesn't sow is the one who harvests others in converting them to Him. Surely His implication was that His preacher-reapers were those who had known condemnation for their sins, but on that basis were His humbled harvesters in the mission field.

4:39 The Samaritan woman at the well had a sense of shame and deep self-knowledge over her, as she realised that Christ knew her every sin. It was with a humble sheepishness that she confessed: "I

have no husband", because she was living in sin. She was converted by that well. Immediately she "left her waterpot, and went her way into the city (the record inviting us to watch her from a distance), and saith to the *men* (significantly), Come, see a man... is not this the Christ?" (Jn. 4:17,28,29). There was a wondrous mixture of enthusiasm and shyness in those words: "Come, see a man...". It is a feature of many new converts that their early preaching has a similar blend. It is stressed that men believed because of the way the woman told them "He told me all that ever I did" (Jn. 4:39). He had recounted her past sins to her (4:18,19). And she now, in matchless humility, goes and tells her former life to her associates, using the very words of description which the Lord had used. He convicted her of her sins, and this conviction resulted in her unashamed witness.

4:42- see on Jn. 20:31.

4:48 The Lord criticized the people for their refusal to believe apart from by seeing signs and wonders (Jn. 4:48). In line with this, the Lord attacks Nicodemus' belief on the basis of the miracles, saying that instead, a man must be born again if he wishes to see the Kingdom (Jn. 3:2,3). But later He says that the disciples were being given miraculous signs greater than even healing to help them believe (Jn. 11:15); He bids people believe because they saw signs, even if they were unimpressed by Him personally (Jn. 5:20; 10:37; 14:11). Clearly enough, the Lord was desperate for people to believe, to come to some sort of faith- even if the basis of that faith wasn't what He ideally wished. And it's possible that His initial high demand for people to believe not because they saw miracles was relaxed as His ministry proceeded; for the statements that faith was not to be based upon His miracles is found in Jn. 3 and 4, whereas the invitations to believe because of His miracles is to be found later in John.

4:50 The nobleman believed Christ's words. But only once his son was healed did he *really* believe (Jn. 4:50 cp. 54).

4:53 The nobleman is credited with faith by the Lord, and therefore He healed his son; but the record says that he only believed *after* the healing (Jn. 4:50,53). Christ saw that man's low level of faith, and took him where he was, with the result that he soon rose up to a higher level. The Lord must have reflected on the wide differences between the various levels of faith and commitment He encountered. Jairus besought Him to lay His hands on his daughter (Mk. 5:23); whilst the Centurion's attitude was "say the word only" (Lk. 7:6). His faith was undoubtedly on a higher level (Lk. 7:9), but still the Lord accepted the lower level of Jairus and worked with it. He was manifesting His Father in this. Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him.

5:2 It's worth noting the evidence that the entire New Testament was written before AD70:

- If any of the Gospels were written after AD70, their total silence as to that cataclysmic event is strange. The synoptics all record a prophecy of the events of AD70, and yet there is no reference by any of them to its fulfillment; whereas the Gospel writers aren't slow to comment on the way the Lord's words came true. Mt. 24:20 speaks of those events as being in the future- "Pray that it may not be winter when you have to make your escape". Surely there'd have been some reference to the fulfillment of the Olivet prophecy, if the records were written after AD70? Jn. 5:2 speaks as if Jerusalem and the temple area were still standing when John was written: "Now there *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool". The record of the Jews' proud comment in Jn. 2:20 that Herod's temple had taken 46 years to build includes no hint nor even presentiment that it had now been destroyed.

- Paul on any chronology died before AD70, so his letters were all before that. We need to marvel at the evident growth in spirituality and understanding which is reflected within Paul's letters, and realize that he grew *very* quickly.

- Hebrews speaks of the temple and sacrifice system in the present tense, as if it were still operating (note Heb. 10:2,11,18). The 40 years of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness are held up as a warning to an Israel approaching 40 years of disobedience after the death of Jesus (Heb. 3:7- 4:11). "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4) sounds like Nero's persecution hadn't started.

- The letters of Peter warn that a huge calamity is to come upon the Jewish churches, couched in terms of the Olivet prophecy. Thus they were written before AD70. 2 Peter also speaks as if Paul is still alive at the time.

- Acts stops at the point where Paul is living in his own house in Rome quite comfortably, and spreading the Gospel (Acts 28:30). And yet we know from 2 Tim. 4 that ultimately he died in Rome, presumably after being released and doing more work for the Lord. The obvious conclusion is that Acts was written before Paul died. Acts also implies that Jews were living at peace with Rome (Acts 24:2; 25:1-5; 15:13- 26:32)- a situation which didn't apply after AD70.

5:4 Christ's miracle of healing the lame man at the pool was to show the folly of the Jewish myth that at Passover time an angel touched the water of the Bethesda pool, imparting healing properties to it. This myth is recorded without direct denial of its truth; the record of Christ's miracle is the exposure of its falsehood (Jn. 5:4). Another example would be the Jewish myth that the High Priest's Passover address was a direct speaking forth of God's words; this wrong idea isn't specifically corrected, but it is worked through by God – in that Caiaphas' Passover words just before the crucifixion came strangely true, thus condemning Caiaphas and justifying the Lord Jesus as Israel's Saviour (Jn. 11:51).

5:5 The paralysed man had waited by the pool 38 years, waiting for someone to cure him. There was no cure in those 38 years- only in the word of Christ (John 5:5). Israel were actually in the wilderness for 38 years; the similarity implies Moses' leadership could not bring salvation, only the word of Christ.

5:6- see on Mt. 20:32.

5:14 The paralysed man sat by the pool of Bethesda, desperate for someone to take pity and take him to the water so that he might be saved from his pathetic plight. Jesus told him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing (than those years of sitting by the pool) come upon thee" (Jn. 5:14). That "worse thing" was rejection at the judgment- which, it could be inferred, would be like earnestly desiring salvation but not finding it.

5:17- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

The cosmos hasn't been created, wound up by God as it were on clockwork, and left ticking by an absent creator. There are many Bible verses which teach that God is actively, consciously outgiving of His Spirit in the myriad things going on in the natural creation, every nanosecond He is sensitive to the needed input from Him- and He gives it. The Lord Jesus defended working for His Father on the Sabbath because "My Father works hitherto, and I work" (Jn. 5:17).

That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

5:19 "The works... The Son can do nothing *of himself*" (Jn. 5:19). "All these works... I have not done them of mine own mind" (Num. 16:28).

Jn. 5:19 gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this- for no less than four times in Acts (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30) they refer to Jesus as the "holy child" of God. Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. And may we too "ceaseless... Abba, father, cry". The haunting melody of that hymn well expresses the utter wonder of it all, as we too struggle to find our true Father. The spirit / attitude of the Son of God should be ours, in that we like Him cry "Abba, father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). His spirit / attitude to the Father should be ours; He stressed that His Father is our Father (Jn. 20:17). Jesus acted and 'was' for all the world as if He had had His natural Father with Him from the start of His life. This was how close the Father became to Jesus; the extent to which He successfully 'found' Him; to the point that the 'mere' invisibility of that Father was not a major issue or barrier in their relationship. And so it should be for us, in the life of believing in that which is unseen, and in them who are invisible to us.

In Jn. 5:19,20 we read that the Son does (*poieo*) what He sees the Father doing, and the Father shows Him (*deiknumi*) all (*panta*) that He does. This is referring to Ex. 25:9 LXX, where Moses makes (*poieo*) the Tabernacle according all (*panta*) that God shows him (*deiknuo*). The reference of Jn. 5:19,20 is therefore to the Lord working with His Father in the building up of us the tabernacle... and *all* things God planned for us were revealed to the Son even in His mortality. What great wealth of understanding was there within His mind, within those brain cells... and how tragic that the head and body that bore them was betrayed and ignored and spat upon and tortured by men...

5:21 Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas. Jesus Himself 'quickens' or breathes life into us (Jn. 5:21)- but His Spirit does this, in that His words 'are spirit' (Jn. 6:63). Again we see how His personal presence, His life and Spirit, are breathed into us through His words being in us. In the mundane monotony of daily life, doing essentially the same job, travelling to work the same route, the alarm clock going off the same time each morning... there can be breathed into us a unique new life through having His words ever abiding within us. And this 'quickening' in daily life now is the foretaste of the 'quickening' which we will literally experience at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22- 'made alive' is the same Greek word translated 'quicken' in Jn. 5:21; 6:63).

5:22 Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

5:23 To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son,

who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

The true glory to God was to be through the lonely rejection of the cross. He who quietly honours / glorifies the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49) in the life of self-crucifixion will be honoured / glorified by the Father quietly in this life, and openly in the age to come (Jn. 12:26); such is the mutuality between a man and his God. See on Rev. 7:9.

5:24- see on Jn. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:14.

5:25 The judgment quality of the crucifixion is reflected by the way in which the Lord speaks of both the cross and the day of future judgment as "the hour" (Jn. 5:25-29). When the Lord taught that "the hour" is both to come and "now is", He surely meant us to understand that in His crucifixion, properly perceived, there is the judgment of this world, the end of this age for us who believe in Him, the cutting off of sin. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench by Pilate, as if He is the authentic judge, is further confirmation that in His Passion, the Lord was truly Judge of this world.

The hour that was coming and yet was refers to the Lord's death. There, the voice of the Son of God was made clear. We have shown elsewhere how the Lord's blood is personified as a voice crying out. Those who truly hear that voice will be raised to life. The way the graves opened at His death was surely a foretaste of this. See on Jn. 16:25.

5:27- see on Mk. 2:10.

God "gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man" (Jn. 5:27 RVmg.). His humanity is His ability to judge us. We will then realize the extent to which He succeeded in every point where we realize we failed, despite being strapped with our same nature. And thus we will respect Him yet the more for His perfection of character, and for the wonder of the salvation that is thereby in Him.

Even in His life, the Father committed all judgment unto the Son (Jn. 5:22). The Lord can therefore talk in some arresting present tenses: "Verily, verily, I say unto you [as judge], He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation". According to our response to His word, so we have now our judgment. He goes on to speak of how the believer will again hear His voice, at His return: "The hour is coming, and [also] now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". Our response to His word now is a mirror of our response to His word then. Hence the hour is yet future, and yet now is. 'The Son right now has the authority to execute judgment on the basis of response to His word. He will do this at the last day; and yet even as He spoke, He judged as He heard' [paraphrase of Jn. 5:27-30]. Because He *is* the Son of man, He even then had the power of judgment given to Him (Jn. 5:27). These present tenses would be meaningless unless the Lord was even then exercising His role as judge. When He says that He doesn't judge / condemn men (Jn. 3:17-21), surely He is saying that *He* won't so much judge men as they will judge themselves by their attitude to Him. His concentration was and is on saving men. The condemnation is that men loved darkness, and prefer the darkness of rejection to the light of Christ. Likewise Jn. 12:47,48: "If

any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to [so much as to] judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me... hath one that judgeth him: the word [his response to the word, supplying the ellipsis] that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

5:28 The Lord repeatedly tells the cynical and unbelieving Jews of His day *not* to marvel / wonder, but to *believe*. Perhaps we're intended to read in an ellipsis to these passages: '[Don't only] marvel / wonder [but *believe*]'. John later used the same phrase himself in 1 Jn. 3:13- he was so influenced by reflecting upon the words of the Lord Jesus that His words became John's words. Our language and thought processes should be likewise changed as we come to have Christ in us, and His spirit becomes ours.

5:30 Our will is not yet coincidental with God's; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer.

Am. 7:8 describes Israel's condemnation as a plumb line, a measurement and assessor, being applied to them. Here the figure of weighing up evidence is made to mean condemnation; so immediate is God's judgment. He needs no time to draw a conclusion; being outside of time, He can see a situation and make the judgment immediately, and implicit within the information gathering process. The Lord Jesus likewise judged as soon as He heard (Jn. 5:30). His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39).

5:34 "John bare witness unto the truth [i.e. the legitimacy of Jesus' claims]. But I receive not testimony from man [e.g. John]; *but these things I say, that ye might be saved...* I have greater witness than that of John... the works which the Father hath given me... bear witness... the Father himself... hath borne witness of me". I wish to stress the Lord's comment: "*But these things I say, that ye might be saved*". The Lord wanted men to accept His Father's witness; but He was prepared to let them accept John's human witness, and actually this lower level of perception by them, preferring to believe the words of a mere man, would still be allowed by the Lord to lead them to salvation.

The Lord said that He didn't receive witness from men; but, because He so wanted men to be saved, He directed them to the witness of John the Baptist (Jn. 5:33,34). This in essence is the same as the way in which some people believed the testimony of the Samaritan woman, but others said they only believed once they heard Jesus Himself, as they discounted the testimony of men / women (Jn. 4:42). And so in our day, the ideal witness is that of the Father and Son themselves directly through their word. And yet there are others who are persuaded not by that so much as by the testimony of others who have believed. This may be a lower level compared to the Lord's ideal position of not allowing the testimony of mere men; and yet He makes this concession, for the sake of His burning desire for human salvation

5:35 - see on Mt. 3:11.

John "was not the light" in the sense that he was not Jesus personally (Jn. 1:8 RV); but he was in another sense "a burning and shining light" (Jn. 5:35) in that he like us was "the light of the world" on account of his connection with Jesus. We too are to be the light of the world insofar as we are in Christ, who is the light of the world.

5:36- see on Jn. 4:34.

Each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do. There is fair emphasis on this: Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 22:12. Likewise, Christ came to do the works God gave Him to do (Jn. 5:36), and it seems He works with us on a similar basis.

“The work that the Father gave me to finish... testifies” (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when “it [was] finished” in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness of God was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God’s word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord’s blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.).

5:37-46 "The Father himself which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape (Gk. form, view). And ye have not his word abiding in you...I am come in my Father's Name, and ye receive me not... there is one that accuseth you, even Moses... for had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me" (John 5:37-46). Nearly all these statements were true of Moses, but untrue of the Jews. Yet there was one glaring contrast: Moses earnestly desired to see God's shape, to view Him, to completely understand Him. This was denied him- but not Jesus. The similarity and yet difference between Moses and Jesus is really brought out here. And again, Moses is shown to be representative of sinful Israel; as he lifted up the serpent, so they would lift up Christ; as he failed to see the Father's "shape", so they did too.

5:39 The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord’s encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life”. Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, ‘Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it’. We must see in that Man who had fingernails, hair, who needed to shave, who sneezed and blinked, the very Son of God; the Man who should dominate our thinking and being. And we must grasp the wonder of the fact that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew came the words of Almighty God. All that was true of natural Israel becomes a warning for us, Israel after the spirit. The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord’s encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life”. Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, ‘Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it’.

C.H. Dodd throughout chapter 3 of his classic *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* gives ample reason to believe his thesis that John's Gospel was written [partly] in order to deconstruct the popular teachings of Philo in the first century- and there are therefore many allusions to his writings. Thus John records how in vain the Jews searched the Scriptures, because in them they thought they had eternal life (Jn. 5:39)- when this is the very thing that Philo claimed to do. This approach helps us understand why, for example, the prologue to John is written in the way it is, full of allusion to Jewish ideas about the *logos*. How John writes is only confusing to us because we're not reading his inspired words against the immediate background in which they were written- which included the very popular false teachings of Philo about the *logos*. Thus Philo claimed that God had two sons, sent the younger into the world, and the elder, the *logos*, remained "by Him"- whereas John's prologue shows that the *logos* was an abstract idea, which *was* sent into the world in the form of God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus. See on Jn. 3:3.

The Lord was unlike any other Rabbi- He wasn't a verse-by-verse expositor of the Old Testament, neither did He like to argue case law. He told parables to exemplify and clarify His message- not in

order to explain an Old Testament verse, as the Rabbis tended to. He drew lessons from nature in a way the Rabbis simply couldn't do. Rabbi Jakob, a first century Rabbi, stated: "He who walks along the road repeating the Law and interrupts his repetition and says: How lovely this tree is! How lovely this field is! To him it will be reckoned as if he had misused his life" (The Mishnah, *Pirke Abot* 3.7b). By contrast, the Lord stopped and looked at the flowers of the field and drew His teaching from them. The Rabbinic way was to write and study endless *midrashim* on Bible verses, a kind of verse-by-verse exposition. The Lord's approach was more holistic and natural. The word 'Midrash' comes from 'darash', to search, and perhaps the Lord had this style of 'Bible study' in mind when He said: "Ye search [i.e. midrash] the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... [but] ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life" (Jn. 5:39). Neither the Lord nor myself are against careful Bible study. But the Lord was warning against the attitude that eternal life comes from midrashing the Scriptures, writing dry analytical commentary, labouring under the misapprehension that this somehow will give life. Eternal life comes from knowing the life of Jesus, for His nature and quality of life is the life that we will eternally live, by His grace.

They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. The Lord brought this out in Jn. 5:39, in saying that "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... and ye will not come to *me*, that ye may have life" (RV). Their Bible study did not lead them to Him. And is just as possible that we too can be Bible-centred and not Christ-centred. For to academically study a document and perceive its connections and intellectual purity does not require the living, transforming, demanding relationship which knowing Jesus does. See on Acts 13:27.

The Lord told the Jews to "search the scriptures" so that they would have the word of God and the love of God abiding in them (Jn. 5:38-42). They academically knew "the scriptures", but the voice of God, the presence of God, and the love of God this reveals, was simply hidden from them. They weren't *really* studying. But the Saviour also upbraided His very own men for their lack of true Biblical perception: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Lk. 24:25). Note that He did not upbraid them for not understanding His own clear prophecies concerning His passion; instead He rebukes them for not grasping the OT teaching about His death and resurrection. Yet if we try to prove from the OT alone that Messiah would die and resurrect, we are largely forced to reason from types. Even Isaiah 53 is only a prophecy of Christ insofar as Hezekiah (to whom it primarily refers) was a type of Christ. Stephen in Acts 7 resorts to typology to prove his points about the Messiahship of Jesus. The point is, the Lord expected those simple fishermen to have worked these things out, to have heard the voice of God in those OT types. And He upbraided them because they failed to do so.

There is in Jn. 5:39 what C.H. Dodd has called 'the parable of the apprentice': "A son...does only what he sees his father doing: what father does, son does; for a father loves his son and shows him all his trade". Now just imagine what that meant for the Lord Jesus, growing up with Joseph, who appeared to be His father, learning Joseph's trade. Yet He knew that His true Father was God, and He was eagerly learning *His* trade.

5:39,40 The Jews searched the scriptures, thinking that by their Bible study alone they would receive eternal life. But they never came to Christ that they might know the eternal life that is in Him (Jn. 5:39,40). They thought "eternal life" was in a book, a reward for correct intellectual discernment and exposition, rather than in the man Christ Jesus. And for all our Biblicism, we need to examine ourselves in this regard. For like Peter, we must be Christ-centred more than purely Bible-centred; we must see Him "in all the Scriptures", knowing that the whole word of God's revelation was made flesh in Him.

5:42 Understanding "the love of God" as the love we have for God opens up several passages. The Jews didn't have the love of God inside them (Jn. 5:42); but this doesn't mean God didn't love them.

They *are* beloved for the father's sakes; as a Father always loves His wayward son. But they didn't have love of God in their souls. Paul's prayer that God would direct hearts "into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5) surely means that He would influence their consciousness to be more filled with an upsurging love of God, rather than meaning that God would bring them into a position where He loved their hearts.

5:44 In Jn. 5:44, the RVmg. has the Lord telling the Jews that they sought glory "one of another" because they didn't seek the glory that comes from the one God. Because there is only one God, there is only one glory, one Name of God, one standard of spirituality, one judge, one justifier. Whilst men seek glory and approbation and acceptance and justification from other men, they are denying the principle of one God. If there is only one God, we should seek His honour and justification, to the *total* exclusion of that of men. Hosea had revealed this truth earlier: "I am the Lord thy God... and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me... neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee [i.e. thee alone] the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. 13:4; 14:3). Because God alone can give salvation and mercy, therefore there is no space for worshipping or seeking for the approbation of anything or anyone else; for the receipt of mercy and salvation are the only ultimate things worth seeking. There is only one God who can give them, and therefore we should seek for His acceptance alone.

6:5 It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise. See on Mk. 11:20.

6:7- see on Jn. 14:8.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:11 Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He

made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

6:14- see on Jn. 12:42.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes made men see the similarity between Christ and Moses, whom they perceived to have provided the manna (John 6:32). Therefore they thought that Jesus must be the prophet like Moses, of whom Moses wrote (John 6:14). But Jesus said that he was greater than Moses, because Moses' bread only gave them temporal life, whereas if a man ate of him, he would live for ever; his words would give spiritual life which was part of that "eternal life" of the Father (6:49,50). The Jews thought that the prophet like Moses of Dt.18:18 was a prophet equal or inferior to Moses. John's Gospel records how Christ was showing that the prophet would be greater than Moses. Martha understood that when she said that "the Christ... which should come into the world" (i.e. the prophet of Dt.18:18) was "the Son of God", and therefore Jesus of Nazareth (11:27).

6:15 Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough*

Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

6:21 John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee (Jn. 6:21). Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation, can we properly 'receive' Him?

6:24 Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, "but have removed [our] heart far from me" (Is. 29:13). Only those who call upon Him "in truth", with "unfeigned lips" will he heard (Ps. 145:18). Men repeatedly 'sought for' the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:37; Jn. 6:26), but He told them to *truly* seek Him (Mt. 6:33; 7:7; Lk.12:31). "Strive to enter in [now] at the strait gate: for many [at judgment day] will seek to enter in, and shall not be able"

(Lk. 13:24). Our attitude to seeking the Lord now will be the attitude we have then. The emotion and reality of the judgment experience will not essentially change our attitude to the Lord. If we have “boldness” in prayer now (Heb. 4:16), then we will have “boldness in the day of judgment”. How we feel to Him now is how we will then.

6:27 The food which the Lord provided was His body and life, given above all upon the cross. He urges His hearers to labour to possess this, because this is the food that will abide in / into [Gk. eis] the life eternal (Jn. 6:27- ‘endures unto’ is a poor translation). The essence of having and ‘eating’ of the Lord’s sacrifice now, is what eternal life is to be all about. No wonder He invited us to understand that we will repeat the breaking of bread service [which symbolizes this whole theme of eating of Him] in His future Kingdom. Absorbing Him, His sacrifice, the food which is Him, begins now... and in so doing, we are eating of the food / bread that will abide into the life eternal. He surely had in mind too the manna stored in the ark, which was eaten in the wilderness and yet abode / endured into Israel’s life in the promised land. And that bread, of course, was symbolic of Him; it is the “hidden manna” which His followers will eat in the future Kingdom (Rev. 2:17). Eph. 1:17,18 puts it another way, by paralleling "the knowledge of [Christ]" with "knowing what is the hope of his calling... the riches of the glory of his inheritance". The blessed hope of our calling is not simply a life of bliss in ideal conditions, but more specifically it is the hope of 'knowing Christ' as person eternally, in all the glorious fullness of that experience.

The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own.

6:28 The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. In typical style, He responded: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (Jn. 6:27). They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and “him hath God the Father sealed”, i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was “sealed” / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

6:30 When the people asked: “What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee?” (Jn. 6:30), the Lord could have spoken words similar to Heb. 11:1 to them- He could have corrected them by saying that actually, faith is not related to what you can see. You cannot “see and believe” in the true sense of belief. But the Lord doesn’t do that. He says that He in front of them is the bread of God, miraculously given. And their critical tone changes: “Lord, evermore give us this bread!”

(:34). This surely is our pattern- not to necessarily correct every error when we see it, but to pick up something the other person has said and develop it, to bring them towards truth.

6:31 The living word of God which speaks to us each personally. In this sense, we are constantly being invited to place ourselves in the position of those who played a part in the historical incidents which that word records. The Jews quoted to the Lord Jesus: “He gave *them* bread from heaven to eat”, to which the Lord replied [after the teaching style of the rabbis to which they were accustomed] by changing and challenging a word in the quotation they made: “It is not Moses who gave *you* the bread”. He wanted them to see that the account of bread being given to Israel in the wilderness was not just dry history. *They*, right there and then, were as it were receiving that same bread from Heaven. See on Mt. 22:31; Heb. 11:4.

“I came down from Heaven” (Jn. 6:33,38)

“The bread of God is he which comes down from heaven, and gives life unto the world... I came down from heaven” (Jn. 6:33,38).

These words, and others like them, are misused to support the wrong idea that Jesus existed in Heaven before his birth. The following points, however, must be noted.

1. Trinitarians take these words as literal in order to prove their point. However, if we are to take them literally, then this means that somehow Jesus literally came down as a person. Not only is the Bible totally silent about this, but the language of Jesus being conceived as a baby in Mary’s womb is made meaningless. Jn.6:60 describes the teaching about the manna as a saying “hard to take in” (Moffatt’s Translation); i.e. we need to understand that it is figurative language being used.
2. In Jn. 6, Jesus is explaining how the manna was a type of himself. The manna was sent from God in the sense that it was God who was responsible for creating it on the earth; it did not physically float down from the throne of God in Heaven. Thus Christ’s coming from Heaven is to be understood likewise; he was created on earth, by the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary (Lk.1:35).
3. Jesus says that “the bread that I will give is my flesh” (Jn.6:51). Trinitarians claim that it was the ‘God’ part of Jesus which came down from Heaven. But Jesus says that it was his “flesh” which was the bread which came down from Heaven. Likewise Jesus associates the bread from Heaven with himself as the “Son of man” (Jn. 6:62), not ‘God the Son’.
4. In this same passage in Jn. 6 there is abundant evidence that Jesus was not equal to God. “The living Father has sent me” (Jn. 6:57) shows that Jesus and God do not share co-equality; and the fact that “I live by the Father” (Jn. 6:57) is hardly the ‘co-eternity’ of which Trinitarians speak.
5. It must be asked, When and how did Jesus ‘come down’ from Heaven? Trinitarians use these verses in Jn. 6 to ‘prove’ that Jesus came down from Heaven at his birth. But Jesus speaks of himself as “he which cometh down from heaven” (v.33,50), as if it is an ongoing process. Speaking of God’s gift of Jesus, Christ said “My Father is giving you the bread” from Heaven (v.32 Weymouth). At the time Jesus was speaking these words, he had already ‘come down’ in a certain sense, in that he had been sent by God. Because of this, he could also speak in the past tense: “I am the living bread which came down from Heaven” (v.51). But he also speaks about ‘coming down’ as the bread from Heaven in the form of his death on the cross: “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (v.51). So we have Jesus speaking here of having already come down from Heaven, being in the process of ‘coming down’, and still having to ‘come down’ in his death on the cross. This fact alone should prove that ‘coming down’ refers to God manifesting Himself, rather than only referring to Christ’s birth. This is conclusively proved by all the Old Testament references to God ‘coming down’ having just this same meaning. Thus God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, and ‘came down’ to save them through Moses. He has seen our bondage to sin, and has ‘come down’ or manifested Himself, by sending Jesus as the equivalent to Moses to lead us out of bondage.

The Lord Jesus was "the beginning of God's creation" (Rev. 3:15)- He was a created being and as such in whatever form He 'came down from Heaven', He was still not God Himself. Hugh Schonfield comments: "Clearly John himself believed that the heavenly Christ was a created being, as did the early Christians" (1).

A Devotional Appeal

The Lord's language of coming down from Heaven can be understood from a very powerful devotional aspect. He reasons that because He had *come* down from Heaven, therefore, whoever *comes* to Him, He would never reject (Jn. 6:37,38). The connection is in the word "come". We 'come' to Jesus not by physically travelling towards Him, but in our mental attitudes. He likewise 'comes' to us, not by moving trillions of kilometers from Heaven to earth, but in His 'coming' down into our lives and experiences. If He has come so very far to meet us, and we come to Him... then surely we will meet and He will not turn away from us, exactly because He has 'come' so far to meet us. This theme continues throughout John's Gospel. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62) is therefore not a reference to Him physically travelling off anywhere- He is saying that if people would not 'come' to Him in meeting, then He would withdraw the opportunity from them. He wouldn't stand waiting for them indefinitely. This explains the urgency behind His appeals to 'come' to Him. He had 'come down', and was waiting for people to 'come' to Him. He's come a huge distance, from the heavenly heights of His own spirituality, to meet with whores and gamblers, hobby level religionists, self-absorbed little people... and if we truly come to Him, if we want to meet with Him, then of course He will never turn us away. For it was to meet with us that He 'came down'. This approach shows the fallacy of interpreting His 'coming down' to us and our 'coming' to Him in a literal sense.

And yet this Lord of all grace also sought to confirm men and women in the path they chose. He admitted that His comment about Himself being the manna which descended from Heaven was a "hard saying". And yet He goes straight on to say [perhaps with a slight smile playing at the corner of His lips] something even more enigmatic: "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62). Surely He is here choosing to give them yet another, even harder "saying"; and goes on to stress that His sayings, His words, are the way to life eternal (Jn. 6:63). For those who didn't want His words, He was confirming them in their darkness. And He did this by the mechanism of using an evidently "hard saying". Therefore to simplistically interpret the saying as meaning that the Lord had literally descended from Heaven through the sky just as literally as He would ascend there through the clouds... is in fact to quite miss the point- that this is a "hard saying". It's not intended to have a simplistic, literalistic interpretation.

Notes

(1) Hugh Schonfield, *The Original New Testament: Revelation* (London: Firethorn Press, 1985) footnote on Rev. 3:15.

6:33 "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven", i.e. our Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:33). Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming. The sacrificial animals are spoken of as "the bread of thy God" (Lev. 21:6,8,21; 22:25; Ez. 44:7 etc.), pointing forward to Christ. In addition to alluding to the manna, Christ must have been consciously making this connection when He spoke about himself as the bread of God. The only time "the bread of God" could be eaten by the Israelite was at the peace offering. When in this context Christ invites us to eat the bread of God, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn. 6:51,52), He is looking back to the peace offering. But this is also an evident prophecy of the breaking of bread service. Many of the Jews just could not cope with what Christ was offering them when He said this. They turned back, physically and intellectually. They just could not grapple with the idea that Christ was that peace offering sacrifice, and He was inviting

them to sit down with God, as it were, and in fellowship with the Almighty, partake of the sacrificed body of His Son. But this is just what Christ is inviting each of us to do in the memorial meeting, to sit down in fellowship with Him, and eat of His bread. God really is here with us now. He is intensely watching us. He is intensely with us, He really is going to save us, if only we can have the faith to believe how much He loves us, how much He wants us to share His fellowship and know His presence.

Life was given to the world not only in the sense of eternal life. A way of life was shown to us, the only way of life- the life of the cross. It is a frequently found paradox in Scripture that life comes through death. The Lord's cross and resurrection are the prime example. However, it is not simply that His death opened the way to eternal life for us at His coming. It gives us spiritual life now, in that all that we do in our being and living should be motivated by the spirit of the cross. Each of the myriad daily decisions we take should be impacted by our knowledge of the cross. In this way, the cross gives life right now.

6:35 Several times the Lord stresses His personal identification with the manna / bread. But this was His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world. The cross epitomised the man Jesus. Thus He could take the bread and deftly insist: "This is my body". There and then, He was to be identified with the slain body that hung upon the cross. In death, in life, this was and is and will be Him.

He that cometh to me shall never hunger A reference to men and women 'coming to' the cross to behold "that sight" of the cross, just as men came to the lifted up snake.

and he that believeth on me shall never thirst Only in a personal appropriation of the cross to ourselves can we find an inspiration that is utterly endless. No wonder the Lord insists we remember His cross at least weekly in the breaking of bread.

He challenged us that if we truly eat His words, we'll never hunger or thirst (Jn. 6:35); but 30 years or so later, He said that in the Kingdom, He will stop us hungering and thirsting (Rev. 7:16,17). He realizes that although we have it within our potential to live this kind of fulfilled spiritual life, in practice we will only get there in the Kingdom.

The juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His exaltation is found all through Bible teaching about His death. It's been observed that the 'I am' sayings of Jesus, with their obvious allusion to the Divine Name, are in fact all found in contexts which speak of the subordination of Jesus to God. He was 'lifted up' in crucifixion and shame; and yet 'lifted up' in 'glory' in God's eyes through that act.

6:37- see on Mk. 6:36.

The parable of the fig tree appears to show the Lord Jesus as more gracious and patient than His Father- the owner of the vineyard (God) tells the dresser (Jesus) to cut it down, but the dresser asks for another year's grace to be shown to the miserable fig tree, and then, he says, the owner [God] Himself would have to cut it down (Lk. 13:7-9). But in Jn. 6:37-39 we seem to have the Lord's recognition that the Father was more gracious to some than He would naturally be; for He says that He Himself will not cast any out, exactly because it was the Father's will that He should lose nothing but achieve a resurrection to life eternal for all given to Him. And the Lord observed, both here and elsewhere, that He was not going to do His own will, but rather the will of the Father. Now this is exactly the sort of thing we would expect in a truly dynamic relationship- on some points the Father is more generous than the Son, and in other cases- vice versa. And yet Father and Son were, are and will be joined together in the same judgment and will, despite Father and Son having differing wills from one viewpoint. But this is the result of process, of differing perspectives coming together, of a mutuality we can scarcely enter into comprehending, of some sort of learning together, of a Son struggling to do the will of a superior Father rather than His own will, of conclusions jointly reached through experience, time and process- rather than an automatic, robot-like imposition of the Father's will and judgment upon the Son. And the awesome thing is, that the

Lord invites us to know the Father, in the same way as He knows the Father. His relationship with the Father is a pattern for ours too.

6:38 He accomplished the will of God on the cross (see on Jn. 4:32-34). On the cross He came down from Heaven, there He manifested Yahweh in the greatest theophany of all time. The darkness over Him is to be read in the context of the OT theophanies which involved darkness.

6:39- see on Jn. 3:13.

6:40 The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake. God's will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine. The comment that "Every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him [shall] have eternal life" (Jn. 6:40) is another allusion to the serpent lifted up on the pole, where everyone who "looked upon the serpent of brass... lived" (Num. 21:9).

6:41 Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

6:44. See on Jn. 6:40- the drawing power is surely in the cross itself. There was and is a magnetism about Him there.

The Lord Jesus often stressed that He was the only way to the Father; that only through knowing and seeing / perceiving Him can men come to know God. And yet in Jn. 6:45 He puts it the other way around: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". And He says that only the Father can bring men to the Son (Jn. 6:44). Yet it is equally true that only the Son of God can lead men to God the Father. In this we see something exquisitely beautiful about these two persons, if I may use that word about the Father and Son. The more we know the Son, the more we come to know the Father; and the more we know the Father, the more we know the Son. This is how close they are to each other. And yet they are quite evidently distinctly different persons. But like any father and son, getting to know one leads us to know more of the other, which in turn reveals yet more to us about the other, which leads to more insight again into the other... and so the wondrous spiral of knowing the Father and Son continues. If Father and Son were one and the same person, the surpassing beauty of this is lost and spoilt and becomes impossible. The experience of any true Christian, one who has come to 'see' and know the Father and Son, will bear out this truth. Which is why correct understanding about their nature and relationship is vital to knowing them. The wonder of it all is that the Son didn't automatically reflect the Father to us, as if He were just a piece of theological machinery; He made a supreme effort to do so, culminating in the cross. He explains that He didn't do *His* will, but that of the Father; He didn't do the works *He*

wanted to do, but those which the Father wanted. He had many things to say and judge of the Jewish world, He could have given them 'a piece of His mind', but instead He commented: "*But... I speak to the world those things which I have heard of [the Father]*" (Jn. 8:26). I submit that this sort of language is impossible to adequately understand within the trinitarian paradigm. Yet the wonder of it all goes yet further. The Father is spoken of as 'getting to know' [note aorist tense] the Son, as the Son gets to know the Father; and the same verb form is used about the Good Shepherd 'getting to know' us His sheep. This wonderful, dynamic family relationship is what "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", true walking and living with the Father and Son, is all about. It is into this family and wonderful nexus of relationships that trinitarians apparently choose not to enter.

6:45- see on Mt. 12:18.

We are taught of God by the display of His very essence which we see in the cross. We have emphasised the degree of 'seeing God' which is possible through the cross in notes on Jn. 6:40.

6:46 We see God in the crucified Christ, just as Moses saw God in the glory which was announced before him. And we have shown that John saw this as a prototype, in essence, of the crucifixion.

6:50 The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life. He could take the bread and say that "this *is* my body which *is being given* [Gk.] for you"; He saw His sacrifice as already ongoing even before He left the upper room. The cross therefore manifested the real Christ.

As the manna was regularly eaten of, so the Lord's cross should be our daily inspiration and food. We must ask whether we personally and collectively have appreciated this. We obtain eternal life from the cross in the sense that we see there the definition of the true life; the life of crucifying self, slowly and painfully, for others; of enduring injustice and lack of appreciation to the very end, of holding on in the life of forgiveness and care for others in the face of their bitterest rejection... we see there the life we must lead, indeed the only true life. For all else is ultimately only death. And it is "eternal" in its quality more than in its length, in that this is the type of life which will be lived eternally in the Kingdom. It is in this sense that John later comments that eternal life is "in" Christ (1 Jn. 5:11,20 cp. 3:14,15).

6:51 John's Gospel points out how the Lord often changed tenses so strangely- to the extent that many have concluded that some of the strange combinations of tenses are a result of John's later editing. But it could be that the Lord used past, present and future tenses in close proximity in order to show His manifestation of the Name. He is the bread which was, is and will be on the cross. He came, is coming down, and will come (Jn. 6:50,51). The hour was coming and yet "now is" (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:31,32). These mixing of tenses must have seemed strange to the hearers, and they read strangely in the tense-conscious Greek language. About 50 times in John's Gospel we read the phrase "I am" as having been on the lips of Jesus. And it gets more and more frequent as He nears the cross, as if He was aware of an ongoing manifestation of the Name which reached its climax there.

The Lord taught the crowds to focus more on the gift of Him as a person and His sacrifice, than on the literal achievement of the Kingdom there and then. The Jews understood the coming of manna to be a sign that the Messianic Kingdom had come. Their writings are full of this idea:

- "You shall not find manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming" (Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 16:25)

- "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend" (Midrash Rabbah on Ecc. 1:9)

- "[The manna] has been prepared for...the age to come" (Midrash Tanhuma, *Beshallah* 21:66).

Yet the Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord's equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than eternity here and now...all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day.

There are evident parallels between Paul's account of the breaking of bread, and the Lord's words about the giving of His body. There is no record of the great preaching commission in John, but he does in fact record it in more spiritual and indirect ways. And likewise there is no account of the breaking of bread, but in fact he has already recorded the essence of it in the discourse about the bread and wine of life in Jn. 6:

Jn. 6:51	1 Cor. 11:24
The bread which I will give	This
Is my flesh	Is my body
For the life of the world	Which is for you

Note in passing how 'we' are 'the world' to Jesus. And He likewise should be our world, as we are to Him. The word of interpretation which Jesus spoke over the emblems was a reflection of the way the head of the family explained the meaning of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread to the participants during the Passover meal. But before His death, during His life, the Lord Jesus as it were proclaimed this word of interpretation over His own body. The conclusion is clearly that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. This explains why so much stress is made upon His "blood" saving us, when crucifixion was in fact a relatively bloodless death. It wasn't as if the Lord was killed by His blood being poured out. But it was the life which the blood represented which was the essential basis of our redemption. And that life was lived out over 33 years, not just in the 6 hours of crucifixion. All this means that the spirit of the cross must be lived out in daily life; not merely in occasional acts of heroism, nor only in occasional acts of commitment or religious duty, such as attending ecclesial meetings. The cross was and is a life lived.

The link between the Lord's death and the true word / voice of God is made in Jn. 6:51 cp. 63: the words of the Lord give life, whereas also His flesh "which I will give for the life of the world" on the cross would also be the source of life. The giving of His flesh was in essence His word to man; the word made flesh. This phrase, we have suggested elsewhere, also refers to the Lord's death rather than His birth. See on Heb. 12:25.

The Lord died so that the world may have life (Jn. 6:51); but only those who eat His words and assimilate the true meaning of His cross will share this life; therefore "the world" refers to all who would believe. It is for them (us, by His grace), not even for those who respond but ultimately fall away, that the Lord gave His all. We are "the world" to Him. Let's not dilute the specialness of His love and the wonder of our calling to these things. We ought to be deeply, deeply moved by the fact that we have been called into God's world, into His sphere of vision. He even created the different types of meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3); they were made for us, not the world, and therefore we ought to give thanks for our food with this realization.

6:53 There is nothing else of meaning in human experience. His life, as shown in His death, is the only true and lasting sustenance for the believer.

6:54 There is evident reference here to the breaking of bread. In our absorption of the bread and wine into our bodies, we symbolise our desire to appropriate His life and death into the very fabric of our lives. It is a symbol of our total commitment to living life as He did, and as it was epitomised in His time of dying. The breaking of bread is therefore not something which can be separated from the rest of our lives; it is a physical statement of how our whole lives are devoted to assimilating the spirit of this Man.

6:56 One of the common Aramaic Passover sayings at the time of Jesus was: "Behold this is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers, let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover". The Passover Haggadah of today includes virtually the same words. Now it is evident that Jesus several times in the course of His life alluded to these words. He spoke of how all who were hungry, who were heavy burdened, should "come" unto Him. And the bread which He gave would constantly satisfy. The conclusion surely is that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. He lived out the essence of the cross in His life.

6:60 There's something in our nature which shies away from the true Gospel because it's too good to believe. Paul had this struggle with the Jews, both in and outside of the church. They heard the offer of life from the Lord Himself, and rejected it: "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" (Jn. 6:60). It was just too good to believe. There is something in our natures which is diametrically opposed to the concept of *pure* grace. We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. See on Mt. 8:34.

John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

6:63 The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it. Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord stated that when He had been lifted up on the cross, *then* the Jews would realize the truth and integrity of the words that He had spoken (Jn. 8:28). Again, the cross is presented as a confirmation of all the words / verbal teaching of the Lord.

"Bread" or manna was a phrase the Rabbis commonly applied to the Torah- e.g. they interpreted Prov. 9:5 ("Come, eat ye of my bread") as referring to the Law. And the Lord was clearly playing on and extending this idea in John 6. The Lord taught that in the same way as Moses gave Israel manna, so He was giving them Himself, and His word. He defines the meaning of the manna in Jn. 6:63 as His words. He is inviting us to eat Him in the sense of His words; He is the word of God. Remember how Jeremiah says that he found God's word and ate it, God's word was unto him the joy

and rejoicing of his heart. Think too of the words of Job in 23:12, speaking as a type of Christ on this occasion: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food". We tend to think that as we eat physically, so we should eat spiritually. The point is often made amongst us that as we always find time to eat physically, so we should to eat God's word. But this is not quite what Job is saying. He says that we should relate to our spiritual food even *more* importantly than to our natural need for food. It's second nature for us to eat regularly, every day; we don't have to schedule time to eat, it flows naturally into our daily organization of life.

There are a number of similarities between the record of the gathering of the manna and that of the Passover. They could seethe the manna, as the Paschal lamb could be seethed. They were to gather the manna according to the size of their families, and the collection was to be organized by the head of the house. This is all the language of the Passover. The lamb represented Jesus, and so did the manna. The saving work of the lamb of God is further mediated to us through the medium of His word. In John 6 the Lord says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life; and He says the same about eating His words (v.63). So often the Lord says that we have got eternal life, here and now. He keeps on saying it in John 6.

6:64- see on Jud. 16:13; Jn. 13:11.

The impression of a close spiritual relationship and subsequent shock on appreciating that Judas was a traitor that we see expressed in the psalms is hard to reconcile with our Lord knowing Judas' motives from the beginning. Jesus knew from the beginning that some would betray him: "There are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto me of my Father" (Jn. 6:64,65). Our Lord knew that not all were called by God to be able to come to Him- He knew who would not believe. And yet He suppressed this knowledge in his love and hope for Judas- just as it could be that God limits His omnipotence and omniscience in His dealings with us [hence His sense of hurt, shock and genuine disappointment with human behaviour]. If this passage does imply Christ's knowledge of Judas' intentions (as Jn. 6:70 seems to), these words were spoken in the final year of the Lord's ministry, when Christ's sensitive spirit would have noticed the tell tale signs in Judas. [Or is "He spake of Judas... that should betray him" (Jn. 6:70) a comment added by John, which would mean that Jesus was not necessarily thinking of Judas when he said "One of you is a devil"?].

6:68 Peter was one of the few who really grasped the meaning of the Lord's miraculous provision of bread, and the discourse which followed. The Lord had said that He was the living bread, of which a man could eat and live forever. Peter's comment that only the Lord had the words of eternal life showed that he quite appreciated that it was the *words* of the Lord Jesus which were the essential thing, not the physicality of the miracle (fascinating as it must have been to a fisherman; Jn. 6:51 cp. 68).

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Again we have the same words, 'quicken' and 'his spirit'. And Paul says that our resurrection will have some similarities with that of our Lord- who was "put to death in the flesh but quickened by [on account of] the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). It was according to the spirit of holiness, of a holy life, that Jesus was raised and given eternal life (Rom. 1:4). What all this means in practice is that if we live a 'quicken' spiritual life now, a life modelled around what Jesus would have done or said in any given situation, then we have the guarantee that we will be 'quicken' in the Kingdom. Thus

Rom. 8:2 speaks of “the law of the spirit of life in Christ”. Having “the spirit” in our hearts is therefore the seal, the guarantee, of our future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

6:69- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

6:70- see on Jn. 6:64; 8:44.

7:3 Both his family and the men of Israel generally rejected David's claims to be able to save Israel (1 Sam.17:28-30). Eliab's "Why camest thou down hither?" matches Christ's brothers telling him "depart hence" (Jn.7:3).

7:4 “If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world” (Jn. 7:4) connects with the other references in John to the Lord ‘hiding himself’ (Jn. 8:59; 12:36). The Jews thought that as Moses hid himself and then re-emerged from obscurity, so Messiah would. Rabbi Berekiah said: “As the first deliverer [Moses] was revealed, then hidden and afterwards appeared again, so will it also be with the last deliverer [Messiah]”. John’s record is clearly presenting the Lord as Moses in this sense.

Just as the Lord's synagogue-influenced brothers wanted Him to show Himself openly to the world (Jn. 7:4), so did the disciples (Jn. 14:22). There was that hankering for Him to openly display Himself as the Messiah which Judaism had created within its own mind.

In collective societies, where life was totally lived in the public realm and anything done 'in private' is seen as deviant (cp. Jn. 7:4; 18:20), shame was related to how *others* saw you, not your internal reflections and assessment of your guilt or innocence for things like private thoughts and unknown deeds. And there's every reason to think that the global village of the 21st century is an equally conscience-less place, where so long as you talk in niceness and don't get caught actually *doing* anything society thinks is wrong, you can exist with no internal, personal conscience at all. Indeed, the word "conscience" originated from words which literally mean 'common / with others / knowledge'- conscience was collective, whereas the Biblical understanding of it is more on a personal level.

7:6 Joseph held no grudge against his brethren, and would not be vindictive to them, because he understood something of predestination: “You *meant* evil against me; but God *meant* it for good” (Gen. 50:20). And because he understood that God’s good intentions were worked out through the evil intentions of others, Joseph was content to leave all in God’s hands, and on *this basis* he assures his brothers that given his understanding of this ‘predestination’, he wouldn’t hit back at them for what they’d done to him. The Lord spoke of the coming of His ‘hour’ of death as if it were somehow predestined of the Father. But His appreciation of this didn’t lead to a mere fatalism, but rather to a heightened sense of the importance of obedience, of playing His part in the Father’s drama to the best of His ability (Jn. 7:6,8; 12:23,27). Joab likewise, when facing a battle against a hugely superior army, commented: “Let the Lord do that which is good in his sight” (1 Chron. 19:13)- but this bred not fatalism but rather a zealous attempt to fight for the Lord, which God blessed with victory.

7:17- see on Jn. 8:43.

7:18 This is the language of Jn. 17 concerning the Lord’s upcoming death. The cross was and is the declaration of God’s glory, the ultimate truth of life. Men sought to kill Him because He was the truth (8:40). In the cross the Lord spoke not of Himself, but only of His Father’s glory. The perfection and Divinity that exuded from Him eclipsed the humanity of the man from Nazareth, the carpenter’s son, the man who spoke through the larynx of a Palestinian Jew.

If we seek God's glory (John 7:18)-i.e. the development of His attributes in us- He will seek ours (John 8:50), and our glory is His glory. The word for 'seek' used here can imply 'worship'- we must worship this concept of giving glory to God in our lives. God's glory is His essential self (Jn.17:5),

yet He is willing to give us His glory. He will not give His glory to anyone apart from His people (Is.48:11). What higher honours can be revealed to us?

In the Lord Himself we see the supreme example of a mutual experience with the Father. He sought God's glory (Jn. 7:18), as the Father sought His (Jn. 8:50).

Fear of false teachers, even paranoia about them, is what has led to so much division in practice. The Lord Jesus tackled the issue of whether a person is a true or a false teacher. He didn't make the division so much on the *content* of their teaching, as we usually do, but rather says that the true teacher is motivated by seeking the Father's glory, whereas the false teacher seeks only his own glory (Jn. 7:18). Yet it is the endless fear of 'false teachers' in terms of the *content* of their teaching which has led to so much division- and often the process of it seems to have led to self-glorifying individuals establishing their own followings.

7:24 As recipients of God's grace through the experience of His way of working with us reflecting His character, we too must reflect those same characteristics to others. This is why we *must* judge- for in doing so, we have the opportunity to reflect God's character. We must judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24) in reflection of that of "the Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8). David was almost eager to replicate the principles of God's judgments in how he judged issues (Ps. 75:10 cp. 7; 75:7 cp. 2). And therefore Asaph poses the question to Israel's judges: 'Because God judges justly, why don't you?' (Ps. 82:1-3). As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the... fatherless and widow" (Dt. 27:79) because "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). Israel were to reflect God's judgments in their judgments.

7:27 If He were really like us, then this demands an awful lot of us. It rids us of so many excuses for our unspirituality. And this, I'm bold enough to say, is likely the psychological reason for the growth of the Jesus=God ideology, and the 'trinity' concept. The idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus likewise arose out of the same psychological bind. The Jews wanted a Messiah whose origins they wouldn't know (Jn. 7:27), some inaccessible heavenly figure, of which their writings frequently speak- and when faced with the very human Jesus, whose mother and brothers they knew, they couldn't cope with it. I suggest those Jews had the same basic mindset as those who believe in a personal pre-existence of the Lord. The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God. As John Knox concluded: "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both". His person and example aren't so much of an imperative to us, because He was God and not man. But if this perfect man was indeed one of us, a man amongst men, with our very same flesh, blood, sperm and plasm... we start to feel uncomfortable. It's perhaps why so many of us find prolonged contemplation of His crucifixion- where He was at His most naked and most human- something we find distinctly uncomfortable, and impossible to deeply sustain for long. But only if we properly have in balance the awesome reality of Christ's humanity, can we understand how one man's death 2,000 years ago can radically alter our lives today. We make excuses for ourselves: our parents were imperfect, society around us is so sinful. But the Lord Jesus was perfect- and dear Mary did her best, but all the same failed to give Him a perfect upbringing; she wasn't a perfect mother; and He didn't live in a perfect environment. And yet, He was perfect. And bids us quit our excuses and follow Him. According to the Talmud, Mary was a hairdresser [*Shabbath* 104b], whose husband left her with the children because he thought she'd had an affair with a Roman soldier. True or not, she was all the same an ordinary woman, living a poor life in a tough time in a backward land. And the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God and Son of Man... was, let's say, the son of a divorcee hairdresser from a dirt poor, peripheral village, got a job working construction when He was still a teenager. There's a wonder in

all this. And an endless challenge. For none of us can now blame our lack of spiritual endeavour upon a tough background, family dysfunction, hard times, bad environment. We can rise above it, because in Him we are a new creation, the old has passed away, and in Him, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Precisely because He blazed the trail, blazed it out of all the limitations which normal human life appears to impress upon us, undeflected and undefeated by whatever distractions both His and our humanity placed in His path. And He's given us the power to follow Him.

7:28 The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

7:33 The disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world".

The Lord Jesus has to say the same words to the Jews as He does to the disciples:

Phrase	To the Jews	To the disciples
"I am to be with you only a little longer"	Jn. 7:33	Jn. 13:33
"You will look for me"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33
"Where I am going, you cannot come"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33

Greek (unlike Hebrew) uses tenses in a very precise way. There are some real problems in understanding exactly why the Lord changes tenses so often, e.g. in Jn. 7:33,34: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am [we would expect: 'Where I will go / be'], thither ye cannot [not 'will not be able to'] come". He saw Himself as both with the Father, already glorified, and yet also still in mortal life. Another example is in the way He speaks of how the faithful *are* equal to the Angels, *being* the children of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36- in the context of explaining how 'all live' unto God)- we

would rather expect Him to speak of how the faithful *will be* equal to Angels, *will be* resurrected etc. But He pointedly speaks in the present tense.

7:34 "Where I am, thither ye cannot come" (John 7:34) sounds like Moses ascending the Mount, leaving Israel behind him. Yet "Where I am" refers to Christ's unity with God; the heights of his relationship with God connect with the physical ascension of Moses into the mount to hear God's words. "I will that they also... be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (17:24) alludes to the 70 elders sharing Moses' experience in the Mount (Ex.24:70); it is as if Christ is saying that his disciples really can enter into his relationship with God, we can be where he was spiritually in his mortal life.

7:34 His going unto the Father was how He understood going to the cross (13:1,3 make the connection clear). Later, the Jews would recollect Golgotha's scene and seek Him, but not find Him. There was a time for them to accept the cross, but there would come a time when they would not be able to accept it. This surely cannot refer to their mortal lives; for whoever comes to the Son, He will in no wise cast out. So it presumably means that at the judgment, as they wallow in the wretchedness of their condemnation, they will recall the cross and wish desperately to appropriate that salvation for themselves. They will seek Him, but be unable then to find Him.

and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

We expect: 'Where I *will be*...'. But He was in principle already with the Father, the cross was ongoing, and He had already reached and was living the spirit of the cross.

John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come". He then went on to foretell how that out of His pierced side there would come the water of the Spirit. "Where I am" is parallel with "I am going...". The cross was ongoing in His life. Note in passing that He saw the cross as a going to the Father. There the Father was especially manifested.

7:38- see on Jn. 1:14.

The enigmatic Jn. 7:38 must be read in the context of preaching to others: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the Millennium, rivers of spring water will come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom, aided then by the Spirit gifts. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special efforts (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities to these committees. There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Ezekiel's prophesied of the river of water of life (representing the Gospel) going out from Jerusalem, with the result that wherever it went, a forest of healthy trees sprung up, and healing was brought to the nations. This shows how the physical blessings of the Kingdom will only be given in relation to peoples' response to the Gospel. "Everything shall live whither the river cometh", both naturally and spiritually (Ez.47:9). It is to this verse which Jesus alluded in Jn.7:38: "As the Scripture hath said (in Ezekiel), he that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water". Through our preaching with the Spirit, we will be this river of living water. However "that which shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt" (Ez.47:11 A.V.mg.) shows that some will

refuse our preaching. Salt is used in Scripture as a figure of God's judgment and a place which is uninhabited (Dt.29:23; Jud.9:45; Jer.17:6). This means that in the Millennium, there will be some places which are "salt" due to their rejection of our Gospel. Again, we see reason to believe that the *whole* earth will not necessarily have the conditions of the Kingdom which we are familiar with.

Living water was to come out of the smitten rock. When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. He paralleled His 'smiting' on the cross with His glorification (Jn. 7:38). And He elsewhere seems to link 'glory' with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19). The Hebrew idea of 'glory' means that which is lifted up; and thus His references to His death as a lifting up suggested that He saw His death as His glory. And we with Isaiah and with John and the Lord Himself should find in the glory and terror of the cross the vision which will endlessly inspire our ministry. Ps. 96:10 in some LXX versions reads: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigned from the tree". What would have looked like the utter, pathetic humiliation of the Man from Nazareth was in fact His glorification, His moment of triumph and victory; just as the pathetic death of a poor saint may be their glorious triumph over their mortality. And He there was and is our King. And this has implications for us; we were constituted a people over whom God reigns by the cross (Rev. 1:5 Gk.). Because of His utter victory there, He becomes our all controlling Lord, King and Master. We are no longer free to do what we want. This is why baptism into His death is an acceptance of His Lordship, of His will being the command of our lives.

7:39- see on Jn. 12:24,28.

Because it is the same Spirit working through various specific manifestations, to some degree the Spirit and Holy Spirit (the one Spirit used for a special purpose) are interchangeable. It should be noted that any distinction between Spirit and Holy Spirit is largely a New Testament one; if the difference was that fundamental, one would expect to see it in the Old Testament too. Thus: "This spake he of the Spirit, which they... *should* receive: for the Holy Spirit was not *yet* given" (Jn.7:39) parallels the Spirit and the Holy Spirit- once the emphasis upon the word "yet" is appreciated. "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor.3:16) is matched later in the same epistle by "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you" (1 Cor.6:19). See on Rom. 8:26.

7:40 "The prophet" (Jn. 7:40,52 RV) is clearly a reference to "the prophet" like Moses, i.e. Messiah. There are many other allusions by John's record to the Dt. 18:18 passage: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him". References to the Son only speaking what the Father commanded Him are to be found in Jn. 4:25; 8:28; 12:49.

7:42 There are very few direct statements from Jesus about Himself- e.g. He never actually says He had a virgin birth, nor does He explain that He was born in Bethlehem as required by Micah 5:2. He left people assuming He was born in Nazareth (Jn. 7:42). In fact it could be that without this struggle for understanding going on within the heart of each of us, there is no other way for us to come to real relationship with Jesus. Without that effort to understand we'd be left with a fictional Jesus, a 'Jesus' we inherited from men, from churches, from theologians, from our own unexamined assumptions... and not the real Christ.

7:52- see on Jn. 1:46.

8:1,2 "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives... he came again into the temple, and all the people (i.e. the leaders and the crowd, see context) came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them" (John 8:1,2). This is framed to recall Moses coming down from Sinai: "The Lord came (down) from Sinai (manifest in Moses)... yea, he (God) loved the people (in the fact that) all his saints (Israel) are in thy (Moses') hand (as we are in the hand of Christ, Jn. 10:28-30): and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words... the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel (i.e. both leaders and ordinary people) were gathered together (to Moses)" (Dt. 33:2-5).

8:8 He was tempted just as we are- and temptation surely involves feeling the pull of evil, and having part of you that feels it to be more attractive than the good. The record of Jn. 8:8 seems to imply that it was the way Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust which convicted the accusers of the adulteress in their consciences. As He kept on writing, they one by one walked away. It's been speculated that He was writing their deeds or names there, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy of how the names of the wicked would be written in the dust. But I'm not so sure they'd have just let Him do that with no further recorded comment. My suggestion is that He stooped down and looked at the ground out of simple male embarrassment, but His 'writing' in the dust was simply Him doodling. If this is so, then there would have been an artless mix of His Divinity, His utter personal moral perfection, and His utter humanity. Embarrassed in front of a naked woman, crouching down on His haunches, doodling in the dust... that, it seems to me, would've been the ultimate conviction of sin for those who watched. It would've been surpassingly beautiful and yet so challenging at the same time. And it is that same mixture of utter humanity and profound, Divine perfection within the person of Jesus which, it seems to me, is what convicts us of sin and leads us devotedly to Him. Maybe I'm wrong in my imagination and reconstruction of this incident- but if we love the Lord, surely we'll be ever seeking to reconstruct and imagine how He would or might have been.

8:9- see on Mt. 27:5.

It can be no coincidence that the Lord Jesus is described as being "left alone" only twice in the New Testament, and they are both within a few verses of each other: "They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was *left alone*, and the woman standing in the midst" (Jn. 8:9)... "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not *left me alone*; for I do always those things that please him" (Jn. 8:28,29). He was not alone because the Father confirmed Him in the judgments He made (Jn. 8:16). What is the meaning of this connection? As the peerless Son of God stood before the repentant sinner, with all others convicted by their consciences to one by one slink away from His presence, He was left alone with His perfect Father as well as the repentant woman. Jesus saw in that scene a prefiguring of His death on the cross. There, lifted up from the earth, He was left alone with the Father, a repentant sinner [the thief], and again, one by one, the condemning onlookers smote their breasts in conviction of their sin and walked away. The cross was "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31). There men and women are convicted of their sin and either walk away, or take the place of the humbled woman or desperately repentant thief. This alone should impart an urgency and intensity to our memorial services, when through bread and wine we come as it were before Him there once again, facing up to the piercing reality of our situation as sinners kneeling before the crucified Son of God. One aspect of the loneliness of the cross was that simply the Lord's righteousness set Himself apart from humanity- and He so intensely felt it: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). Yet it was the loneliness which drew Him to the Father. For the isolated believer, the loneliness of being in some sense more righteous living than e.g. your alcoholic husband, your atheist daughter, the materialistic women at work... is a burden hard to live with. Yet in this, we are sharing something of the cross of our Lord. And if we suffer with Him, we shall also share in the life eternal which He was given. Being "left alone" with the Father and your humbled, repentant brethren is a sharing in the cross of the Son of God. This is the gripping logic, the promise of ultimate hope, which is bound up with the sense of spiritual loneliness which is in some ways inevitably part of the believing life.

8:10 There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make the connection to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is the dead ringer of every one of us.

8:12 The teaching of Jesus was very much centred around Himself. Other religious teachers tend to say 'This is the truth, these are the ideas I have put together: follow them'. But Jesus says: "I am the truth; follow *me*". His formula was not "Thus saith the Lord", but rather "Truly, truly *I* say unto you...". The personal pronoun forces itself upon our attention as we read His words:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to *me* shall not hunger"

"I am the light of the world; he who follows *me*..."

"I am the resurrection and the life... whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"

"I am the way and the truth"

"Come to *me* ... learn of *me*".

He called people to Himself- to come to Him, learn of Him, follow Him. He knew, too, that the example and achievement of His death would exert a certain magnetism upon men and women: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself". He is drawing them not primarily to a church, to a statement of faith, to a 'truth' ...but to Himself.

See on Jn. 3:19-21. The "light" was a lifted up torch of fire, exactly as He was to be lifted up on the cross. But He saw Himself as there and then lifted up as the light of the world. The principles of the cross must be the light, the only light, of our lives. When the Lord speaks of Himself as the light / burning torch of the Jewish world, He continues: "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody follows the sun when they walk- so the "light" referred to is hardly the sun.

Surely the reference is back to the fiery pillar in the wilderness, which gave light by night so that the Jews could walk in the light even when darkness surrounded them. And there's an upward spiral in all this. If "the light" is specifically a reference to God's glory manifested through the crucifixion, then this must provide the background for our understanding of Jn. 12:35-50. Here the Lord teaches that only those who walk in the light can perceive who He really is, and "the work" which was to be "finished" on the cross. It is the light of the cross which reveals to us the essence of who the Lord really is... and this in turn leads us to a keener perception of the light of the cross. Which in turn enables us to see clearer the path in which we are to daily walk.

Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johannine references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46)

The light of the Gospel is not just light which we behold and admire for its beauty; it is a light which by its very nature opens the eyes of blind people (Jn. 8:12)!

Many passages in John speak of the believer as being in a state of constant spiritual strength; e.g. "he that followeth me shall never (Gk.) walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). These kind of passages surely teach that God does not see us on the basis of our individual sins or acts of righteousness; He sees our overall path in life, and thereby sees us as totally righteous or totally evil. Thus Proverbs contains many verses which give two alternative ways of behaviour, good and evil; there is no third way. Thus, e.g., we *either* guard our tongue, *or* we speak rashly (Prov. 13:3). At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5).

8:13- see on Jn. 8:17.

8:14- see on 1 Jn. 5:9.

8:17 The Lord often began His statements with the word "Amen" - 'truly', 'certainly', 'surely... I say unto you...'. Yet it was usual to *conclude* a sentence, prayer or statement with that word. But the Lord *began* His statements with it. And this feature of His style evidently caught the attention of all the Gospel writers. Mark mentions it 13 times, Matthew 9 times, Luke 3 times and John 25 times.

And it should stand out to us, too. Jeremiah also mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. The Lord's extraordinary sense of authority was not laughed off as the ravings of a self-deluded 'holy man'. For the crowds flocked to Him, and even hardened guards sent to arrest Him had to give up on the job for the humanly-flimsy excuse that "never man spake like this man". And it is that very sense of ultimate authority which amazingly comes through to us today, who have never met Him nor heard His words with our own ears. This is the power of the inspired Gospel records, yet it is also testimony to the extraordinary, compelling power of the Personality which is transmitted through them. The Lord's sense of authority helps explain His mysterious logic in Jn. 8:17,18. The Jews accuse Him of bearing witness of Himself, and that therefore His witness is untrue. The Lord replies that under the Law, two witnesses were required in addition to the accused person. And He argues that He is a witness to Himself, and His Father is too: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness". But this was exactly their point- He was bearing witness of Himself, and therefore "thy witness is not true" (Jn. 8:13 RV). Yet His reply seems to have silenced them. Clearly the authority attached to Him was so great that effectively His bearing witness of Himself *was* adequate witness.

8:19 There seems to be a verbal connection at least between the Jews' mocking question of Christ "Where is thy father?" (Jn. 8:19) and Saul's "whose son is this youth" (1 Sam. 17:55).

8:21- see on Jn. 7:33.

"I go my way" was to the cross. He was and is the way, the cross is the only way to the true life, both now and eternally. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4) further cements the connection between His "way" and the cross.

8:21-25 The Lord warned the Jews that "I go my way, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, you cannot come. Then said the Jews, will He kill Himself? Because He says 'Whither I go, you cannot come'? And He answered them... I said therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins. Then said they unto Him, Who are you?" (Jn. 8:21-25). Here the Lord twice seeks to confront them with their sin, and yet they ignore this matter and get lost in speculation about His more cryptic statements. And this is why a man can spend hours or even a lifetime in 'Bible study' and come out with a conscience untouched as to his personal sin. Because humanity has a terrible way of footnoting the Lord's conviction of our sins and getting endlessly lost in striving about words and their interpretations. As we daily read, almost every chapter hammers home the same point: that God sees sin as far more shocking than we do.

8:25 Most of His messages are hidden in His lifestyle and in the way He treated people. He left it to those who watched Him to see how the word was being made flesh in Him. In this sense Jesus' words really were eminently deeds. He was the word made flesh. When the Jews asked Him "Who art thou", He replied: "How is it that I even speak to you at all? I have many things to say... When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:25,28 RVmg.). Jesus didn't have to speak anything about Himself; He was the word made flesh, His deeds and above all His death would declare who He was. This self-proclamation that didn't require any self-advertisement or even self-explanation was so wonderfully unique to Jesus. However, Peter says that a wife should convert her husband without needing to speak a word- and there we have something of the same idea.

8:26- see on Jn. 6:44.

Even when making the profoundest claims to be God's Son, sent from God and destined to ascend to Heaven, the Lord in the same context emphasizes His humanity- e.g. in Jn. 8:26, having spoken of

His origins, Father, and destiny, He stresses that *He* has much He'd like to say and judge of His generation, but He could only share what His Father had taught Him to speak. This was a very pointed presentation of His humanity, and He made it lest His hearers think that He was altogether other-worldly.

8:28- see on Jn. 5:36; 6:63; Jn. 20:28.

Consider how in Jn. 8:28; 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas in Jn. 8:28 He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. See on Lk. 9:44; Jn. 14:10.

In many discussions with Trinitarians, I came to observe how very often, a verse I would quote supporting the humanity of Jesus would be found very near passages which speak of His Divine side. For example, most 'proof texts' for both the 'Jesus=God' position and the 'Jesus was human' position- are all from the same Gospel of John. Instead of just trading proof texts, e.g. 'I and my father are one' verses 'the Father is greater than I', we need to understand them as speaking of one and the same Jesus. So many 'debates' about the nature of Jesus miss this point; the sheer wonder of this man, this more than man, was that He was so genuinely human, and yet perfectly manifested God. This was and is the compelling wonder of this Man. These two aspects of the Lord, the exaltation and the humanity, are spoken of together in the Old Testament too. A classic example would be Ps. 45:6,7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever [this is quoted in the New Testament about Jesus]... God, thy God, hath anointed thee [made you Christ]". It was exactly because of and through His humanity that His glory, His 'Divine side', was and is manifested. His glory was 'achieved', if you like, not because He had it by nature in Heaven before His birth; but exactly because He as a human of our nature reflected the righteousness of God to perfection in human flesh. Thus "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He"(Jn. 8:28)- the 'I am' aspect of Jesus was manifested at the point of His maximum humanity. Thus He was 'made sin for us' so that we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). It was only because the Word was made *flesh* that the glory of God was revealed (Jn. 1:14).

"I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28). "The Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of myself" (Num. 16:28 LXX).

The Jewish conscience about the cross is predicted by the Lord in Jn. 8:28: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he". But the Jews generally were not subsequently persuaded that Jesus was indeed Messiah, bearer of the "I am" Name of God. Potentially, in their consciences, they *did know* that He was, once they crucified Him. The words of Jesus were of course true. But they didn't confess that faith, because they suppressed it in their conscience. This is why to this day there is this Jewish conscience about the cross. And it's why conversion to the Lord Jesus cannot be far from the heart of every Jew.

When they had lifted up the Son of man in crucifixion, then they would "know that I am he" (v. 28). Unless they saw the manifestation of the great "I am" there, Yahweh Himself, they would die eternally. Eternal life therefore depends upon an appreciation of the cross. For this reason, the atonement must be the central doctrine of the Gospel, and those who believe it must feel it and know it personally if they are to be saved in the end. This is why 20:27-29 seems to show that the Lord understood the essence of faith in all His people as meaning that they would discern and believe the marks in His hands where the nails were. The cross would confirm all He had spoken. There the words of Jesus were made flesh (1:14). In the lifted up Jesus, we see all His words, God's words, brought together in that body.

Jn. 8:28,30 records that He predicted that when He was crucified, then His people would believe on Him; yet "As he spake these things, many believed on him", there and then. There was such congruence between His message of crucifixion and His actual life, that people believed there and

then, even before seeing the actual crucifixion. His life was a crucified life, and it elicited faith in those who perceived this.

8:29 We are the witnesses in the same way as the Lord Jesus was the word made flesh- in His very person, He was the essential witness and message. When He said "I do always those things that please [God]", it is recorded that "As he spake these words, many believed on him" (Jn. 8:29,30). There was something real and credible. He was His words made flesh.

When the Jews lifted up Christ in crucifixion, then they would know that the words He spoke were the words of God, that the Father had not left Him at all, and that Jesus had done "always those things that please Him" (Jn. 8:28,29). Surely this implies that His death, His dead body motionless there, was in fact some sort of word of testimony, a voice from God. Note too that when He looked as if He was forsaken by God, it was apparent that He was not. The Jews had jeered at Him as He still clung on to life, implying that God and the prophet Elijah had now abandoned Him- clearly, they mocked, He was not the Son of God. But when He was lifted up by them- i.e. in death- the lifeless body must have spoken to them of something. Somehow [and the earthquake and darkness doubtless confirmed this], there was the very real presence of God evident in the scene once He had died. The Centurion realized that "truly, this was the Son of God"- and from these prophetic words of the Lord, it appears that the Jews generally had to face the same conviction. This is the sort of paradox God delights to use- the humanly hopeless and God forsaken, the lost cause, becomes the very convicting proof of just the opposite- that we are *not* forsaken. In all this there was the word of the cross.

8:30 Many of the Jews believed on Christ (Jn. 8:30)- but He rebukes them for not being His "disciples indeed", not really having the freedom which a true acceptance of the Truth will bring, not really being children of Abraham, still living in sin, not really hearing His word, and passively wanting to kill Him (Jn. 8:33-44). Yet He spoke all these criticisms to those whom the record itself describes as believing in Him (Jn. 8:31). It's as if the Spirit wants to show us that belief in Christ can exist on a completely surface level. He says they were Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37,56); but almost in the same breath, He says they weren't anything of the sort in spiritual reality (Jn. 8:39).

8:31 The idea that the Gospels are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel becomes more obvious when we start to probe how the Gospels would have originated. As accounts and rumours about Jesus and His teaching began to spread around, some would have been skeptical. Those who had met Jesus would have wished to persuade their neighbours and friends that really, what they had seen and heard was really so. People who had met Jesus would share their impressions together and reflect upon the striking things He had said and done. The beginnings of the Gospels were therefore rooted in preaching the good news about Jesus. The Lord speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). I suggest this refers in the first instance to the new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His words abiding in us. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious... for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. See on 1 Jn 2:24.

Jn. 8:31 credits some of the Jews with believing on Jesus- and yet the Lord goes on to show how they didn't 'continue in His word', weren't truly confirmed as His disciples, and were still not true children of Abraham. Yet it would appear God is so eager to recognize any level of faith in His Son that they are credited with being 'believers' when they still had a very long way to go.

Jn. 8:30,31 records how He spoke about how the Father was with Him, “that I am he”, with full reference to the Yahweh Name. “As he spake these words, many believed on him”, as He spoke the words, it was evident that they were more than words, they were an expression of the truth that was in this Man. He was the word made into flesh. People are tired of words, of language...which in any case doesn't convey as well as we may think any lasting impression. People need to see what we believe lived out. They need to see, e.g., that our understanding of the representative nature of Jesus issues forth in our praying and in our feeling for this man “whom having not seen ye love”. And perhaps this is why it can be observed that Jesus almost never “went out of his way” to help people but rather walked along and helped the people He met in His path.

8:32- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to chose for themselves. He was Himself supremely free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was the red heifer “upon which never came yoke” (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin by Christ through “freedom” (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be ‘used’ to love others (Gal. 5:13). He didn't spell things out to His followers in the detailed way many religious leaders do. And yet it is surely related to a sense one gets from re-reading the Gospels that Jesus was in tune with nature. He so often uses examples and parables grounded in a perceptive reflection upon the natural creation. He spoke of the carefreeness of birds and other animals; and yet He had the shadow of the cross hanging over Him. The way He was evidently so relaxed with people is a tremendous testimony to Him, bearing in mind the agony ahead. All this is what makes and made Jesus so compelling. On one hand, an almost impossible standard- to be perfect, as the Father is. And yet on the other, an almost unbelievable acceptance of fallen men and women. He didn't criticize those who came to Him. He Himself was the standard by which their consciences were pricked, and yet not in such a way that they were scared away from Him. This mixture of high standards and yet acceptance of people wherever they were is what we all find so elusive. The fact none of us get it right is what turns so many away from our preaching. How compelling He was is shown by how He polarized people- He sought to provoke a final decision in people for or against Him personally- not a yes or no to a particular dogma, rite or law. His compelling power is associated with the sense of urgency which there was in His teaching. The Lord repeatedly spoke of His return as being imminent- and surely His intention was to inspire in us a sense of urgency about His return, a living for His kingdom today rather than delaying till tomorrow.

The Lord and the Gospel writers seem to have recognized that a person may believe in Christ, and be labelled a 'believer' in Him, whilst still not knowing the fullness of "the truth": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which had believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:31,32). Clearly the Lord saw stages and levels to discipleship and 'knowing the truth'.

The truth makes free; and yet it is Jesus who makes free (Jn. 8:32,36). The Truth in the person of Jesus, not just in our perception of doctrines in intellectual purity, is what liberates our personhood.

Jesus told the truth to this world in the sense that He was sinless (Jn. 8:47). Likewise in Jn. 17:19 He says that He sanctifies Himself, so that “the truth”, i.e. His perfect life and death, might sanctify us. This was His telling of truth to men. By continuing in the word of Jesus we will know the truth (Jn. 8:31,32)- not so much that we will attain greater doctrinal knowledge, but that our lives will reflect our knowledge of Jesus who is “the truth”. The truth sets us free; the Son sets us free (Jn. 8:32, 36). “The truth” is therefore a title for Jesus. Mere academic knowledge alone cannot set anyone free from sin; but the living presence and example and spirit of life of another Man can, and does. And so

in Jn. 14:6 the way, truth and life are all parallel- truth is a way of life; “truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21 RV).

8:37 The Jews could be described as both Abraham’s seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham’s seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44).

Jesus described the unbelieving Jews as having Abraham as their father, and yet He also said that they weren’t the real children of Abraham. They appeared to believe in Him, but effectively denied Him (Jn. 8:37,39,56). Like Israel, we can have an appearance of faith, an assumption that we believe because we are through baptism the children of faithful Abraham, when the real, house-on-the-rock faith is unknown to us.

The Jews of Christ’s day thought that they were righteous because they were the descendants of Abraham. Jesus therefore addressed them as “the righteous” (Mt. 9:12–13), and said “I know that you are Abraham’s seed” (Jn. 8:37). But He did not believe that they were righteous, as He so often made clear; and He plainly showed by His reasoning in John 8:39–44 that they were *not* Abraham’s seed. So Jesus took people’s beliefs at face value, without immediately contradicting them, but demonstrated the truth instead. We have shown that this was God’s approach in dealing with the pagan beliefs which were common in the Old Testament times. Christ’s attitude to demons in New Testament times was the same; His God–provided miracles made it abundantly plain that illnesses were caused by God, not any other force, seeing that it was God who had the mighty power to heal them.

8:39 When the Jews proudly said “Abraham is our father!” (Jn. 8:39) they were showing the very same spirit as Ishmael- in persecuting Isaac / Jesus. See on Jn. 12:31.

8:42 It is impossible to love God without loving His Son, Jesus (Jn. 8:42); and 1 Jn. 5:1,2 is alluding to this, saying that this principle means that we can’t love God without loving *all* His sons, those who are in Christ, the Son of God. Christian disillusion with Christianity is disobedience to this. If we think we can love God while disregarding His sons, we are making the same mistake as the Jews; they confidently thought they could love God and disregard His Son. And this faulty logic led them to crucify the Son of God.

The fact that Jesus was humanly fatherless has been extensively commented upon by Andries van Aarde. He points out that: “Against the background of the marriage arrangements within the patriarchal mind-set of Israelites in the Second Temple period, a fatherless Jesus would have been without social identity. He would have been excluded from being called a child of Abraham, that is, a child of God. Access to the court of the Israelites in the temple, where mediators could facilitate forgiveness for sin, would have been denied to him. He would have been excluded from the privilege of being given a daughter in marriage”. Behold the paradox. Because He was the Son of God, He was written off by Israel as not being a child of God; because He was *the* seed of Abraham, He was rubbished as not being a son of Abraham. We can now understand better how He could attract other social outcasts to Him; we have another window into the fact He never married; we appreciate more deeply the significance of His offering forgiveness and fellowship with God to those who were outside of the temple system. He could offer a new social identity to people on the basis that He knew what it was like to be without it. All this is confirmed in the Biblical record. This is why the Jews accused the Lord of being both not a “child of Abraham” and also illegitimate” (Jn. 8:42), a “sinner” (Jn. 9:16). And He was also called a “Samaritan” (Jn. 8:48). According to the Mishnah, “... they are the people of uncertain condition, with whom one may not marry: those of uncertain parentage, foundlings and Samaritans”. Refusing to declare Joseph as His father meant that the Lord would’ve been unable to marry, at least not any girl from a religious family. See on Jn. 19:9.

8:43 Again, the inextricable link between doctrine and practice is brought out by the Lord in Jn. 7:17: "If any man willeth to *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine...". My expanded paraphrase of this would be: 'If you want to do right before God in practice, then you will discern between right and wrong doctrine, because true doctrine leads to true practice. If you really want to be *doing* the right thing, then God will lead you to true doctrine'. And not long afterwards, the Lord hammers home His point: "Why do ye not understand my speech [teaching]? Even because ye cannot hear [i.e. accept] my word" (Jn. 8:43). Intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a resistance to having our lives disturbed in a moral sense. How many have started studying true doctrine, only to draw back, perhaps unconsciously even, because they sense that this stuff is life-changing, and altogether too demanding for them to handle in practice? That refusing to believe or understand truth has a moral basis is brought out by the Lord's comment in Jn. 8:46: "If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?". He surely implies that it's not hard in itself to believe and accept His words as true- but He explains that the Jews didn't believe because they preferred to believe the words of the "devil". The "devil" speaks his own language (Jn. 8:44 NIV), the Lord says, and the Jews preferred to hear *that* language because it was actually their own language. They did not "understand my word" because they preferred to do 'their own lusts' (Jn. 8:43). Those 'lusts' are paralleled with the language of the devil- which is exactly what 'the devil' refers to in so many Biblical contexts. The point of all this is that misunderstanding God's word is because we prefer to hear the language of our own self talk, our own lusts, the Biblical 'devil'. "The lusts of the [devil] it is your will to do", the Lord commented (Jn. 8:44 RV). This was their "language", and therefore any other language which was not of their own self talk was 'foreign' to them. And in this we have the essential basis for why people misunderstand the Lord's words today.

The Lord's cryptic manner of speaking at times yielded "hard sayings"; and yet He utters most of them in conversation with His critics. Thus having said that "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death", and the Jews predictably responded with misunderstanding and confusion, He goes straight on to utter an even harder saying: "Your father Abraham... saw my day, and was glad". And they again come back at Him with the anger born of misunderstanding. And so He rounds off the episode with a yet harder saying: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:51-58). In all this He was using "hard sayings"- which have come down to us as 'wrested scriptures, 'difficult passages'- in order to drive the unbelievers further down the downward spiral. And He does the same today, with the same passages. Because the Jews didn't "hear my word / logos", therefore they couldn't understand His speech, i.e. the words as individual words which He spoke (Jn. 8:43). They stumbled over each word, as a child struggling to read a text way too advanced for her. Because they didn't hear His logos, the essence of Him. This is why the simplest minds which firmly understand the logos, the essential idea, the bigger picture, don't find the "hard sayings" to be hard for them, they aren't stumbled by them. But the word-by-word theologian does stumble at them, if he doesn't believe the simple logos of Jesus.

8:44- see on Hos. 6:7.

The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'Devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the Devil" is a "liar" – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" – clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the Devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "child of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel. There are many other connections between the serpent and the Jews; clearest is Isaiah 1:4 "A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers,

children that are corrupters”. This is describing Israel in the language of Genesis 3:15 concerning the serpent. Thus the Messianic Psalm 140:3,10 describes Christ reflecting that His Jewish persecutors “have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips... let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire” (referring to the falling masonry of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?). It is quite possible that Christ’s encouragement to the seventy that “I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Lk. 10:19) has a primary reference to their ability to overcome Jewish opposition during their preaching tour.

We all personally struggle to accept basic Bible teaching about generosity, materialism and money. Think of what the Hebrew word “Cain” means- for he is alluded to by the Lord as the epitome of the “devil”, the “murderer from the beginning”, the archetypical sinner (Jn. 8:44- perhaps because Adam and Eve’s sin was forgiven, whereas Cain was the first impenitent sinner). “Cain is defined on the basis of a double Hebrew etymology, as ‘possession’ (from *qana* = acquire) and ‘envy’ (from *qana* = be envious)”. Personal possession is almost- almost- inextricably linked with envy, and led to the lies and murder for which Cain was noted by the Lord. To have a strong sense of our personal ‘possessions’ will lead us into the same sins. Indeed, it’s the epitome of ‘the devil’. The concept of ‘private property’ is indeed a myth. For we die, and leave it all behind.

Ensure that all you are saying to yourself, even if it’s not about spiritual things, is at least truthful. This is where this great theme of truth starts and ends. Ideally, our self-talk should be of Jesus, of the Father, of the things of His Kingdom. Of anything that is just, true, of good report... Yet our self-talk is closely linked to what Scripture would call the devil- the constant fountain of wrong suggestions and unspiritual perspectives that seem to bubble up so constantly within us. The devil- the Biblical one- is “the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44). And untruthfulness seems to begin within our own self-talk. I would even go so far as to almost define the devil as our own self-talk. And it’s likened to a roaring, dangerous lion; a cunning snake. And it’s there within each of us. The control of self-talk is vital. And the Biblical guidance is to make sure it is truthful; for lack of truthfulness is the root of all sin. The account of the wilderness temptations is in my opinion a wonderful window into the self-talk of the Lord Jesus. He set the example there, of dealing with internal temptation by a self-talk based solidly on the truth of God’s word. Sin is normally committed by believers not as an act of conscious rebellion, but rather through a complex process of self-justification; which on repentance we recognize was the mere sophistry of our own self-talk. This is why truthfulness is the epitome of the spiritual life. To deny ever being untruthful is to deny ever sinning. We all have this problem. It’s why the assertion of Jesus that He was “the truth” was tantamount to saying that He was sinless. Only thus is He thereby the way to eternal life.

Your Father the Devil

Comments

1. The use of the pronoun “he” does not indicate that the Devil is a person. “Wisdom” is personified as a woman house-builder (Prov. 9:1) and sin as a paymaster paying wages (Rom. 6:23). Human lust is personified as a man who drags us away to enticement. If it is accepted that sin and sinful tendencies are personified, there should be no problem in imagining that persona being given a name – “Satan”, the adversary.
2. There is no specific reference here to the serpent in Eden.
3. We sin because of the lusts that begin inside us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14; Jer. 17:9). Our evil heart – the real Devil – is the father of our lusts and sins. “The lusts of your father” the Devil, are thus the same as the lusts of our evil heart – the Devil.

4. The Devil is a murderer. But “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die – but as angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) they are therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them.

5. In our exposition of Mark 4:15, we have identified the children of the Devil as those who obey their evil desires – the real Devil.

6. “You do that which you have seen with your father” (the Devil) v. 38. The Jews had not literally seen a person called the Devil, which indicates that when Jesus spoke about the Jews being of their father the Devil, He was again using parabolic language.

7. They were *of* the Devil in the sense that “you do the deeds of your father” (v. 41), i.e. they continued the family likeness.

8. If the Devil is a murderer then he isn’t immortal, for in commentary on this verse John later explained [as if there had already arisen misunderstandings in the time between John’s Gospel and epistles]: “No murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:15). Angels are immortal (Lk. 20:36), so therefore this “murderer” wasn’t a ‘fallen Angel’.

Suggested Explanations

1. Scripture often uses the characteristics of something mentioned at an earlier point in the Bible to describe what a group of people are like. Thus “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56) alludes back to the sting of the serpent in Eden, but it doesn’t mean that death is a literal serpent – it has the characteristics of the serpent. Thus the dragon in Revelation 12:9 is called “that old serpent”. A dragon cannot be a snake at the same time; but it had the characteristics of the serpent in Genesis.

2. Similarly, the Devil, the desires which are in our heart forming and stimulating an evil inclination, has the characteristics of the serpent, but it does not mean that the serpent was the Devil itself. The serpent was “subtil” (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3); this may well be behind the description of the Jews consulting “that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Mt. 26:4). The serpent in Eden was the prototype of the Jewish system; their killing of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy that the seed of the serpent (sin manifested in the Jews, Mt. 12:34; Lk. 3:7, in its primary meaning) would wound the seed of the woman, Christ, in the heel (Gen. 3:15).

3. John 8:44 is also a reference to Cain, the first murderer – “he was a murderer from the beginning” (Gen. 4:8–9). He “abode not in the truth” as he was the father of the seed of the serpent who corrupted the true way of worshipping God. The letters of John often alludes to the Gospel of John, and 1 John 3:12,15, is an example; it confirms this interpretation: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (i.e. the Devil – Mt. 13:19 cp. Mk. 4:15) and slew his brother...Whosoever hateth his brother (as Cain did) is a murderer”. However, it is also true that John 8:44 alludes to the serpent as well. The serpent told the first lie, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4); he did not abide in the truth; he was a murderer in the sense that he brought about the death of Adam and Eve. “He is a liar, and the father of it”. Cain was not a super-human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man. He characterized sin, the Devil. The way in which the fire consumed Abel’s offering but not Cain’s is paralleled by the fire burning up Elijah’s offering but leaving those of the apostate Jewish Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18:19–40). This would associate Cain with apostate Jews, i.e. the Jewish Devil.

4. Note: “...he is a liar, and the father of it”. Jesus does not say “he was a liar”. If we tell a lie, it is a result of the Devil, in the sense of our evil desires prompting us – not due to any force outside of us. Lying is one of those things that Jesus lists in Mk. 7:15,21–23 as not entering a man from outside him, but originating from within him. The Devil is the ‘father’ of lies in the sense that they originate from within us – which is where the Biblical Devil is located.

5. “When he speaks a lie” – when someone lies, it is not a super-human person called the Devil standing in front of him, it is the Devil, in the sense of the man’s evil desires speaking to him. “Deceit” – i.e. lies – proceed “from within, out of the heart of men” (Mk. 7:21–22).

6. The context of John 8 is Jesus stressing that if only the Jews would truly follow the Word of God, then they would not be seeking to murder Him. There is a pointed contrast between those who are born of the Word of God and those conceived by the Devil, our evil heart. Man’s heart is evil continually (Gen. 6:5), and it is only by the Word of God being there that we can stop the evil desires there – the Devil – leading us into sin (Ps. 119:11; James 1:13–15):

– Thus Jesus said that the Jews were murderers (i.e. of the Devil – v. 44) because the word “has no place in you” (Jn. 8:37)

– “Because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the Devil” (v. 43–44)

– Because Jesus kept the saying (Greek *logos* – word) of God, He was not a liar like the Jews (v. 55)

– and they were liars because they were of the Devil (v. 44)

– “There is no truth in him” (the Devil – v. 44) because “Your Word is truth (Jn. 17:17). The Devil is therefore the opposite to the Word of God. Jesus said “If you continue in my Word... you shall know the Truth” (Jn. 8:31–32)

– “He that is (born) of God hears God’s Words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God” (v. 47), i.e. they were of the Devil (v. 44)

– The seed of the Devil is our lusts, which result in the conception of sin (James 1:13–15; Mt. 13:39). Believers are born “not of (this) corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18), the seed of the Word preached by Christ (Lk. 8:11).

Because it is through the Word of God that our evil desires are overcome, they who like the Jews reject that Word, will be living lives and making judgments governed solely by their evil desires – they will be truly “of the Devil”.

8:47 Jn. 8:47: “He that is of God (by being born of the word, 1 Pet. 1:23) heareth God’s words” presents the upward spiral of spirituality which belief in God’s word creates. In the same discourse the Lord reasoned “If ye continue in my word... ye shall know the truth (the word- Jn. 17:17)” (Jn. 8:31,32).

8:48- see on Jn. 8:42.

It has been widely recognized that John’s Gospel often refers to the same themes found in the Synoptics, but in different language and from a different perspective. The account of the virgin birth as the word being made flesh is one such example. Another would be the effective repeating of the great commission in different terms. Yet another would be the description of water baptism as being born of water (Jn. 3:3–5). The accounts of casting out demons which we have in the Synoptic Gospels are not found in John – not in so many words. But I suggest that the essence of it all is there in John, too. The battle between Jesus and the ‘Devil’ is referred to there frequently. He is accused of being in league with the Devil (Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20); but He labels His critics as being of the Devil (Jn. 8:44). And in that same passage He redefines their view of “the Devil” as being a question of doing sinful “desires”. Judas is portrayed as being “of the Devil” (Jn. 6:70,71; 13:2,27). John speaks of an epic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, truth and error, faith and unbelief, God and evil / sin. In this struggle, the forces of evil have no real power over the Lord Jesus; He is greater than them and overcomes them to such an extent that they are effectively non-existent for those in Him. The Synoptics speak of the opposition to Jesus as being from Scribes, Pharisees etc. John describes this opposition as the Jewish ‘Satan’ or adversary to the Lord. John presents the opposition to Jesus from the Jews as being symbolic of evil and sin itself. Effectively,

the more literal accounts of the Synoptics are saying the same thing – that the Lord showed that the power of God is so great that effectively, demons don't exist as any realistic force in the lives of both Jesus and His people. John puts this in more epic and symbolic language – the forces of evil were overcome and revealed to be powerless by the Lord Jesus, ultimately expressing this through His death. And perhaps that's why John's Gospel doesn't speak of the Lord casting out demons – because his record has made it clear enough that effectively, those things don't exist.

8:49 When He was wrongly accused of being a Samaritan, Jesus did not deny it (Jn. 8:48,49 cp. 4:7–9) even though his Jewishness, as the seed of Abraham, was vital within God's plan of salvation (Jn. 4:22). Even when the Jews drew the wrong conclusion (wilfully!) that Jesus was "making himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:18), Jesus did not explicitly deny it; instead He powerfully argued that His miracles showed Him to be a man acting on God's behalf, and therefore he was *not* equal with God. The miracles of Jesus likewise showed the error of believing in demons.

8:50 Because there is only one God, this demands *all* our spiritual energy. There is only one, the one God, who seeks glory for men and judges them (Jn. 8:50)- therefore the unity of God should mean we do not seek glory of men, neither do we judge our brother. See on Lk. 10:28.

8:51 If we "keep" in mind the Lord's words, we will never "see death" (Jn. 8:51)- death itself will be perceived differently by us, if our hearts are ever with Him who conquered death, and is the resurrection and the life. If our view of death itself, the unspoken deepest personal fear of all humanity, is different... we will be radically different from our fellows.

8:56 It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham 'saw the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off' (Gen. 22:4), there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham *saw* the fulfilment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham *saw* His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be *seen*'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ (Jn. 8:56)- and this is surely an allusion to how he laughed [for joy] at the promise of Isaac. He "gladly received the promises" (Heb. 11:17 RV). And realizing that through baptism the promises are made to us ought to inspire a deep seated joy too.

8:58 When the Jews mocked Him for saying that He had seen Abraham, the Lord didn't respond that of course that wasn't what He meant; instead He elevated the conversation with "before Abraham was I am".

"Before Abraham was, I am"(Jn. 8:58)

These words are often misapplied to teach that Jesus existed before Abraham did. However, closer investigation reveals the opposite to be true:

1. Jesus does not say 'Before Abraham was, I was'. He was the promised descendant of Abraham; we make a nonsense of God's promises to Abraham if we say that Jesus physically existed before the time of Abraham.
2. The context of Jn. 8:58 is Christ's discourse with the Jews concerning Abraham. As far as they were concerned, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. Jesus is saying "I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham". As they stood there, Jesus was the one to be honoured

rather than Abraham. He is saying 'I am now, more important than Abraham ever was'. It is possible to understand "before" in Jn. 8:58 with some reference to time, in the sense that before Abraham existed, Christ had been in God's plan right from the beginning of the world. It was because Jesus was "before" Abraham in this sense that he was "before" him in terms of importance. But the more comfortable reading is to understand "before" as referring to importance rather than time. In 2 Sam. 6:21 there's a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour.

3. Proof of this is found in Jn. 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad". The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham "saw" ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that Jesus could say "Before Abraham was, I am". He appreciated that God's promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been "before Abraham was", had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, "the word (of promise) made flesh".

4. "I am" may indeed be a reference to the Divine Name which Jesus, as the Father's Son, carried (Jn. 5:43). But "I am" is also used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9 with no apparent reference to the Name. The same Greek words are also used by Asahel in the LXX of 2 Sam. 2:20. Jesus and the Father were "one" and so for Jesus to bear the Father's Name is no reason to think that 'Jesus = God'. Note however that the unity between Father and Son spoken of e.g. in Jn. 10:30 is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same. And sharing such unity it is quite appropriate for them to share the same Name.

A related misunderstanding is often applied to the comment of John the Baptist about Jesus- that "He was before me" (Jn. 1:30). John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is... essentially my superior" (1).

Notes

(1) C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274.

9:1 *Passed by*- s.w. 8:59. As the Lord was 'passing by', more like quickly rushing away from his persecutors and would-be murderers, He takes time to heal a blind man, with quite a lengthy process. He didn't allow His own fears and self-preservation instinct to make Him so self-centred that He didn't notice and engage with others' physical and spiritual needs.

9:2 The section begins with the issue of sin and blindness, and ends with it (:41).

D.A. Carson's commentary on John lists Talmudic citations which show that the Jews considered each disability to be the result of specific sin; to be born blind was listed as the result of the mother committing adultery (hence their claim he was born in sin, 9:34). This connects the incident with the previous chapter, as does the phrase "passed by" in 8:59; 9:1. The Lord is consciously seeking to

challenge the Jews' false theology at the points in which it was devaluing to the human person- He wasn't seeking theological controversy for the sake of it. See on Jn. 9:6.

9:3 "*In him*" rather than on or through him- suggesting that the manifestation of God was to begin within the man, and the essential miracle was to be on his internal spiritual vision.

The Lord refused to get caught up in the philosophical questions about 'Why suffering?'. Instead He saw the simple reality of human suffering as a call to do God's work; the disciples like so many were caught up on the 'fairness of suffering' question to the extent that they didn't perceive the extent of human need and try to do something about it.

"But that the works of God should be manifest in him, I must work..." (Gk.) would suggest that God has prepared potential 'works' but we must do them; if we don't, they will not be done. This is perhaps the sense of 9:4- we only have limited opportunity to do this, life is brief, the night comes when no man can work. If we don't use those opportunities, they are gone forever, and the works God potentially enabled will not be performed. Yet time can be frittered away today as never before.

9:4 We are lights in the dark world (Mt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15), because we are in Christ, *the* light of the world (Jn. 9:5). Notice how in the preceding verse, Jesus said spoke of how "I must work the works of him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4 AV), yet the RV reflects the manuscript difficulties by giving "*We* must work". Could it be that the Lord said: 'I must work, we [you in me] must work'? The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

Perhaps the Lord was speaking in a kind of soliloquy when He mused that "the night cometh, when no man can work", and therefore man should walk and work while he has the light (Jn. 9:4, quoting Ecc. 9:10). He was speaking, in the context, not only of His own zeal to 'work' while He had life, but also applying this to His followers.

9:5 The Lord Jesus calls both Himself and us "the light of the world". The Lord's difficult comment that "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5 RV) now falls into place. He is "the light of the world" whenever we, who are in the world, are His light to people.

9:6 D.A. Carson's commentary on John cites Talmudic evidence that there were specific regulations against ploughing (cp. rolling spittle in the dirt), kneading (the clay), anointing and curing on the Sabbath. In this case, the Lord was purposefully seeking to provoke issues with the Jews regarding their false theology- see on Jn. 9:2. The paradox was that the man was made yet further blind in order to have his sight restored.

9:7 In John's Gospel, Jesus is the one "sent" from God- Jesus has just stated this in 9:4. The Siloam pool therefore represented washing / baptism in Him.

9:9- see on 9:27. He repeated the "I am" used by Jesus in Jn. 8:58, because God was now being manifested in him. As Jesus was the light of the world, so should we be.

9:11 Consider how the healed blind man grew in his appreciation of the Lord: a man (Jn. 9:11), a prophet (:17), the leader of disciples (:27), a man sent from God (:33), and finally, one to be worshipped as God is worshipped (:38). Because we've gone up one level in our appreciation of the Lord, don't think that we're there. Progressive growth in appreciation of Him should be true of us too. This experience of a growing appreciation of the Lord is in fact a foretaste of the Kingdom; for this will feature an everlasting growth in appreciation of the Lord's excellence (Is. 9:7). For us, that process has already begun. When Christ comes, we will say in that day "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: *this is the Lord*; we have waited for him, we will be glad

and rejoice in his salvation" (Is. 25:9). It doesn't mean we'll turn into trinitarians. It means we will behold and marvel at the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to an extent hidden from mortal eyes.

9:22- see on Jn. 12:42.

The "man born blind" in John 9 was an eloquent type of the believers: the unclean one had the spittle (word / spirit) of the Lord Jesus mixed with dust (flesh) and placed on his eyes. Then he had to go and baptize himself at Siloam, and then his blindness was lifted. It is stressed, really stressed (12 times in 32 verses) that the man was "blind"; as if to emphasize how totally blind we are before our "washing", and how blind the unsaved world is. The result was that the man was "put out of the synagogue" (Jn. 9:22)- and the very same phrase is used about all the other first century Jewish believers (Jn. 16:2). They were to go through exactly what he did. The Lord Jesus was well known for His many miracles of curing blind people (Lk. 7:21,22; Jn. 10:21; 11:37); it was as if he healed this affliction especially. All these miracles were surely acted parables of His work in saving men from the spiritual blindness of their earlier life. The figure of blindness being lifted is truly a powerful picture of what happened at our conversion. From then on, we began to see (i.e. understand) for the first time. We began to understand something properly for the first time. We were *blind* beforehand. Previously, all our 'knowledge' was just perception, passing through paradigms.

9:24 The demand to "Give God the glory" as an admonition to repent and tell the truth (Josh. 7:19). But the man refused to take false guilt, piled onto him by his religious elders.

9:27 His styled was copied by Jesus- 10:25. As Jesus was the "I am", so this man too manifested God and uses the same phrase *ego eimi*, 9:9.

9:29 Guilt by association is deeply ingrained in the human psyche- it's one of the most obstinate parts of our nature with which we have to do battle. We tend to assume that people are like those with whom they associate. The association of God's Son with us just shows how totally untrue that assumption is- and He went out of His way to turn it on its head by associating with whores and gamblers. You can see an example of the guilt by association mentality in the incident of the healed blind man in John 9. The Jews accused Jesus of being illegitimate- they mocked the former blind man about his healer: "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" (Jn. 9:29). When the healed man stands up for Jesus, the Jews get really mad with him: "You were completely born in sin!"- i.e. 'you're illegitimate' (Jn. 9:34). But the record reveals that the Jews knew the man's parents and had just spoken with them (Jn. 9:20). Clearly the mentality of these learned men was: 'You follow a bastard; so, *you* are a bastard'. Simple as that.

9:31 Paul Tournier in *The Meaning Of Persons* perceptively comments: "We become fully conscious only of what we are able to express to someone else. We may already have had a certain intuition about it, but it must remain vague so long as it is unformulated". This is why anyone involved in preaching, public speaking, writing or personal explanation of the Gospel to someone else will know that *they* have gained so much from having to state in so many words what they already 'know'. And in the course of making the expression, our own understanding is deepened, our personal consciousness of what we believe is strengthened, and thereby our potential for a real faith is enhanced. Tournier's observation is validated by considering the record of the healed blind man in Jn. 9. Initially he says that he doesn't know whether or not Jesus is a sinner, all he knows is that Jesus healed him. But the Jews force him to testify further, and in the course of his witness, the man explains to them that God doesn't hear sinners, and so for Jesus to have asked God for his healing and been heard... surely proved that Jesus wasn't a sinner. He was sinless. The man was as it were thinking out loud, coming to conclusions himself, as he made his bold witness (Jn. 9:31,33).

9:32 There are no O.T. accounts of a born blind person being healed; this was specifically the work of God (Ps. 146:8) and His Messiah (Is. 35:5). The healed man seems to have been aware of this and therefore came to the conclusion that his healer must be Messiah. It wasn't that he believed and

therefore was given the benefit of healing; by grace, God first of all healed him and this grace, reflected on and believed, led him to faith in Christ.

9:34 By saying he was born in sin, they were admitting that he had indeed been born blind- for they believed blindness was a result of the mother's sin (see on 9:2). Yet they had refused to believe that he had been born blind (9:18,20). Thus the Lord worked to even move them onwards in their faith; He gave up on nobody (cp. His efforts to witness to the priests by asking the cleansed leper to offer a sacrifice for cleansing).

9:36 When the blind man asks Jesus to tell him who the Son of God is, I don't think it was because he didn't recognize Jesus to be Messiah. He was surely saying 'Tell me more about Him / you, that I may believe properly' (Jn. 9:36). Jesus didn't give a doctrinal exposition. But instead He just tells the man to keep looking at Him and hearing Him. And in the next chapter, Jesus says that His sayings and His works are the same thing (Jn. 10:32,33,38)- whereas the Jews kept making a distinction between them. They said that His words, not His works, were the problem. His works, they said, were OK. But not His words. And Jesus tells them to "*believe the works*" - for they are His words to men. Thus the Lord showed that His actions were His words made flesh.

The blind man asked about Jesus: "Who is he, that I may believe on him?" (Jn. 9:36). True belief depends upon having the true image of Jesus. The goal of conversion to Him is love from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). To know Him properly leads to love within us. 1 Jn. 3:22 brackets together believing in His Name and loving one another. Again and again we say: images and understanding of Jesus matter.

9:39 His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39). Bright light shows up every shadow. Whenever men were in Christ's presence, they were judged. The very presence of His light amongst men was their condemnation (Jn. 3:19; 5:27; 12:31; 16:8,11). In this sense He could say that for judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39).

9:41 The world's sinful behaviour is because it is blind, i.e. it lacks true understanding (Eph. 4:17-19). The spiritually blind man lacks an awareness of his sins, he lacks basic spiritual attributes and an appreciation of the Kingdom, because he lacks knowledge (1 Pet. 2:9). The Lord gave sight to His people and blinded those He will later condemn (Jn. 9:39-41). Blindness is associated with condemnation (2 Pet. 1:9).

10:1-see on Mk. 13:34.

The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar.

10:4- see on Mt. 16:22-25.

John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus "*putteth forth* his own sheep by name" (Jn. 10:4); the same word is used by Him in Lk. 10:2 concerning how He *sends forth* workers to reap converts in preaching. Each of those He calls has a unique opportunity ["by name"] to gather others to Him.

The idea of 'following' Jesus is invariably associated with the carrying of the cross. Why do this? because of the voice / word of Jesus. This must be the ultimate end of our Bible study; a picking up of the cross. For there we see God's words made flesh.

10:5 Just before His death, in full knowledge of the disciples' impending collapse of faith, the grace of Jesus confidently spoke of how His men would not follow "a stranger... but will flee from him" (Jn. 10:5). But the disciples fled from their Lord in Gethsemane, as He knew they would (from Zech. 13:7, cp. Mt. 26:31) at the time He said those words. He knew that He must die for the sheep who would scatter each one to His own way (Is. 53:6). "The time cometh... when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own" (Jn. 16:32); and true enough, they all fled from Him (Mt. 26:56). But in Jn. 10 He spoke of His followers as calm, obedient sheep who would not scatter if they had a good shepherd (Jn. 10:12); even though He knew they would. The Lord's way of imputing such righteousness to His followers seems to be brought out in Jn. 10:4 cp. 6: "The sheep follow Him (Christ): for they know (understand, appreciate) His voice... this parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake", i.e. they didn't know His voice.

10:9 *in and out*. The good shepherd enables the sheep to go out and come in. Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep.

If we enter in at the door of the sheepfold, we will go in and out (a NT idiom for leadership) and find pasture (Jn. 10:9). This may mean that the sheep becomes a shepherd, searching for good pasture for others, leading others, grasping the meaning of priesthood, all as a result of our experience of the good shepherd. See on Heb. 10:19.

Ex.38:18 describes the curtain over the door of the tabernacle in similar language to how the veil hiding the Most Holy is described. Christ is the door of the tabernacle through which we enter at our conversion (Jn.10:9). By doing so we also enter, in prospect, through the veil into the Most Holy of eternity and Divine nature.

10:10 It was the smitten rock that gave abundant, springing life. "I am come" seems to refer to His 'coming down' on the cross, as if it was already happening.

The Lord died so that we might know life "more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). Think for a moment of *how* the death of a man on a stake, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, irritated by flies and barking dogs... could actually give us life "more abundantly"? What was the process, what *is* the process, going on here? What's the connection between that dying man, and a transformed life in you and me today in the 21st century? Surely the connecting power is that the spirit / disposition of the Lord there and then has an inevitable, transforming influence upon those of us who believe in Him; the super-abounding grace and generosity of spirit that was in Him there, which was epitomized in the hours of public, naked exhibition... can't fail to move our spirits to be likewise. Paul speaks of this when He says that God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, by the spirit / power / disposition that works in us (Eph. 3:20). That power, that spirit, is surely that of the crucifixion of Christ. For we cannot be passive to it, if we really 'get it'. It is a power that "works in us". See on 2 Cor. 8:7.

10:11- see on Jn. 13:36-38.

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num. 27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so Christ gave his life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. "The good shepherd" may well have been a Rabbinical title for Moses; Christ was saying "I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this". In a

sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in that he was excluded from the land *for their sakes* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolise how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of Christ's for us. The Lord Jesus likewise died the death of a sinner; he was "forsaken" in the sense that God forsakes sinners, whilst as God's Son he was never forsaken by the Father.

10:12 Jn. 10:12 implies that Christ, the good shepherd, saw the wolf coming. He didn't flee, but fought with this ferocious beast until the death. He says that if He had not done this, the sheep would be scattered. The struggle between Christ and the devil / flesh was therefore at its most intense on the cross, in His time of dying. The cross was not only a continuation of His struggle with the (Biblical) devil. It was an especially intensified struggle; and the Lord foresaw this fight coming. There is an element of unreality in this story that serves to make two powerful points. Firstly, no normal shepherd would give his life in protecting his sheep. The near fanaticism of this shepherd is also found in Am. 8:4, which describes the Lord as taking out of the mouth of the lion the legs or piece of ear which remains of the slain sheep; such is the shepherd's desperate love for the animal that now is not. The love of Christ for us on the cross, the intensity and passion of it, is quite outside any human experience. Hence the command to copy His love is a new commandment. And secondly, wolves don't normally act in the way the story says. They will only fight like this when they are cornered, and they aren't *so* vicious. But the point the Lord is making is crucial to us: the devil, the power of sin in our natures, is far more powerful than we think, and the struggle against it on the cross was far far harder than we would think. And there's a more tragic point. In the short term, the sheep *were* scattered by the wolf, even though Christ died so this wouldn't happen. And Christ knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain. Not only is the shepherd unreal. The sheep are, too- once we perceive the link back to Ez. 34:17-22. They tread down the good pasture so others can't eat from it; having drunk clean water themselves, they make the rest of the water dirty by putting their feet in it; and the stronger sheep attack the weaker ones. This isn't how sheep usually behave! But these sheep are unusually badly behaved. And they are symbols of us, for whom this unusual shepherd gave His life. See on Lk. 15:5.

10:13 The Lord even saw the unconverted and the unreached as His potential sheep. He criticizes the "hireling" who has "no concern for the sheep" (Jn. 10:13) with the same expression as is used in Jn. 12:6 to describe how Judas was "not concerned for the poor". He parallels "the sheep" with the "poor" whom He and His group sought to help materially as best they could; He saw those crowds, whom we would likely have dismissed as just of the "loaves and fishes" mentality, as potential sheep.

The Lord's care was shown in the death of the cross. Any care we may show, to the aged or ill or poor, is to be a reflection of the cross which we must see as the true and ultimate care.

The Gospel writers three times bring out the point that people perceived that the Lord Jesus didn't "care" for people. The disciples in the boat thought that He didn't care if they perished (Mk. 4:38); Martha thought He didn't care that she was left in an impossible domestic situation, doubtless assuming He was a mere victim of common male insensitivity to women (Lk. 10:40); and twice it is recorded that the people generally had the impression that He cared for nobody (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14). And yet the Lord uses the very same word to speak of the hired shepherd who cares not for the sheep- whereas He as the good shepherd cares for them so much that He dies for them (Jn.

10:13). I find this *so* tragic- that the most caring, self-sacrificial person of all time wasn't perceived as that, wasn't credited for it all. The disciples surely wrote the Gospels with shame over this matter. It points up the loneliness of the Lord's agonizing last hours. And yet it provides comfort for all unappreciated caregivers, as spouses, parents, children, servants of the ecclesia... in their suffering they are sharing something of the Lord's agony.

10:15 There is and will be something dynamic in our relationship with the Father and Son. The Lord Jesus spoke of how He 'knows' the Father and 'knows' us His sheep in the continuous tense (Jn. 10:14,15)- He was 'getting to know' the Father, and He 'gets to know' us. And this is life eternal, both now and then, that we might *get to know* the one true God and His Son (Jn. 17:3). The knowing of God and His Son is not something merely academic, consisting only of facts. It is above all an experience, a thrilling and dynamic one. I am the good shepherd, and know (Gk. 'am getting to know', continuous tense) my sheep, and am known (*being known*) of mine. As the Father *knoweth* (is knowing) me, even so know I (I am getting to know) the Father" (Jn.10:14). The relationship between us and our Lord will therefore be one of progressive upward knowledge, as He has with God. Thus a state of ultimate knowledge of God will not be flashed into us at the moment of acceptance at the judgment. For this very reason, the Kingdom cannot be an inactive state. God is dynamic. For us to grow in His knowledge will be a continuously dynamic process. It is pointed out in John's Gospel that those who will truly know God will not fully know Him now, in this life. Thus the blind man in Jn.9:12 said that he did not know where Jesus was; Thomas likewise said that the disciples did not know where Jesus was going (Jn.14:5,7); in Jn.4:32 Jesus said that He had meat which we do not know of. Those who said (in John's Gospel) that they *did* know Jesus, often found that they did not. Thus Jesus said that the Samaritans worshipped what they did not know (Jn.4:22), although they were convinced that they did. Nicodemus thought that he knew Jesus, when he did not (Jn.3:2); the Jews thought that they knew whence Jesus was (Jn.7:26); "now we know that thou hast a devil" , they boasted (Jn.8:52); " we know that this man is a sinner" (Jn.9:34)- and how wrong they were. Those who accepted they did not fully know Jesus will spend eternity coming to know Jesus (Jn.17:3).

It was due to His *knowing* that the Lord gave His life (Jn. 10:15). Knowledge, in its active and true sense, does have a vital part to play. Otherwise spirituality becomes pure emotion alone. To "follow after righteousness" is paralleled with " to know righteousness" (Is. 51:1,7). To know it properly is to follow after it.

10:16- see on Jn. 17:23.

Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10). When the Lord spoke of His people as being raised up put of the stones, as living stones, He surely had Neh. 4:2 in mind- where the stones of Zion are described as reviving, coming alive, at the restoration. The second coming is to be the restoration *again* of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), as if the first restoration is to be understood as a type of that to come.

The cross is the basis of unity amongst us. We cannot be focused upon "that sight" and be divided.

The way in which we are seen by God as if we are already saved on account of our being in Christ is also explicable by appreciating His timelessness. Rom. 8:29 says that the whole process of our calling, justification and glorification all occurred at the foundation of the world. In God's eyes, those of us in Christ are already saved and glorified. The Lord spoke of "other sheep I have" (Jn. 10:16) when at that time we never existed. Likewise in God's eyes there was only one resurrection, that of the Lord Jesus. The resurrected Lord is compared to the sheaf of firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20), as

if those in him rose with him and were glorified together, in God's eyes. Perhaps Jesus had this in mind when he said : "I *am* the resurrection".

10:17 The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final outbreathing was a summation of His daily attitude.

10:18 He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand.

10:23 The Bible does use (at times) the language of the day, contemporary with the time when it was first inspired. Jn. 10:23 speaks of "Solomon's colonnade", but as the NIV Study Bible correctly points out, this was "commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon's time". But the error isn't corrected. The language of the day is used.

10:24 They asked Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person? See on Jn. 16:30.

10:25 The Jews pressured Him: "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly". But He could respond: "I told you, and you believe not: the works that I do... these bear witness of me" (Jn. 10:24,25). Of course, they'd have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His "works", His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was "the [plain] word" which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection. See on Jn. 14:10.

10:26 The Hebrew word for 'hear' is also translated 'obey' (Gen. 22:18; Ex. 19:5; Dt. 30:8,20; Ps. 95:7). We can hear God's word and not obey it. But if we *really* hear it as we are intended to, we will obey it. If we truly believe God's word to be His voice personally speaking to us, then we will by the very fact of hearing, obey. The message itself, if heard properly and not just on a surface level, will compel action. We can *delight* to know God's laws and pray daily to Him, when at the same time we are forsaking Him and His laws; if we are truly obedient, *then* we will *delight* in God's law (Is. 58:2 cp. 14). We have a tendency to have a love of and delight in God's law only on the surface. John especially often uses 'hearing' to mean 'believing' (e.g. Jn. 10:4,26,27). And yet the Jews 'heard' but didn't believe. We must, we really must ask ourselves: whether we merely hear, or hear and believe. For we can hear, but not really hear, if we lack the "obedience of faith".

10:27- see on Mt. 19:28.

The Lord knows His sheep according to whether they follow Him, i.e. whether they take up His cross and follow Him. The question of cross carrying therefore reveals a man to his Lord for what he is. And it also reveals the Lord to His would be followers for who He really is.

10:28 "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28) sounds as if the eternal type of life being given is an ongoing process. Consider the repeated parallelisms in the Lord's teaching:

Labour / work, as Israel worked to
gather manna, as the crowds walked
around the lake to get to Jesus

For the food that gives eternal life

Believe in me	Receive eternal life
Eat me daily, eat / absorb my body and blood, the essence of My sacrifice; have this as your real food and drink in life	Receive eternal life
Come to me, having heard and learnt of the Father	Never hunger, never perish, receive eternal life
Behold the son, believe on him	Receive eternal life
“I am”, God manifested in the person of Jesus	The bread that gives eternal life
The manna of Christ	Gives eternal life
Jesus came down from Heaven [i.e. manifested the Father]	Gives life unto the world
By Jesus doing God’s will	I get eternal life for you (“the world” of believers)
By giving His blood to drink and flesh to eat	Gives eternal life
The Spirit and words of Jesus	Quickens / gives eternal life

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both ‘quicken’ or give eternal life, right now. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life” (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the ‘Spirit’ of the eternal life in us: “He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11).

This unreal shepherd not only dies for the sheep but gives them eternal life, making them eternal sheep (Jn. 10:28). We’d understand it more comfortably if He spoke of giving His life for people, and then them living for ever. But He speaks of giving eternal life to a sheep, who wouldn’t have a clue what that really entailed. But that’s just how it is with us, who by grace are receiving an eternal Kingdom, the wonderful implications of which are beyond our appreciation, due to the intrinsic limitations of who we are as sheep. See on Jn. 15:15.

10:32- see on Jn. 9:36; 17:20.

10:34-36 Here the Jews made the mistake which many do today. They thought that Jesus was saying he was God Himself. Jesus corrected them by saying, “Is it not written in your law, I said, You are

gods? If He called them 'gods'... why do you say of (me)... 'You blaspheme!' because I said, I am the Son of God?'. Jesus is really saying 'In the Old Testament men are called 'gods'; I am saying I am the *Son* of God; so why are you getting so upset?' Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called 'gods'.

10:35 In order to reveal Himself to men, God uses the principle of manifestation through men. The very fact that He should allow mere men to manifest Him, even to bear His Name when they were weak (Jn. 10:35), to allow men to be baptized into His Name (with all the spiritual immaturity we have at the point of baptism)- this all shows a wondrous humility.

10:36- see on Jn. 17:20.

In Jn. 10:36 there's a brief and rare window into how the Lord perceived His life before age 30. There Jesus says that He was "consecrated" [as a priest or High Priest], and then sent into the world, at age 30. That's how He looked back and understood those 30 years of mundane village life- a process of consecration, of purifying, of preparation. He saw that none of the multitude of daily frustrations was without purpose- it was all part of His preparation. And perhaps we'll look back on these brief years of our humanity in the same way. But the point in our context in these studies is that the Lord's mundane life before 30 was actually an active preparation of Him for service.

10:38 It would appear that in John's Gospel, the verbs for 'to know' and 'to believe' are interchangeable (e.g. Jn. 17:8). Knowledge in its true and proper sense leads to faith. Therefore the importance of truth becomes paramount. Jn. 10:38 in the AV has Jesus beseeching men to "know and *believe*", whereas the RV has "know and *understand*".

10:41- see on Gal. 3:5.

Several times during his ministry Elijah did spectacular miracles to confirm the validity of his message. The fact that "John did no miracle" (John 10:41) is perhaps recorded in order to show that he was not the supreme fulfilment of the prophet who would come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17), i.e. doing similar miracles to those of Elijah. Elijah's miracles resulted in the poor widow woman (perhaps typical of the latter-day remnant) accepting him and his message (1 Kings 17:24).

11:4- see on Jn. 1:14; 13:32.

The Lord stated that the sickness of Lazarus "is not unto death, but for the glory of God" (Jn. 11:4). That sounds like a predictive statement. But it seems to have been conditional. For one thing, that sickness did lead to the death of Lazarus. But notice the Lord's later comment to Martha when her faith wavered in the possibility of immediate resurrection for Lazarus: "Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn. 11:40). But the Lord isn't recorded as actually having said that. What He had said was that the sickness of Lazarus would reveal the glory of God. But He had intended Martha to understand the conditionality of that statement- i.e. 'If you can believe Martha, Lazarus can be saved from that sickness and its effects, and thus glory will be given to God'. But again, we see the Lord's grace. She didn't have that faith. She was concerned that even the taking away of the grave stone would release the odour of her brother's dead body. But Jesus didn't say 'Well Martha, no faith on your part, no resurrection of Lazarus, no glory to God this time'. By grace alone, He raised Lazarus. He overrode the conditionality. And so it must happen so often, and so tragically unperceived, in our lives.

11:6 Jn. 11:6 records that "therefore"- because Jesus loved Martha & Mary, therefore He cured Lazarus. Spirituality can affect third parties; in this case, Lazarus was raised because of Martha and Mary's faith. And so it can be that our prayers and intercessions for others can bring about some degree of salvation for them which otherwise wouldn't happen.

11:7,8 Although the disciples marvelled at His miracles at the time He did them, they seem to have doubted at times whether He was really that super-human. When He said "Let us go up to Judaea

again”, they respond like He is crazy: “Goest *thou* [you singular] there again?”, they respond. They feared the Jews would kill Him, even though they had seen Him walk through the Nazareth crowd who tried to throw Him over a cliff (Jn. 11:7,8).

11:11 Jesus believed that He had already raised Lazarus back to life and so He was now asking him to come out of the grave. Presumably there were just seconds in it- He raised Lazarus, and then, invited Lazarus to come out. Jesus spoke to Lazarus as a person speaks to another living person. He didn't invite the immortal soul of Lazarus to reunite with the body. He raised Lazarus from the dead- that was the miracle. Jesus said that He 'awoke Lazarus out of sleep' (Jn. 11:11)- not reunited a 'soul' with a body.

11:15- see on Lk. 8:27.

Jesus seems to have purposefully not gone to Lazarus immediately, knowing that the longer he remained dead, the greater would be the impression made upon the disciples when they saw the miracle He planned to do (Jn. 11:15). He was even glad that Lazarus died- even though He wept over the loss of His friend. Thus His joy, which He invites us to share, is not mere personal joy- it was the joy for the sake of others' spiritual growth.

11:16 There is no record that the Lord corrected the disciples' misunderstanding that He was going to commit suicide in order to “go unto” Lazarus (Jn. 11:16). He let events take their course and allowed the disciples to reflect upon the situation in order to come to a truer understanding of His words.

When the Lord spoke of going to Lazarus, they thought He was going to commit suicide. They hoped He would redeem Israel in glory, there and then. But such was their devotion to Him as their Saviour, even though they didn't understand how He was going to work it out, that Thomas solemnly ordered them, as they huddled together out of the Lord's earshot: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16). I imagine dear Peter solemnly nodding in agreement, thinking of his wife and dear children back in that fisherman's cottage. But he was serving for nothing, for sheer love of his Lord. And he was prepared to die for Him, even if it meant receiving nothing of the present benefits he thought Jesus of Nazareth might bring for him. And yet the Lord demands such devotion from all of us. The tired servant can labour all day for Him, but immediately he returns, the Lord expects him to *immediately* prepare a meal, and doesn't expect to thank us. As it happens, He elsewhere intimated that He will praise us at the judgment, He Himself will serve us (Lk. 12:37). But the attitude of serving for nothing, for no thanks even, must be with us now, in this life.

11:22 Martha understood Christ's power to help, and she prayed to Him (Jn. 11:22 cp. 16:23). But she didn't make the obvious, blindingly desperate request which filled her heart: to bring Lazarus back to her. She simply stated that the Lord could do all things. And she knew He would read her spirit, and see what she wanted.

11:26 When the Lord asked Martha: “Believest thou this?” (Jn. 11:26), is not the implication that Lazarus was raised because of *her* faith...?

11:32- see on Lk. 19:42.

11:34 The Greek thinking minds who read the New Testament were sadly divorced from the Hebrew background which is the backdrop for God's revelation in the Bible. In the lead up to the AD381 Decree of Constantinople, which declared Trinitarianism as the only acceptable form of Christian faith, Gregory of Nazianzus preached a series of sermons in defence of the Trinity. He dealt with the two blocks of Biblical evidence as saying that e.g. in John 11:34, Jesus resurrected Lazarus by His Divine nature, and then wept in His human nature. Gregory utterly failed to appreciate Hebrew thought; he ended up splitting up the Lord Jesus effectively into two persons, rather than seeking to harmonize the two strands which there were within the one person of Jesus.

11:35 He of all men knew the reality of future resurrection at the last day, and He knew what He was going to do. So why then did He weep? He saw how unnecessary was their grief, how misguided. For He knew what He was going to do. And yet He wept with them because His heart bled for them, because He shared their grief (on whatever basis it was) to the extent that He too wept with them. And the love of Christ will constrain us to have His bleeding heart (2 Cor. 5:14).

11:38 - see on Rom. 8:26.

11:40- see on Jn. 11:4.

"If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see (like Moses) the glory of God" (John 11:40). We are being invited to be equal to Moses, seeing from the cleft in the rock the awesome majesty of the perfection of Christ's character; the full glory of God. But do we appreciate his righteousness? Paul likewise invites us to behold with unveiled face, as Moses did (2 Cor. 3:18 RV), and thereby, just from appreciating the glory of Christ's character, be changed into the same glory. Note too how in Rom. 11 we are each bidden "behold the goodness and severity of God" - a reference to Moses beholding all the goodness of Yahweh. We are in essence in his position right now (Ex. 33:19).

John's Gospel contains several references to the fact that Christ 'shows' the Father to those who believe in him, and that it is possible to "see the Father" and his glory through seeing or accurately believing in him as the Son of the Father (Jn. 11:40; 12:45; 14:9; 16:25). Moses earnestly wished to see the Father fully, but was unable to do so. The height which Moses reached as he cowered in that rock cleft and heard God's Name declared is hard to plumb. But we have been enabled to *see* the Father, through our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. But does an appropriate sense of *wonder* fill us? Do we really make time to *know* the Son of God? Or do we see words like "glory" as just cold theology?

The Lord Jesus encouraged us to see ourselves as Moses: "If thou wouldest believe (in Christ), thou shouldest see the glory of God" (Jn. 11:40) is without doubt an allusion to Moses' experience of seeing God's glory- an experience which in Jewish eyes marked Moses out as the greatest man who had ever lived. The veneration in which Moses was and is held in the Jewish world is hard for Gentiles to enter into. A glance through rabbinical commentaries on the Pentateuch will illustrate this well. And here was the Lord Jesus saying that through faith in him, we can share the experience of Moses, we can rise to the spiritual heights of the man who spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

Martha clearly believed Lazarus was now decomposed, and it would make a smell if the stone over his tomb was rolled away. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" was the Lord's response (Jn. 11:40). Clearly she didn't have that faith. So, on one level, she shouldn't have seen God's glory revealed in the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:4). And yet we read straight away that then, Lazarus was raised- despite Martha's 'unworthiness' of it. Such was the Lord's love for them all.

11:42 Jn. 11:42 is instructive- Jesus prays: "And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the multitude that standeth around I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me". What was it that Jesus "said" or commanded of the Father? The preceding context doesn't seem to record Him saying that much. It seems to me that Jesus had asked / commanded / said to the Father to resurrect Lazarus. Jesus believed that this had happened. And so, in utter faith, he thanks the Father for raising Lazarus- even though Lazarus was still silent in the grave and there was at that point no actual physical evidence Lazarus had come back to life. But then Jesus says, believing so firmly the prayer had already been answered 'OK Lazarus, well, come out and see us then' [my paraphrase!]. The whole point was to demonstrate that "I am the resurrection and the life", to confirm Martha's faith that indeed there would be a resurrection "at the last day" (Jn. 11:24,25). It wasn't to demonstrate that Jesus could reunite 'soul' and body- it was to prove a resurrection.

Both David and Christ panicked when they felt their prayers weren't being answered; they felt that this meant they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-4; and consider too 17:15; 24:5; 27:4,8). Clearly they understood answered prayer as a sign of acceptability with God. Christ knew that God *always* heard Him (Jn. 11:42). When apparently God didn't hear His prayer for deliverance on the cross, He for a moment supposed that He'd sinned and therefore God had forsaken Him.

Lazarus had died, and the evident desire of Martha was to see her brother again, there and then. But she didn't go running to the Lord with this desire. She simply and briefly stated her faith in the Lord's limitless power to resurrect, and her knowledge that He could use the Father's power as He wished. He read her spirit, He saw her fervent desire. And He responded to this as if it had been a prayer. He groaned deeply within Himself, and wept- not the tears of grief, as the Jews mistakenly thought (note how throughout the record they misunderstand what is really going on), but the tears which go with the groaning of serious prayer (Jn. 11:33-39). Having done this, He comments: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me *always*". Because His spirit, His mind, was in constant contact with the Father, His prayers / desires were always communicated to Him, and always being heard. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" could almost imply that the Lord prayed for something, and then, after some interval, the answer came. We have an exquisite insight into the Lord's mind and the highly personal relationship between Father and Son in the words that follow: "I knew (not 'I know') that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe". This almost certainly was not spoken out loud; this is a very rare and privileged glimpse into the unspoken communication between the Son and Father. The Lord seems to be adding this almost in half apology, lest it should seem that He prayed for Lazarus' resurrection, the answer came, and He then thanked the Father for it. It seems that this would be too primitive a sequence of events. He says that He *knew* that His request had been granted, and His utterance of thanks for the answer was for the peoples' benefit: that *they* might perceive that whatever the Son asked for, He received from God. But in reality, the Lord's thoughts to the Father seem to suggest, it wasn't a question of His prayers being accepted and answered. His Spirit, His thoughts, were one with the Father, and therefore it was not that His thoughts were considered, accepted and then God granted the request. What He thought was the prayer and it was the answer all in one. His 'mediation' for us is in the sense that He is the Lord *the Spirit*. There is no barrier (and was not any) between His mind and that of the Father.

11:51- see on Jn. 5:4.

11:52 The Lord Jesus died as He did in order that all who benefit from His cross should show forth the love, the glory and the Name of the Father and Son, and thus have an extraordinary unity among themselves- so powerful it would convert the world (Jn. 17:20-26). This theme of unity amongst us played deeply on His mind as He faced death in Jn. 17. He died that He might gather together in one all God's children (Jn. 11:52). Those who advocate splitting the body, thereby showing the world our *disunity*, are working albeit unwittingly against *the most essential intention of the cross*. And in this, for me at least, lies an unspeakable tragedy. The atonement should create fellowship.

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children (Jn. 11:52). Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our ecclesial experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive nature. Again, the basis of our unity is a sustained, individual appreciation of the cross.

The death of Jesus was primarily for Israel; and that whole nation need not have perished, due to the cross. Here we see the depth of grace; their rejection of Him, their doing of their Saviour to death, was actually the means for their salvation. We would have made it the basis of their condemnation,

were we in the Father's position. But potentially, it was the means of their salvation. But such grace was incomprehensible to them. The whole nation, or many of them, *did* perish. And thereby we learn that the extent of the Lord's victory is dependent upon our response to it; so much was made possible through it, but human response is still required. John evidently intended us to see the connection with his earlier comment that the Lord was lifted up *that whosoever believeth on Him* should "not perish" but have eternal life.

12:1 The similarities between the anointing record in Lk. 7 and those of Jn. 12 etc. require an explanation. Could it not be that the Gospels are showing us that the intensity of Mary's faith and love at first conversion was held by her until the end of the Lord's ministry? We need to ask ourselves whether the fire of first love for Him has grown weak; whether over the years we would do the same things for Him, feel the same way about Him, cry the same tears over Him... or have the years worn our idealism away?

12:1 We are each called to witness; and there is no way out. That witness flows out of our deeply personal experiences. If we won't make that witness, then God will work in our lives to bring us to a position where we have no choice but to do so. This was how the Lord worked with the family of Lazarus. The Jews had commanded "that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it" (Jn. 11:57). And "Jesus *therefore*... came to Bethany" (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that "much people of the Jews learned that he was there" (Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. Jn. 12:1 RV informs us that "Jesus therefore...came to Bethany" and the home of Mary. "Therefore". Why? Because the Jews had just "given a commandment, that is any man knew where he was, he should show it" (Jn. 11:57). And therefore Jesus came to Mary and Martha's home. Why? So that they could no longer keep secret their faith in Him. The meal they put on was not just female, standard hospitality. It was, in this context, a brave public declaration of their identification with this wanted man. And the way in the last week of His life the Lord chose to sleep there each night was surely done for the same reason: to lead them to open identity with His cause and His cross. "Much people therefore of the Jews knew that he was there" (Jn. 12:9). And so with us, the Lord brings about circumstances so that our light can no longer remain under a bucket.

12:3 And yet it has to be observed that her response to 'the gardener' reveals that despite it being the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene wasn't apparently open to the possibility that the Lord had risen. Yet surely she had heard Him specifically, categorically predict His death and resurrection. One can only conclude that she was so consumed by the feelings of the moment that she like us failed to make that crucial translation of knowledge into felt and real faith. In gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus, "Mary therefore" anointed the Lord 'for his burial' (Jn. 12:3 RV). It was as if she perceived that the resurrection of Lazarus was only possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus which was soon to come. Yet as with us as we sit through Bible studies and revel in our own perception of Scripture, her so fine and correct understanding was suddenly without power when reality called.

12:3 The smell of Mary's ointment "filled the house" (Jn. 12:3). Yet every one of the 11 OT references to a house being filled refers to the temple being filled with the Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:3,4; 43:5; 44:4). John's sensitive use of language is surely seeking to draw a parallel. She was glorifying the Name by her gift, senseless as it may have seemed in the eyes of less spiritual people. There is a definite connection between spikenard and what incense was made from. What may seem to have no practical achievement in the eyes of men can truly be a sweet smelling savour to God. We need to remember this at times in bearing with our brethren's efforts for Him. To judge them in a utilitarian way is to fall into the same error as the disciples did. The efforts of others are described later in the NT in the same language- the same

word for “odour” occurs in Phil. 4:18 to describe the labour of believers which is “wellpleasing to God”. The way Mary anoints the Lord with spikenard is surely to be connected with how earlier she had washed His feet with her tears. The spikenard was “precious” (Jn. 12:3 RV), not only in its value materially, but in the way Mary used it in some kind of parallel to her tears. She perceived the preciousness of her tears, her repentance, her grateful love for her Lord. And any tears we may shed in gratitude of forgiveness are likewise so precious in His sight

The question arises as to why Mary anointed the Lord’s feet, when anointing is nearly always of the head. The only time the foot of anything was anointed was in Ex. 40:11, when the pedestal / “foot” of the laver was anointed in order to consecrate it. This pedestal was made from the brass mirrors donated by repentant prostitutes (Ex. 38:8 = 1 Sam. 2:22). In this there is the connection. Mary the repentant whore wanted to likewise donate way she had to the true tabernacle and laver, which she perceived to be the Lord Jesus. Her equivalent of brass mirrors was her pound of spikenard. And it could be that she had been baptized at her conversion, and saw the Lord as her laver. And this was her response- to pour all her wealth into Him. She anointed him for His death- for she perceived that it was through death that the Lord would fulfill all the OT types of the laver etc.

Peter’s letters are packed with allusions back to the Gospels. When he writes that to us, the Lord Jesus should be “precious” (1 Pet. 2:7), he surely has in mind how Mary had anointed the Lord with her “very precious ointment” (Jn. 12:3 RV). He bids us to be like Mary, to perceive “the preciousness” (RV) of Jesus, and to respond by giving up our most precious things, mentally or materially, in our worshipful response to Him.

12:6 The Lord evidently knew how Judas was taking money out of the bag. As the Son of God He was an intellectual beyond compare, and sensitive and perceptive beyond our imagination. And He noticed it; and yet said nothing. He was seeking to save Judas and He saw that to just kick up about evident weakness wasn’t the way. If only many of our brethren would show a like discernment.

12:7- see on Mk. 14:53.

Let her alone “Let her alone” translated a Greek phrase which essentially means ‘to forgive’, and it is usually translated like this. The Lord isn’t just saying ‘leave off her, let her be as she is’; He is saying ‘Let her be forgiven’, which is tantamount to saying ‘let her express her gratitude as she wants’. The root for her gratitude was her sense of forgiveness. This heightens the connection between Mary and the woman in the city who was a sinner of Lk. 7.

Mary Magdalene’s understanding of the Lord went far beyond that of anyone else at the time. The record of Mary after the crucifixion has many links back to the woman of Luke 7. She *came to the sepulchre*, to wash the dead body with her tears, for she *went to the grave, to weep there*, and to *anoint it with the ointment* she had prepared. It’s as if in her anointing of the Lord she really did see forward to His death and burial. And yet her initial motivation in doing it all was gratitude for what He had done for her through enabling her forgiveness. The Lord’s power to forgive was ultimately due to His death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 5:31; Lk. 24:46,47). Yet Mary believed there and then that all this would happen, and thus she believed in His forgiveness. Her second anointing of the Lord has within it the implication that she somehow perceived that her adoration was motivated on account of the death that He was to die. “It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial” (Jn. 12:7 New Century Version). The RV of Jn. 12:7 gives another suggestion: “Jesus therefore said [in response to Judas’ suggestion she sell the ointment and give him the money to distribute to the poor], Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying”. Mary Magdalene had kept the precious ointment to anoint Jesus with when He died; and yet Judas was pressurizing her to sell it. And yet she used at least some of it then. This would indicate that she perceived Him as good as dead; she alone it seems perceived the frequent implications in His teaching that He was living out an ongoing death [see *The Death Of The Cross* for illustration of this]. She fully intended to pour the ointment on His dead body, but she did it ahead of time because

she wanted Him to know right then that she understood, and that she loved Him. The argument of Judas for efficiency, central administration etc. is contrasted most unfavourably with her personal, simple and deeply felt emotional response to the Lord's death. She did it at supper time (Jn. 12:2). In Jewish culture of the time, a meal together had religious significance. It could be that she so dwelt upon the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6 that she perceived the broken bread of the meal to be symbolic and prophetic of His upcoming death. Her generosity and totality of response to His death was therefore inspired by what we would call a breaking of bread, which made real to her yet once again the endless implications of His self-sacrifice.

12:11- see on Jn. 12:42.

The chief priests wanted Lazarus put to death simply because "many of the Jews went away" from the synagogue because of him, and it would have meant the tithes were lost or at least put in jeopardy (Jn. 12:11). And this cannot be ruled out as a major factor why they wanted Jesus out of the way too, and why they persecuted the early church so fiercely, seeing that thousands of tithe-paying members were being turned against them.

12:13 It has been so often pointed out that the crowd who welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna!" were the very people who days later were screaming "Crucify him!". It's been suggested that the crowds were comprised of two different groups; those who shouted "Hosanna!" were those who had come up from Galilee, and the Jerusalem crowd shouted "Crucify Him!". But Jn. 12:13 and Jn. 19:14,15 seem to encourage us to make a connection between the two scenes, for "the crowd" *shouts* both times- firstly "Hosanna!", and then "Crucify Him!". Personally I am convinced it was the same basic crowd. They were a classic witness to the fickleness of human loyalty to God's Son. And remember that only a few months after Jerusalem slew Him, the leaders of the Jews feared that "the people" would have stoned them if they acted too roughly with the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:26). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). But this leads to questions, questions which aren't answered by a simple acceptance of humanity's fickleness. Why this *anger* with Jesus, a man who truly went about doing good, caring for little children, impressing others with the evident congruity between His words and His person? How could it have happened that the anger of His people was so focused against Him, leading them to prefer a murderer as against a Man who clearly came to give life, and that more abundantly...?

They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm fronds. These were a symbol of Jewish nationalism- hence the palm appeared on the coins of the Second Revolt (AD 132-135). Back in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple altar, palms were brought to the temple (2 Macc. 10:7); and Simon Maccabeus led the Jews back into Jerusalem with palm fronds in 1 Macc. 13:51. The crowd were therefore welcoming Jesus, expecting Him to announce His Messianic Kingdom there and then. The "Hosanna!" of Jn. 12:13 was used in addressing kings in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It meant literally "Save *now*!". They wanted a Kingdom there and then. His whole interpretation of the Kingdom, extensively and so patiently delivered for over three years, had simply failed to register with them.

It seems that only after the crowd had started doing this, that the Lord sat upon the donkey, to fulfill the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's King would come to them "humble, and riding upon a donkey"- not a warhorse. And, moreover, Zechariah says that He would come commanding peace [and not bloodlust] *to the Gentiles*, with a world-wide dominion from sea to sea, not merely in Palestine. Those who perceived the Lord's allusion to Zechariah 9 would have realized this was what His acted parable was trying to tell them- the Lord Jesus was not out to destroy Rome but to bring peace to them as well as all the Gentile world. A humble, lowly king was a paradox which they could not comprehend. A king, especially the Messianic King of Israel, had to be proud and war-like. The crowd must have been so terribly disappointed. He purposefully abased Himself and

sat upon a donkey. This Jesus whom they had liked and loved and hoped in, turned out to totally and fundamentally *not* be the person they thought He was- despite Him so patiently seeking to show them who He really was for so long. He had become an image in their own minds, of their own creation, convenient to their own agendas- and when the truth dawned on them, that He was *not* that person, their anger against Him knew no bounds. The Russian atheist Maxim Gorky commented, in terrible language but with much truth in it, that man has created God in his own image and after his own likeness. And for so many, this is indeed the case. The image of Jesus which the crowds had was only partially based on who He really was. Some things they understood right, but very much they didn't. And they turned away in disgust and anger when they realized how deeply and basically they had misunderstood Him. They angrily commented: "Who is this son of man?" (Jn. 12:34). In that context, Jesus had not said a word about being "son of man". But they were effectively saying: 'What sort of Messiah / son of man figure is this? We thought you were the son-of-man Messiah, who would deliver us right now. Clearly you're not the type of Messiah / Christ we thought you were'. All this would explain perfectly why the awful torture and mocking of Jesus in His time of dying was based around His claims to be a King. The crown of thorns, the mock-royal robe, the 'sceptre' put in His hand, then taken away and used to beat Him with, the mocking title over His body "This is the King of the Jews", the anger of the Jewish leaders about this even being written as it was, the jeers of the crowd about this "King"- all this reflects the extent of anger there was with the nature of His 'Kingship'. All the parables and teaching about the true nature of His Kingship / Kingdom had been totally ignored. The Lord had told them plainly enough. But it hadn't penetrated at all... The Lord was not only misunderstood by the crowds, but His very being amongst men had provoked in them a crisis of conscience; and their response was to repress that conscience. As many others have done and do to this day, they had shifted their discontent onto an innocent victim, artificially creating a culprit and stirring up hatred against him. Their angry turning against Him was therefore a direct outcome of the way He had touched their consciences. Such tragic misunderstanding of persons occurs all the time, to varying intensities. One frequently finds married couples with such anger against each other that it seems hard for an outsider to appreciate how two such nice people could be so angry with each other. The source of that anger is often traceable to a misunderstanding of each other during courtship. Each party built up an idealized or simply incorrect image of the other; and once they really got to know the other, in the humdrum of daily life, there was a great release of anger- that the spouse was not the person the other partner had imaged. The goodness of who they really goes unperceived and is readily discounted- simply because they don't live up to the mistaken image which the spouse had of them in other areas.

12:16- see on Jn. 14:29.

The purpose of prophecy is that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear, not that we shall be able to predict the future:

- "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (Jn. 14:29).
- The disciples did not expect Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16).
- Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22).

12:21 To know Him crucified was and is to know Him. When men asked "We would see Jesus", He responded by giving a prophecy of His death (Jn. 12:21)- just as the broken bread *is* Him; His death is the essence of Him. He continues by saying that if a man lost his life for Him, then that man would be with Jesus where He is. Those who want to know where Jesus is, to see Him, have to die

His death (Jn. 12:25,26). The fact the disciples did *not* appreciate His death meant, therefore, that they didn't really appreciate *Him*. And they so openly stress this in their Gospels.

12:23

John's Gospel and the Synoptics

John's Gospel frequently repeats the themes of the Synoptic Gospels, but from a different angle and in more spiritual / abstract language:

The Synoptic Gospels	John's Gospel
Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom	Jn. 20:21,23
the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus	Jn. 1: 1-14
The great preaching commission	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV
Lk. 16:31	"If you believe not (Moses') writings, how shall you believe my words?" (Jn. 5:47). This is John's equivalent of the parable of the rich man and Lazrus, which concluded with the same basic point (Lk. 16:31).
The transfiguration	Whilst there is no account of the transfiguration in John, he repeatedly stresses how the Lord manifested forth His glory and was glorified. For John, the Lord's whole life was in a spiritual sense a form of the transfiguration experience which the synoptics described.
The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's	In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that

‘confession’, shortly before Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain.

Thomas’ confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?

The need for water baptism

The account of the breaking of bread

The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.

Jn. 3:3-5

John’s version is in John 6:48-58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.

John expresses this in more abstract language: “The word was made flesh” (Jn. 1:14).

John’s Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but “became flesh” when He was born of Mary.

The transfiguration is recorded in the synoptics, and their records include the idea that it happened “after six days” (Mk. 9:2). John speaks of the same theme of Christ manifesting God’s glory, but he sees it as happening not just once at the transfiguration, but throughout the Lord’s ministry and above all in His death. Interestingly, John’s record also has the idea of the Lord manifesting the Father’s glory after six days. The Gospel opens by describing events on four successive days (Jn. 1:19,29,35,43), and then we read that “the third day” [i.e. six or seven days after the story has begun], Jesus “manifested his glory” (Jn. 2:1,11). Again in Jn. 7:37, it was on the last great day of the feast of Tabernacles, i.e. on the 7th day, that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself. Perhaps too we are to pay attention to the six days mentioned in Jn. 12:1, after which the Lord was crucified and manifested the Father’s glory.

12:23- see on Rev. 7:9.

It can be inferred from Jn. 12:23 that the Lord perceived that His hour had come to lay down His life when He was told that there were Gentiles who wanted to “see” [Johannine language for ‘believe’] Him. It was as if this were the cue for Him to voluntarily lay down His life. The conversion of the whole world was a major reason for the Lord’s death; and thus there is the inevitable connection between His death, and the need to take the knowledge and power of that death to the whole planet.

Through John’s Gospel, the Lord inspired an awareness that the *essence* of His coming, the day of judgment and the future Kingdom was in fact to be realized within Christian experience right now. John’s Gospel brings this out clearly. The Synoptics all include the Lord’s Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion. In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord’s discourse in the upper room. “The day of the son of man” in John becomes “the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified” (Jn. 12:23). “Coming”, “that day”, “convict / judge the world” are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we

have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now. As John Robinson put it, “the Last Assize is being accomplished in every moment of choice and decision... Judgment Day is a dramatised, idealised picture of every day”.

12:23-25 The Lord likened the preaching of the Gospel to a seed falling onto various types of ground, good, stony, etc. In all the synoptics, the account of the sower parable is recorded at length; and within that parable, the Lord emphasizes this falling of the seed onto the ground. Likewise He likes response to the Gospel message to “a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth... but when it is sown...” (Mk. 4:31,32). But the Lord clearly understood the image of a seed falling into the ground as prophetic of His forthcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:23-25). The connection in His mind is surely clear- the preaching of the Gospel is a form of death and crucifixion, in order to bring forth a harvest in others. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

12:23-26 In Jn. 12:23-26, the Lord foretold aspects of His coming sacrifice: “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit [spoke in the context of potential Gentile converts]. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it... if any man serve me, let him follow me”. Here the Lord goes on to assume that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise “bear much fruit”, and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: “I have chosen you... that ye should *go* [cp. “Go ye into all the world...”] and bring forth fruit” (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of “much fruit” through His death with the same “much fruit” being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit. Likewise the Lord had earlier linked the life of cross carrying with bearing witness to the world around us (Lk. 9:23,26). As His witnesses we bare His cross as well as share His glory. See on Jn. 17:20.

12:24- see on Mk. 14:35.

Jesus died a lonely death. Loneliness is a part of sharing in the crucifixion life. The Lord hinted at the loneliness of the cross in saying that the seed falls into the ground and ‘dies’ “alone”- but then brings forth much fruit as a result of that alone-ness (Jn. 12:24). The High Priest entered alone into the Most Holy place with the blood of atonement (Heb. 9:7). Any stepping out of the comfort zone is an inevitably lonely experience, just as the crucifixion life of Jesus was the ultimately lonely experience. For nobody else knows exactly how you feel in e.g. turning down that job, giving away those savings, quitting that worldly friendship, quietly selling something...

The power of conversion, the fruit of many converts / sons (as in Is. 53:10-12) is the cross.

He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7:39 to the Holy Spirit being given at the Lord's death (His ‘glory’), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in

prospect we have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

12:25 "He that loveth his life loseth it" (Jn. 12:25 RV)- we are right now losing our lives if we love ourselves. The final judgment is likened to a winnowing process. But right now, according to Ps. 139:3 RVmg., God winnows our path [our daily living], all day ("my path") and every evening (at my "lying down"). "The Lord sat as king [in judgment] at the Flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (Ps. 29:10 RV); He is just as much sitting in judgment now as He was at the flood, which is a well known type of the judgment to come.

He speaks of our death in the context of His death. Baptism is a statement that we are prepared to identify with His death as the guiding principle for the rest of our eternal existence.

12:25,26- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

12:26 Whoever serves [Gk. 'is a deacon of'] the Lord Jesus must follow Him, and the idea of following Him is usually connected with His walk to death on the cross (Jn. 12:26). We are all asked to follow Him, it is all part of being His disciples, and so we are all asked to be 'deacons' in this sense. Our service is of *each other*; to walk away from active involvement because of personality clashes etc. is to walk away from true, cross-carrying Christianity. In unfeigned humility, let us by love serve one another, and in so doing know the spirit of the Lord who served, and thereby share together His exaltation.

If any man serve me, let him follow me;

"Follow me" is usually used by the Lord in the context of taking up the cross and following Him. True service is cross-carrying. It cannot be that we serve, truly serve, in order to advance our own egos. It is all too easy to "serve" especially in an ecclesial context without truly carrying the Lord's cross.

and where I am, there shall also my servant be:

We can know something of the spirit of His cross. We can be where He was and where He is, in spirit. The life of cross carrying, devotion to the principles of the cross, will lead us to be with Him always wherever He leads us.

John 12:24-26: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me ['following' Christ is normally used by Him in the context of the need to take up His cross and follow Him]; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour". Losing life as the Lord lost His, serving Him, following Him, being "where I am" are all parallel.

12:27 Jesus seems to have prepared His words before praying them. Consider Jn. 12:27 RVmg: "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?". But it appears He decided against praying that.

12:28 The Lord Jesus struggled in Gethsemane between "save *me*..." and "Father, glorify thy name". The glorifying of the Father's Name meant more to him than his personal salvation. Likewise Moses and Paul [in spirit] were prepared to sacrifice their personal salvation for the sake of Yahweh's Name being glorified in the saving of His people (Ex. 32:30-34 cp. Rom. 9:1-3).

When He addressed God as *abba*, 'dad', the Jews would have been scandalized. But this was the experience He had of God as a near at hand, compassionate Father. He purposefully juxtaposed *abba* with the Divine Name which Jews were so paranoid about pronouncing: "Abba, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28). This was nothing short of scandal to Jewish ears. And we are to pray as the Lord prayed, also using "Abba, father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Seeing it was unheard of at the time for Jews to pray to God using 'Abba', Paul is clearly encouraging us to relate to God and pray to Him as

Jesus did (cp. Jn. 20:17). The Lord made a big deal of calling God 'Abba', even forbidding His Jewish followers to use the term about anyone else (Mt. 23:9).

The Lord Jesus prayed out loud: "Father, glorify thy name". A voice came from Heaven saying that God had already done this and would do it again. And the Lord told the listeners that this response came not for His sake, not really as an answer to His prayer, but for their sakes, that in the apparent 'answer' to His words, they might see the power of prayer and the extent of the Father's relationship with the Son (Jn. 12:28-30). But He knew that the prayer had already been answered before it was prayed. And even with us, answers can come not necessarily for the sake of the answer, but to demonstrate other principles. Likewise the Lord asks us to pray for the Kingdom to come, not because this means that a certain number of prayers will change the date, but surely because the process of petition for the Kingdom is for our benefit.

There is good reason to understand that in those wretched hours of crucifixion, God was especially manifested to the world. There was a matchless, never to be surpassed partnership between Father and Son on the cross. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). There the Lord Jesus manifested and declared the Father's Name, His essential character, to the full (Jn. 12:28; 13:31,32; 17:5,6,26). The Lord's references to 'going to the Father' referred to His coming crucifixion. That was where the Father was, on the cross. In the very moment of His death the observing Centurion gasped, twice: "*Truly* this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46). There was something so evidently Godly in that death. God was so near.

"Hallowed be your name" isn't merely an ascription of praise- it's actually a request for God to carry out all the implications of His Name in practice. When we sing praise to God's Name, we ask for it to be glorified- and here is where praise isn't mere painless performance of music. Once we bring the Name of God into it, we're actually asking for action in our lives. Jesus Himself prayed that part of His model prayer- "Father, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28)- and soon afterwards He could comment that in His death, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified" (Jn. 13:31). Thus in the Lord's case, a request to glorify God's Name lead Him ultimately to the cross.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. Thus God was "glorified" in the judgment of the disobedient (Ez. 28:22; 39:13), just as much as He is "glorified" in the salvation of His obedient people. God glorified Himself in redeeming Israel, both in saving them out of Babylon, and ultimately in the future. Thus He was glorified in His servant Israel (Is. 44:23; 49:3). There are therefore both times and issues over which the Father is glorified. He was above all glorified in the resurrection of His Son. Each of these 'glorifications' meant that the essential Name / personality of the Father was being manifested and justified. The glory of the Lord Jesus was that of the Father. He was glorified in various ways and at different times within His ministry (e.g. Jn. 11:4); but He was also glorified in His resurrection and exaltation (Jn. 7:39). As the Lord approached the cross, He asked that the Father's Name be glorified. The response from Heaven was that God had already glorified it in Christ, and would do so again (Jn. 12:28). At the last Supper, the Lord could say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (Jn. 13:31). And yet various Scriptures teach that the Son of man was to be glorified in His death, in His resurrection (Acts 3:13), at His ascension, in His priestly mediation for us now (Heb. 5:5), in the praise His body on earth would give Him, in their every victory over sin, in every convert made (Acts 13:48; 2 Thess. 3:1), in every answered prayer (Jn. 14:13), and especially at His return (2 Thess. 1:10)... So the glorification of the Lord Jesus wasn't solely associated with His resurrection, and therefore it wasn't solely associated with His nature being changed or His receiving a new body. In each of these events, and at each of these times, the Name / glory / personality of the Father is being manifested, justified and articulated.

12:29 His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. "Who hath believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38). "He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, Jesus bore the sin of the world. He was glorified in His death (although the world didn't see it that way), as well as in His life (Jn. 12:23,29).

12:31 The Lord plainly described His death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:30-32). Because there was "no judgment", therefore Jesus died on the cross (Is. 59:15,16). This was the ultimate judgment of this world. There the Lord God, through His Son, acted as judge in condemning sin (Rom. 8:3).

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins; thus apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10).

John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 "The prince of this world"

The "prince of this world" is described as being "cast out", coming to Jesus, having no part in Him and being "judged", all during the last few hours before Christ's death (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). All these descriptions seem to fit the Jewish system as represented by the Law, Moses, Caiaphas the High Priest, Judas and the Jews wanting to kill Jesus, and Judas. Note that "the prince of this world" refers to Roman and Jewish governors in 1 Cor. 2:6,8. At Christ's death the Mosaic system was done away with (Col. 2:14-17); the "bondwoman", representing the Law in the allegory, was "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). "The prince of this world" is described, in the very same words, as being "cast out" (Jn. 12:31).

Caiaphas?

Wycliffe in archaic English renders Mt. 26:3: "Then the princes of priests and the elder men of the people were gathered into the hall of the prince of priests, that was said Caiaphas". The "world" in John's Gospel refers primarily to the Jewish world; its "prince" can either be a personification of it, or a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas' equivalent name in Hebrew could suggest 'cast out'; his rending of his priestly clothes at Christ's trial declared him "cast out" of the priesthood (see Lev. 10:6; 21:10). "This world" and its "prince" are treated in parallel by John (12:31 cp. 16:11) – just as Jesus, the prince of the Kingdom, can be called therefore "the Kingdom" (Lk. 17:21). Colossians 2:15 describes Christ's ending of the Law on the cross as "spoiling principalities and powers" – the "prince" of the Jewish world being "cast out" (a similar idea in Greek to "spoiling") would then parallel this. The Jews "caught" Jesus and cast Him out of the vineyard (Mt. 21:39) – but in doing so, they themselves were cast out of the vineyard and "spoiled" by Jesus (Col. 2:15).

If indeed "the prince of this world" is a reference to Caiaphas, then we have to face the fact that this individual is being singled out by the Lord for very special condemnation, as the very embodiment of 'Satan', sin and its desires, all that was then in opposition to God. This is confirmed by the Lord's comment to Pilate that "he that delivered me unto you has the greatest sin" (Jn. 19:11 Gk. – "greater" in the AV is translated "greatest" in 1 Cor. 13:13; Mk. 9:34; Mt. 13:32; 18:1,4; 23:11; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26). It was Caiaphas and the Jews who "delivered" Jesus to Pilate to execute (Mt. 27:2,18; Jn. 18:30,35 s.w.). But the Lord speaks as if one person amongst them in particular had delivered Him to Pilate – and that specific individual was Caiaphas. If Caiaphas had the

“greatest sin” in the crucifixion of God’s son, we can understand how he is singled out by the Lord Jesus for such description as the “prince of this world”. A number of expositors have interpreted “the Devil... that had the power of death” in Heb. 2:14–17 as an allusion to Caiaphas.

Judas and “The prince of this world”

After Judas left the upper room we get the impression that Jesus started to talk more earnestly and intensely. Immediately after Judas went out Jesus said, “*Now* is the Son of man glorified... Little children, yet a little while I am with you... Hereafter I will not talk much (longer) with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Jn. 13:31,33; 14:30). Because He knew Judas would soon return with his men, Christ wanted to give the disciples as much instruction as possible in the time that remained. This would explain the extraordinary intensity of meaning behind the language used in John 14–17. After He finished, “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, *cometh*...” (Jn. 18:3); “The prince of this world *cometh*”, Jesus had prophesied, epitomized in the person and attitude of Judas. Christ had told the disciples that “the prince” “hath nothing (cp. no part) in Me” (Jn. 14:30). Not until Judas appeared with the men would the disciples have realized that he was the betrayer (see Jn.18:3–5). Jesus knew this would come as a shock to them, and would lead them to question whether they themselves were in Christ; therefore He warned them that Judas, as a manifestation of “the prince of this world”, had no part in Him any longer. For “the Devil” of the Jewish authorities and system, perhaps Caiaphas personally, had put into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2). The whole Jewish leadership were the “betrayers” of Jesus (Acts 7:52) in that Judas, the one singular betrayer, was the epitome of the Jewish system. The prince having nothing in Christ suggests a reference to Daniel 9:26: “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing (A.V. margin – i.e. have no part): and the people of the prince that shall come (the Romans) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary”. Thus it was the Jewish world as well as Judas which had nothing in Messiah, and the system they represented was to be destroyed by another (Roman) “prince that shall come” to replace the (Jewish) “prince of this world”. The occurrence of the phrase “prince” and the idea of having nothing in Messiah in both Daniel 9:26 and John 14:30 suggest there must be a connection of this nature.

Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus because he was bought out and thus controlled by the Jewish ‘Satan’. The fact that Judas was “one of the twelve” as he sat at the last supper is emphasized by all the Gospel writers – the phrase occurs in Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:47 and John 13:21. Thus later Peter reflected: “he was numbered with us (cp. “one of the twelve”), and had (once) obtained *part* of this ministry” (Acts 1:17), alluding back to Christ’s statement that “the prince of this world” ultimately had *no* part in Him. Similarly 1 John 2:19 probably alludes to Judas as a type of all who return to the world: “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (cp. “Judas, one of the twelve”). Judas is described as a Devil (Jn. 6:70), and his leaving the room may have connected in the Lord’s mind with “the prince of this world” being cast out. Those who “went out from us” in 1 John 2:19 were primarily those who left the Jewish ecclesias (to whom John was largely writing) to return to Judaism, and they who left were epitomized by Judas. 2 Peter 2:13,15 equates the Judaizers within the ecclesias with Balaam “who loved the wages of unrighteousness”. The only other time this latter phrase occurs is in Acts 1:18 concerning Judas.

“Cast out”

“Cast out” in the Old Testament at times refers to Israel being cast out of the land for their disobedience (cp. Lk. 19:45). This was what was to happen to the first century Jews. The Law itself was to be “cast out” (Gal. 4:30). The idea of being cast out recalls the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord commented concerning the end of the Mosaic system: “The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever” (Jn. 8:35). The description of apostate Israel as

being “cast out in the open field” with none to pity them except God must have some reference to Ishmael (Ez. 16:5). Galatians 4:29–30 specifically connects the Law with Hagar, and the source of this passage in Isaiah 54:1–7 concerning the calling again of a forsaken young wife who had more children than the married wife has similarities with Hagar’s return to Abraham in Genesis 16. After Hagar’s final rejection in Genesis 21, she wandered through the Paran wilderness carrying Ishmael – as Israel was carried by God through the same wilderness. The miraculous provision of water for Israel in this place is a further similarity, as is Ishmael’s name, which means ‘God heard the cry’ – as He did of His people in Egypt. Thus Hagar and Ishmael represent apostate Israel, and both of them were “cast out”. Romans 9:6–8 provides more confirmation: “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel...but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God”. Paul’s reminder that the seed was to be traced through Isaac, and that the apostate Israel of the first century were not the true Israel of God but the children of the flesh, leads us to identify them with Ishmael, the prototype child of the flesh. In the same way, Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12). I have elsewhere given many other Biblical examples of how God’s apostate people are described in terms of those who are *not* God’s people ⁽⁵⁾.

Notes

(1) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 66.

(2) As quoted in Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1989) p. 29.

(3) Neil Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 275.

(4) See R. Harre, *Personal Being* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984) and many others.

(5) See my *Judgment to Come* 4–8, http://www.aetheiacollege.net/judgment/judgment4_8.htm

12:32- see on Jn. 3:14-21; 19:13.

“All men” would be drawn together unto the crucified Christ (Jn. 12:32). There is a theme in John’s Gospel, that there was disunity amongst the Jews whenever they rejected the message of Christ crucified (7:43; 9:16; 10:19- which implies this was often the case). Conversely, acceptance of His atonement leads to unity.

The crucified Son of Man must be lifted up by our preaching before the eyes of all, so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (Jn. 3:14,15). “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (Jn. 12:32)- but we draw men by our spreading of the Gospel net, preaching to “all men”. Thus the extent of the Lord’s achievement on the cross depends upon our preaching of it.

The lifting up of Christ on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah’s prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection between the Lord’s lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment. See on Jn. 19:37.

The Lord foresaw that if He were lifted up, He would *thereby* draw all men [men of all types, of all nations and languages] unto Him in truth (Jn. 12:32). And a brief reflection upon the effect of the cross in human lives will reveal that this has indeed been the case. The cross was an instrument of torture; yet it inspires men to write hymns of praise about it [e.g. “When I survey the wondrous cross...”]. Men have never written hymns of praise to the guillotine or hangman’s rope. Nor have men made small relics of an electric chair and glanced towards them for inspiration at hard times.

Whenever we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28).

The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The "ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people (Is. 11:2); and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14). See on Jn. 17:21.

12:34- see on Jn. 12:13.

12:35 He had earlier spoke of Himself as the light of the world, meaning a torch lifted up, just as the snake was lifted up on a standard pole. And He had spoken this in evident anticipation of the manner of His death. Yet He speaks as if He was in His life the light of the world, by which men must walk. He was, in that His life exhibited the spirit of His final death. And this is the light, lifted up, by which we must live. There can be no sense of direction to life unless it is guided by the principles of the cross- we will know not whither we go. For those whose lives seems a long tunnel, through reason of their jobs or family burdens, let His cross enlighten our darkness.

12:36 Our belief in any statement of faith should be just that- a statement of our living faith, rather than a mere statement of our intellectual, academic, theoretical opinion. Our lives and personalities above all are our individual statement of faith. The doctrine of the cross, of the Gospel, of the man and Lord Christ Jesus, is to be the centre of not merely our mind and reason, but at the core of our actual life and conscience. For we become like what we believe in- if we believe in the light, we become children of light (Jn. 12:36).

12:37 "Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him" (Jn. 12:37). This was the identical experience of Moses, described in just the same language (Num. 14:11).

12:37-41 John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet He saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

12:38 Jn. 12:38 parallels our preaching or “report” of the Gospel with the Lord Jesus, the “arm of the Lord”, being ‘revealed’ through us. The body of Christ thus witnesses to itself by simply *being* Christ to this world. This is the essence of our calling and of our lives- to manifest / reveal Christ.

Jn. 12:38 speaks of how the Jews refused to believe in Jesus whilst He was still alive- and yet by doing so, John says, they fulfilled Is. 53:1: “Who hath believed our report”. But the “report” there was clearly the message of the cross. It’s as if John applies a clear prophecy about the cross to people’s response to Jesus during His lifetime.

The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ’s sake, then we know His glory.

12:39 Here the Lord combines quotations from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, applying them to His cross. There He was lifted up in glory, with the power to both convict Isaiah of his sinfulness and also inspire his service of the Gospel. Yet Is. 53:1 also applies to Israel’s refusal to hear the “report” of the Lord’s miracles. The Lord saw His death as summing up the message of all the “works” of miracles which He had done, at least those recorded by John. This opens up a fruitful line of investigation of the miracles; they all show something of the spirit of the cross, and find their final fulfilment in the cross. In 4:34 [see notes there] He had spoken of His death as the final, crowning “work” of His ministry. If men understand the cross, then they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and are converted.

12:39-42 In Jn. 12:39-42 we find John quoting the words of Isaiah about how Israel would not believe the message of Jesus: “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes... *nevertheless* even of the rulers many believed on him” (RV). “Nevertheless” shows the wonder of it all; despite clear prophecy that they would not believe, some of them did. The Lord’s hopefulness paid off. And so can ours.

12:42- see on Rom. 10:9.

The answer, I suggest, lies in the way that they misunderstood Him. They liked Him; the Jewish authorities despaired even just prior to His death that “the world is gone after him”, because so many of the Jews were [apparently] “Believing in him” (Jn. 12:11,19); His popularity seems to have resurged to an all time high on his final visit to Jerusalem. The crowds liked some aspects of the idea of this man Jesus of Nazareth; they are described in John’s Gospel as “believing on him”, and yet John makes it clear that this was not the real belief which the Lord sought. John makes this point within Jn. 6:14,26: “When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world... Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled”. The crowd appeared to respond and perceive the significance of the sign-miracles; but the Lord knew that they had not properly understood. They apparently “believed”, but would not confess Him before men (Jn. 12:42)- and such ‘confession’ is vital for salvation (Rom. 10:9,10 s.w.). For all their liking of Jesus and some of the things that He stood for, they willingly closed their hearts to the radical import of His essential message of self-crucifixion, of a cross before the crown, of a future Kingdom which inverts all human values, where the humble are the greatest, the poor in spirit are the truly rich, the despised are the honoured...

The chief rulers are described as believing on Christ (Jn. 12:42), even though their faith was such a private affair at that time that it was hardly faith at all. The positivism of Jesus counted them as believers.

The record parallels not confessing with not believing in Jn. 12:42. We were called and converted *so that* we might give light to others.

Note the grace reflected in Jn. 12:42, where we read that some Jews were credited with having believed in Jesus, even though they did *not* confess Him (Jn. 12:42), presumably because those who confessed Jesus as Christ were excommunicated from the synagogues (Jn. 9:22). Those will not confess Jesus are antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3)- and yet the inspired record is so eager to note that these weak 'believers' were still believers, and their weak faith appears still to have been credited to them. This is a comfort to us in the weakness of our faith- and yet also a challenge to us to accept weak believers as believers. It seems that the record is prepared to accept that some achieved a valid faith in Jesus, even though they didn't confess Him (Jn. 12:42). And yet there are abundant reasons for understanding that unless we witness to our faith, it isn't a faith that's worth much. And yet the record still accounts these who didn't testify as they ought to have done as 'believers'. This is a comfort for us in those times when we know we chose a far lower level than we should have done, and simply kept quiet about the wondrous hope within us.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

12:43- see on Jn. 4:14.

12:47 For judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39), although He Himself came not to judge so much as to save (Jn. 12:47; "not" is also used in the sense of 'not so much to... but rather to...' in 2 Cor. 7:12: "I did it not [so much] for his causebut that our care...". Likewise in Mk. 10:45, the Lord came not *so much as* to be ministered unto, but to minister. He was and is ministered unto, but His focus is upon *His* ministering to us: Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). God said He judged His people 'according to their way... according to their judgments I will judge' (Ez. 7:27 LXX). A man's way, freely chosen, is his judgment. We truly 'make the answer now'. The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection.

12:48- see on Lk. 14:18; Jn. 3:13.

"Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" was fulfilled both in the final, friendless rejection of the crucifixion, and also in the failure of Israel to really believe as a result of the Lord's miracles done during His life (Jn. 12:48). The cross was ongoing in life.

Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience.

They crucified Him because they rejected the words He spoke from God (Jn. 12:48). The language of rejection is used both about the Jews' crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 17:25; Mk. 12:10) and their rejection of His words. Thus Heb. 6:5,6;10:28,29 connect despising the word with crucifying Christ afresh.

13:1 The Lord's conscious attempt to develop the twelve appears to have paid off to some extent, even during His ministry. For there was evidently some spiritual growth of the disciples even during the ministry. There are indications that even before the Lord's death, the disciples did indeed progressively grasp at least some things about Him. John's Gospel is divided into what has been called 'The book of signs' (Jn. 1:19-12:50) and 'the book of glory' (Jn. 13:1 and following). In the book of signs, the disciples always refer to the Lord as "rabbi" or "teacher"; whereas in the book of

glory, they call him "Lord". We have seen in other character studies how spiritual maturity is reflected in some ways by a growth in appreciation of the titles used of God. Although Jesus was not God Himself, so it seems was the case in how the disciples increasingly came to respect and perceive the Lordship of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we see the love of Christ directly, openly displayed. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). "Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us (in that) he hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.).

The lives of both Moses and the Lord ended with a farewell discourse and prayer. Not only do the words of the Lord consciously allude to Moses' words in Deuteronomy, but John's comments do likewise. John's comment that "Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world..." (Jn. 13:1) is without any doubt referring to the well known [at the time he was writing] Jerusalem Targum on Dt. 32: "And when the last end of Moses the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from the world..."

13:2- see on Lk. 22:3.

13:6 The Lord had taught that when one was invited to a feast, they should take the lowest seat. It seems that at the last supper, Peter did just this. There would likely have been petty jealousy over who sat next to Jesus, and there may have been a desire to sit closest to Him as a sign of faithfulness to their beloved teacher. John was clearly sitting next to Jesus, as he was able to have his head on Jesus' breast. And the fact the Lord dipped in the dish at the same time as Judas may imply that Judas was also next to Him. It's tempting to imagine John at Jesus' right hand and Judas at His left. But it seems Peter was the last to have his feet washed. Jesus "came to Simon Peter" to wash his feet, and when he had done so, He commented that now, all His men were clean (Jn. 13:6). This implies to me that Peter was sitting at the end of the couch, furthest away from Jesus. He certainly wasn't that close to Jesus, because he had to signal [Gk. 'to nod'] to John to ask the Lord who the betrayer was (Jn. 13:24). So I conclude from all this that Peter took the lowest seat at that feast- in conformity to what the Lord had taught them earlier. And I imagine it would have been especially difficult, as the order of seating at the Jewish Passover was a classic opportunity to demonstrate a pecking order within a group of friends or family.

13:8- see on Jn. 3:5.

13:10 The importance of self examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at in Jn. 13:10: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet". This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord's meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread which Peter seemed to want to avoid. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same. Whilst forgiveness itself is not mediated in any

metaphysical sense by the memorial meeting, it is nonetheless a vital part of the life of the forgiven believer. When Peter didn't want to break bread, the Lord reminded him that he who has been baptized / washed is indeed clean, but needs periodic feet-washing. This, surely, was a reference to the breaking of bread (Jn. 13:10). The same word for 'wash' is found in Jn. 15:2, where we read of how the Father washes / purifies periodically the vine branches. Could this not be some reference to the effect the breaking of bread should have upon us?

"He that is washed needeth not save but to wash his feet" (Jn. 13:10) was surely suggesting that all baptized believers ("washed") were like the priests, who firstly washed their bodies and then their hands and feet, before entering on service (Ex. 30:21).

13:11 The Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross. Thus we read of the Lord Jesus being silent before His slaughterers, being led out to death as a sheep (Is. 53:7). But this idiom is used about Jeremiah to describe his wilful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ.

13:13 The Lord alludes to the builder parable in Jn. 13:13,17- see on Mt. 7:22. There He says to the disciples, "Ye call me Master and Lord (cp. "Why call ye me Lord...?") ...if ye know these things (cp. "he that heareth my sayings"), happy are ye if ye do them" - instead of bickering among themselves, as they were doing then (and studiously avoiding the opportunity which they had of fellowshiping the sufferings of Christ). Further evidence that Christ was directing His parable to the disciples is found in v.47: "Whosoever cometh to me...". Time and again the disciples are described as coming to Jesus- on 12 separate occasions in Matthew's Gospel alone. The Lord continued: "Whosoever cometh to me and heareth my sayings". It is the disciples who are often described as hearing Christ's words (Mt. 10:27; 11:4; 13:16,18; 15:10; 17:5; 21:33).

13:14 Because Jesus is Lord and Master, and because He is our representative in every way, therefore all that He did and was becomes an imperative for us to follow. Thus: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:13,14). They called Him "Lord and Master", but *wouldn't* wash each other's feet. Like us so often, they had the right doctrinal knowledge, but it meant nothing to them in practice. To know Him as Lord is to wash each others' feet, naked but for a loincloth, with all the subtle anticipations of the cross which there are in this incident. "Wherefore [because of the exaltation of Jesus] [be obedient and] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [i.e. in humility]" (Phil. 2:12). And so it is with appreciating God's greatness; the deeper our realization of it, the higher our response. Thus Solomon built a "great" house for Yahweh, "for great is our God above all gods" (2 Chron. 2:5). Israel prayed to God but without meaning, "though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7). They theoretically knew Him as "the most High" but in their hearts they failed to exalt Him. And so their prayers remained as empty words.

We would so dearly wish for the suffering Christ to be just an item in history, an act which saved us which is now over, an icon we hang around our neck or mount prominently on our study wall- and no more. But He, His cross, His 'last walk', His request that we pick up a cross and walk behind Him, the eerie continuous tenses used in New Testament references to the crucifixion- is so much more than that. If He washed our feet, we *must* wash each others' (Jn. 13:14). Everything He did, all He showed Himself to be in character, disposition and attitude, becomes an imperative for us to

do and be likewise. And it is on this basis that He can so positively represent us to the Father: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17:16).

13:18 This implies that Judas had a heel to crush Christ with, as if Judas was the seed of the woman and Christ the seed of the serpent due to Christ's close association with sin and sinners. However, it has also been pointed out that “To show the bottom of one’s foot to someone in the Near East is a mark of contempt”- E.F. Bishop, *Evangelical Times* Vol. 70 p. 331.

Ps. 41:9,10 is quoted from the LXX in Mk. 14:18,21. Yet Jn. 13:18 quotes the same passage from the Hebrew text, with a slight difference. Which was inspired? Surely, both sources of the original were accepted as worthy of quotation. So from this evidence alone we should be wary of concluding that the differences between LXX and the Hebrew text are mutually incompatible. See on Acts 15:16.

13:18-21 The record in Jn. 13:18-21 implies that the full recognition about Judas came home to Christ at the last supper: “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen (now): but (note the broken sentence structure, showing the pressure) that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me (a sign of fellowship- shown by Judas joining hands with Jesus in the dish, Mt. 26:23; Lk. 22:21) hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you (implying he hadn't been so specific previously about the betrayer) before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he (a reference to Is. 41:23 etc. about Yahweh being God because he foretells the future; the power of this prophecy made by Christ lay in the fact that it seemed so unlikely for Judas to be a traitor)... when Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily (as if to say 'now this really is true')... one of you shall betray me”. Thus sudden acceptance of the situation explains Christ's fear of Judas as described in the Messianic Is. 51:12,13: “I, even I, am He that comforteth you (a reference to Christ's Comforter Angel?): who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die (Judas)... and forgettest the Lord thy maker?”, which Christ was tempted to do by his fear of Judas. The shock of David at Ahithophel's unexpected defection (which forms the primary basis of the Psalms about Judas) must have its parallel in the Jesus/ Judas relationship.

13:21 He was able to attract all kinds of sinners to Him, when those who are spiritually marginalized tend normally to steer away from those who exude righteousness but no humanity. He was real, He really was who He appeared to be, there was total congruence between His words and actions; and He encouraged others in the same spirit to simply face up to who they were. And He would accept them at that. Yet He was real and human; although there was this congruence between His words and actions, consider how His spirit was “troubled”; “now is my soul troubled” (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). Yet He goes on to use the same word to exhort the disciples hours later: “Let not your heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1, 27). Was this inconsistency, “Do as I say, not as I do”? Of course not. The strength and power of His exhortation “Let not your heart be troubled” was in the very way that His heart *had been troubled* but He now had composed Himself in calm trust in the Father. And Peter remembered that, as he later in turn exhorted *his* flock to not be troubled nor afraid under persecution (1 Pet. 3:14).

13:23 John's Gospel is the personal testimony of the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Not that John was loved any more than the others- his point is surely that ‘I am one whom Jesus so loved to the end’. He describes himself as resting on Jesus' bosom (Jn. 13:23); yet he writes that Jesus is now in the Father's bosom (Jn. 1:18). He is saying that he has the same kind of intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus as Jesus has with the Father. Yet John also records how the Lord Jesus repeatedly stressed that the intimacy between Him and the Father was to be shared with all His followers. So John is consciously holding up his own relationship with the Lord Jesus as an example for all others to experience and follow. Yet John also underlines his own slowness to understand the Lord. Without any pride or self-presentation, he is inviting others to share the wonderful relationship with the Father and Son which he himself had been blessed with. John knew his Lord.

He repeatedly describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). Doubtless John was aware that Jesus loved all His people; but John is surely exalting in the fact that the Lord loved him personally.

13:24- see on Jn. 13:6.

13:27 The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial love* for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

13:30- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:62.

13:31- see on Jn. 12:28.

13:32 The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him".

What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of

who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

13:33- see on Jn. 7:33; Mt. 18:6.

13:34 "As I *have* loved you" is another example of how the Lord spoke of His impending sacrifice as if He had already achieved it in His life. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end in His death (13:1). 15:12-13 says the same: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Only the cross can be a strong enough power to inspire a love between us quite different to anything known in previous times; a love so powerful that it in itself could convert men and women.

The Greeks had various words for love, agape (a rather general word, used in the LXX); eros (referring to the physical aspect) and phileo, referring (for example) to the love of parents for children. These terms had loose definitions and are almost interchangeable in their OT (LXX) and NT usage. But then Christ introduced a whole new paradigm: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love (agape) one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). To love as Christ loved was something fundamentally new, and He chose one of the available terms and made it into something else. Christ chose a rather colourless word in the Greek language: agape, and made it refer specifically to the love of God and Christ towards us, and also to the love which their followers should show to each other. This is agape, He says: this is my redefinition of that word, which must enter your new vocabulary. It is true that agape and phileo are interchangeable in the NT in some places; but the Lord's redefinition of love, His placing of new meaning into old words, still stands valid. Not only does the Lord give 'love' a new flavour as a word. He above all showed forth that quality of love. He turned man's conception of love on it's head. Thus He plugged in to the Pharisee's debate about who could be identified as their neighbour- by showing, in His Samaritan parable, that we must make ourselves neighbours to others.

13:35- see on Acts 4:13.

This is John's version of the great commission- see on Lk. 22:32.

The Lord's death was to result in a unity between us that would lead the world to understand Him and the love the Father has for Him (Jn. 17:21,23); and yet through the loving unity of believers, the world knows *them*, that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). We are an exhibition to this world of the relationship between the Father and Son. Hence our behaviour is so crucial. For if we are divided and unloving, this is the image of the Father and Son which we are presenting.

13:36- see on Jn. 21:18,19.

Peter asks the Lord: "Where are you going"? in the context of the Lord going to the cross. Yet later, the Lord pointed out that "Not one of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" (Jn. 13:36; 16:5). Clearly enough the Lord's point was that Peter had enquired about the cross, but not really enquired. And is it that same with us? That we wish to know of the cross, but we are not *really* enquiring as to it, as the personal implications are too great for us? It wasn't that Peter [nor us] was unaware of the cross and the Lord's teaching about it; it was rather that he [and we] failed to let the realities sink home. The Lord had clearly taught Peter that He must lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11)- but Peter wished to sacrifice his own life to save Jesus' having to do this (Jn. 13:36-38). So great was Peter's barrier to the idea of the Lord Jesus having to die. And we too run into this same barrier with the cross of Christ; it's why, e.g., we find it so hard to make an extended study of the crucifixion, why people walk out of movies about the Passion of Christ half way through, why we find it hard to concentrate upon the simple facts of the death of Christ at their memorial meetings...

13:37 When he says "Though I should die with thee" (Mt. 26:35), he uses the word elsewhere translated "must" in connection with Lord's foreknowledge that He must suffer the death of the cross. Peter knew that he must share the cross- but the flesh was weak. When it became apparent

that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake" (Jn. 13:37). He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

Just before His death, the Saviour spoke of going to the Father, and coming again in resurrection (Jn. 13:36,37 cp. 14:28; 16:16,17; 17:11). He somehow saw the cross as a being with God, a going to Him there ('going to the Father' in these Johannean passages is hard to apply to His ascent to Heaven after the resurrection). Note in passing that when in this context He speaks of *us* coming to the Father, He refers to our taking up of His cross, and in this coming to the essence of God (Jn. 14:6 cp. 4, 13:36). See on Jn. 19:19.

13:51,52 The Lord encouraged them that the teaching which He was giving them would enable them to be like the Scribes, but bringing out great treasures from the riches of their understanding (Mt. 13:51,52). This was a great challenge of course to illiterate men, who had been groomed in a worldview of respecting your religious elders. Equality let alone superiority to them was a shocking and radical concept. "Let them alone..." was a hard thing for them to hear (Mt. 15:14). See on Mk. 9:11.

14:1- see on Jn. 17:3.

"Let not your heart be troubled" (Jn. 14:1) is an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:32.

"Let not your heart be troubled... neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14:1,27) repeats Moses' final encouragement to Israel "fear not, neither be dismayed" (Dt. 31:8; 1:21,29; 7:18).

I think it is worth all of us pausing to ask the most basic question: Do we *really* believe that God exists? "Those who say that they believe in God and yet neither love nor fear him, do not in fact believe in him but in those who have taught them that God exists. Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, any anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-idea, not in God". The Jews must have been shocked when the Lord told them to "believe in God" (Jn. 14:1 RVmg.). For there were no atheists amongst them. What Jesus was saying was that their faith was in the God-idea, not in the real God. For if they believed the Father, they would accept His Son. We must ask whether we feel any real passion for Him, any true emotion, any sense of spiritual crisis, of radical motivation... See on Acts 16:34.

There are many other references in the Upper Room discourse to Moses- without doubt, Moses was very much in the Lord's mind as He faced His end. Consider at your leisure how Jn. 14:1 = Ex. 14:31; Jn. 14:11 = Ex. 14:8. When the Lord speaks in the Upper Room of manifesting the Father and Himself unto the disciples (Jn. 14:21,22), he is alluding to the way that Moses asked God to "manifest thyself unto me" (Ex. 33:18 LXX). The Lord's allusion makes Himself out to be God's representatives, and all those who believe in Him to be as Moses, receiving the vision of God's glory. Note that it was that very experience above all others which marks off Moses in Rabbinic writings as supreme and beyond all human equal. And yet the Lord is teaching that that very experience of Moses is to be shared *to an even higher degree* by all His followers. It would've taken real faith and spiritual ambition for those immature men who listened to the Lord that evening to really believe it... And the same difficult call comes to us too.

14:1,2 “Let not your heart be troubled... I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1,2). “Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them” (Dt. 1:41). Yet the contrast is with Moses, who fain would have gone ahead into the promised land to prepare the place, but was unable.

14:2- see on Lk. 14:12.

“I go to prepare a place for you” = the idea of Moses and the Angel bringing Israel “into the place which I have prepared” (Ex. 23:30).

“I go to prepare a place for you....” is surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He ‘prepared the place’ for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was “taken away” from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the ‘taking away’ of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is ‘taken away’ from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord’s wedding to us.

14:2-4 John 14:2-4: “[in response to Peter’s question as to where Jesus was now going to disappear to, i.e. in death] I go to prepare a place for you [through His death on the cross]. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again [in resurrection], and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know [He had often told them of His forthcoming death]”.

14:3- see on Lk. 17:34; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 4:15.

The way He was going was to the cross- not to Heaven. There our place was prepared. He “came again” in resurrection.

The fact we sin and fail inevitably militates against a robust faith that “we will be there”. The Lord predicted how Peter would deny him; but went straight on to assure the shocked and worried disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled [because some of you will fail me]: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you... if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 13:36-14:3). These wonderful words of assurance were in the very context of predicting the disciples’ failure. It’s as if the Lord is saying: ‘Don’t let the fact that you will fail me shake your faith that I will never fail *you*, and I will save you in the end’.

14:4 The Lord seems to have imputed their future maturity to them at a time when they still didn’t have it. ‘You know where I go’, He told them (Jn. 14:4,5)- when, as they themselves responded, they didn’t. He said that they knew the Spirit of Truth, whereas the Jewish world didn’t (Jn. 14:17)- because “in that day ye shall know...” (Jn. 14:20). And this approach will help us with our immature and frustrating brethren; we need to impute to them that spiritual maturity to which we must believe they will rise.

14:5 Here we have our typical problem- we know the way of the cross, but in practice we don’t know- or rather, we don’t want to know.

The disciples were confused as to where Jesus was going and where He was leading them. His response was that He was and is “the way”. C.H. Dodd in *The Interpretation Of John’s Gospel* p. 412 suggests the meaning of Jn. 14:4,5 as: “You know the way [in that I am the way], but you do not know where it leads”, and Thomas therefore objects: “If we do not know the destination, how can we know the way?”. The Lord’s response is that He is the way. That’s it. It’s not so much the destination as the way there. The excellency of knowing Christ demands of us to walk in His way, to know Him as the life right now, to live His life, to be in His way. The way is the goal; ‘You don’t need any further horizons than that, than me, right now’. This is totally unappreciated by the prosperity Gospel.

14:6- see on Jn. 13:37.

“The way” was to the cross, and there we find and see the only true kind of life. That “way” of crucifixion life leads us to the Father, just as the Lord understood His death on the cross as a going to the Father. Because the cross so supremely manifested the Father, there we find Him, if we will live the life of Christ crucified. Yet if we keep His commandments, the Father and Son come to us (14:23), and we come to them. The cross enables a mutuality of relationship between us all. Note too that “the way” is now another term for “the cross”. They were asking where He was going; was He going to die on a cross? And He replies that “I am the way”- that they ought to have realized that His whole way of life was a cross carrying, and so of course, He would be literally going to die on the cross; He would follow His “way” to the end.

“I am *the* way”, the Lord Jesus said, possibly with His mind on the one great way of Proverbs. The whole way of life which leads to the Kingdom, the things we do, our deepest thoughts, our daily decisions; these are all “the way” which leads to the Kingdom; and yet Christ is “the way”. This clearly means that all these things, the very essence of our being, the fibre of our thought processes, the basis of all our works; must be the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact God’s ways and principles are unchanging encourage our self-examination; for there is always the rock of God and His way against which to compare our ways. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

14:7- see on Jn. 17:7.

14:8- see on Dt. 5:4,5.

Philip asks Jesus to “show us the Father” (John 14:8), and Jesus replies that He is the manifestation of the Father. This is the language of Ex. 33:18 LXX, where Moses likewise asks God “show yourself to me”. The answer was in the theophany on Sinai, with the Name of Yahweh declared, as full of grace and truth. This, according to Philip’s allusion to it, is what we see in Jesus. And this is why Jn. 1 speaks of Jesus in terms of the theophany of Exodus, that in His personality the full glory of the Father dwelt. Philip was the one who commented that “two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient*” for the crowd to eat and be filled. Yet he uses the same, relatively uncommon, Greek word some time later, when he says that if he could see the Father, it would ‘suffice’ him (Jn. 6:7; 14:8). Perhaps John intended to bring out the growth in Philip; he now perceived that the bread created by the Lord for the crowd was indeed representative of the bread of life, the Lord Jesus who was the manifestation of the Father. The Lord had taught in Jn. 6:35 that He was the bread, and He bade His followers ‘see’ Him; and Philip had absorbed the point, even though, as the Lord makes clear, Philip still did not ‘see’ Him as he ought.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Father was evidently intended by Him to be a very real, achievable pattern for all those in Him. He wasn't an aberration, an uncopiable, inimitable freak. John's Gospel brings this out very clearly. The Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father, the Son knows men, men know the Son, and so men know both the Father and Son (Jn.10:14,15; 14:7,8). The Son is in the Father as the Father is in the Son; men are in the Son and the Son is in men; and so men are in the Father and Son (Jn. 14:10,11; 17:21,23,26). As the Son did the Father's works and was thereby "one" with Him, so it is for the believers who do the Father's works (Jn. 10:30,37,38; 14:8-15). Whilst there obviously was a unique bonding between Father and Son on account of the virgin birth, the Lord Jesus certainly chooses to speak as if His Spirit enables the relationship between Him and His Father to be reproduced in our experience.

14:9 Jn. 14:7,9 is plain: “If you had known me... yet have you not known me”, He tells the disciples. And yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did “know” Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn’t then “know”, but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that “In that day you shall know” (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to “know” Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively.

14:10 John's Gospel especially seems to speak of the "words" and "works" of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, issuing in the works / actions of this man who was "the word made flesh". See on Jn. 8:28.

14:11- see on 14:1.

14:12- see on Mk. 11:24; Jn. 17:20.

It may be the Lord had in mind that the disciples through having the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would do greater works than He had done. But this raises the question of what is meant by "greater". It could mean "more", numerically. But the Greek word specifically carries the idea of being older, more mature- e.g. "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (Jn. 8:53) in the context means 'Are you older than Abraham?'. So Jesus could be saying that the disciples would do greater works" in the sense that between us we would reveal to an even greater or mature extent the works of God. Because there must be a connection in His thought with Jn. 5:20, where alone elsewhere we meet the phrase "greater works": "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he shew him, that ye may marvel". The greater works that the Father showed the Son were the works which the believers in Christ were to perform subsequent to the Lord's resurrection. The "works" are the works of God Himself. The community of believers in Christ are doing His works, acting as God would do if He were a human being living on planet earth, and in this sense we are doing greater works than what Jesus personally did; for He was 'only' one person, and we are many. And Jesus was aware of this. He explained repeatedly that the works He did were the works which God did (Jn. 5:36; 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). As God showed Him the works He was to do, so He showed those works to the world in which He lived (Jn. 10:32). Paul therefore states that there are good works which are prepared in Heaven for us to fulfil: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In a sense, all the works were finished from the foundation of the world, it's for us to go out there today and perform them (Heb. 4:3). Practically this means that as we contemplate "good works", we can be assured that somehow God will provide all that's needed for them to be performed. Our little faith so often stops us from performing them because we doubt whether we have the resources, the time, the money, the ability... whereas instead the need should be the call, and we should approach them in confidence that this is indeed God's will for us to do His works here on earth. For He has prepared both them and us to fulfil them.

The Lord's promise that whatever the disciples asked, they would be given seems never to have been fully realized in them (Jn. 15:16). Likewise the 'prophecy' that they would do greater works than done by the Lord, once they received the Comforter (Jn. 14:12), and possibly the promise that they would be taught "all the truth" about "things to come" (Jn. 16:13), were all likewise promises / prophecies whose potential it seems the disciples never fully rose up to.

14:15- see on Jn. 17:6.

"If ye love me ye will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15,21,23; 15:10) reflects a major identical theme in Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:16.

The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6).

God is His word (Jn. 1:1); to love God is to love His word. If we love Christ, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping

His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all too easy to see our relationship with God and Christ as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can. In our seeking to know an infinite God, we will of course fail to see or appreciate the spirit of all His words. But He appreciates this. Yet in a sense our attitude to His word is an indication of our state of 'in-loveness' with God. Reading His word will not be a chore, a mountain to be grimly climbed and achieved each day; it will be a vital and natural part of our daily life, as natural and spontaneous as our desire to eat; and even *more so* (cp. Job 23:12). Now there's a challenge; not to relate to God's word *as* we do to daily physical food, but even *more so* .

14:16 Jn. 14:16 promised the disciples another 'Paraclete' or comforter / intercessor, implying Jesus was the first Paraclete [as confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1]. Yet Moses was the foremost intercessor for Israel, and is actually called 'the Paraclete' in the Midrash on Ex. 12:29.

14:18- see on Mt. 18:6.

14:20- see on Jn. 17:7.

14:21- see on Jn. 14:1.

The love of Christ is nearly always associated, throughout the New Testament, with His death. In the perception of that personal love of the Son for us, we have Him manifested unto us personally. This is why personal meditation upon the cross is so crucial.

We show our love for Him by both *having* and obeying His teaching (Jn. 14:21). It is easy to overlook this; to *have* His teaching is a sign of our love for Him. To study and truly *know* His word is therefore vital.

Keeping the commandments and having the Faith in Christ are paralleled in Rev. 14:12. To have the commandments is to keep them (Jn. 14:21 Gk.)- a true understanding leads to obedience in practice.

14:22- see on Jn. 7:4.

The disciples wondered why only they had been chosen- for wasn't God's plan to invite the whole world to salvation in Jesus? The Lord replied by saying that "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (Jn. 14:22; 15:1-11). His function was to nourish the branches, the life which they drew from Him and lived, this would bring forth the fruit which would offer all men salvation. And this is perhaps why initial preaching by bills and adverts in a new area of the world brings forth response, but it dries up once a few converts are made. It is *their* duty to bring forth more fruit in that area. In another figure, Christ is the head, we are the body. As a man may have a healthy head and mind, and yet be limited by the weakness of his limbs- so with the Lord Jesus.

14:25- see on Jn. 1:38.

14:27 "'Peace' ['shalom' - the usual Semitic greeting] is my farewell to you" (Jn. 14:27) is an example of how He seems to have almost purposefully delighted in using language in a startlingly different way. There are times when the Lord Jesus seems to have almost coined words.

The Lord's commission to His preachers comes along with a promise that He would "be with [them] always". This is perhaps Matthew's equivalent to John's promise of the Comforter, who would abide with the Lord's people for ever. The promise of Holy Spirit support in the work of fulfilling the great commission is not necessarily fulfilled in the ability to do miracles etc. It was in

the first century, but not today. Yet the promise that “I am with you always, even [as you fulfil my commission to preach] unto the ends of the world”, is surely fulfilled in the promised Comforter, who is to ‘abide with us for ever’. What does this mean? The Comforter clearly refers to the personal presence of Jesus, even though He is not visibly with us:

The Comforter	The Lord Jesus
Will come into the world	Jn. 5: 43; 16:28; 18:37
Comes forth from the Father	Ditto
Given by the Father	Jn. 3:16
Sent by the Father	Jn. 3:17
The spirit of truth	The truth Jn. 14:6
The Holy Spirit	The Holy One of God Jn. 6:69
The disciples would know / recognize the Comforter	As they knew / recognized Jesus Jn. 14:7,9
Would remain within the disciples	Jn. 14:20,23; 15:4,5; 17:23,26
Declares things to come	Jn. 4:25,26
Bears witness, against the world	Jn. 8:14; 7:7
Not accepted by the world	Jn. 5:43; 12:48
Unseen by the world	Jn. 16:16

Because of this, the Lord made a clever word play by saying that “‘Peace’ [*shalom*] is my farewell to you” (Jn. 14:27)- when ‘Peace’ was what you said when you met someone, to say ‘Hello’. His farewell in the flesh was His ‘hello’, in that His personal presence would be with them. This Comforter, this personal presence of Jesus, is given *especially in the context of fulfilling the great commission to take Him to the whole world*. He will be with us, there will be a special sense of His abiding presence amongst us, because we are witnessing “in Him”, and our witness is a shared witness with Him. Any who have done any witnessing work, not necessarily missionary work, but any witnessing to Him, will have felt and known His especial presence, as He promised. And we live in a time similar to that when John’s Gospel was written- a time when the church were disappointed the Lord had not returned as quickly as they thought He would, when the eyewitnesses of Jesus in the flesh were not with them any longer. John’s point is that through the Comforter, it’s as good as if Jesus *is* here with us; and he brings out in his gospel how things like the judgment, eternal life, the coming of Jesus etc. all essentially occur within the life of the believer right now.

He speaks of giving His *shalom* [peace] to us, not as the [Jewish] world gives it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

14:29- see on Jn. 12:16.

The purpose of prophecy isn't to specifically predict the future, but so that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear. The disciples did not expect Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" in fulfillment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16). Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22).

14:30 There was a Rabbinic tradition that the whole world was under the power of the Angel of death which controlled Egypt at the first Passover, but had no dominion over Israel. They referred to this Angel as the Sar ha-olam, and at the time of Jesus the phrase "Prince of this world" would have been understood as referring to this Angel. This is how Christ's use of the phrase would have been understood. He described the "prince of this world"- the Angel of death and darkness- as coming to him and finding nothing in Him (Jn. 14:30). This would be alluding to the Angel of death at the first Passover (and Jesus was speaking at Passover time) coming to each house and finding nothing worthy of death there because of the blood of the lamb on the lintel. Jesus may have been using the 'language of the day' as He did regarding Beelzebub and demons, but the consistent fitting of the type implies Jesus believed the Rabbinic idea was at least partially correct, in that the whole world apart from Israel was under the control of a specific Angel. However, spiritually Israel were not under the protection of the blood of the lamb because they rejected Christ. The "prince of this world" Angel would therefore destroy them too. It can be shown that "the prince of this world" refers to the Jewish system, perhaps to the Angel(s) that headed it. Christ's allusion to the Sar ha-olam would then have a telling double twist. The Angel whom the Jews thought would not touch them because of the other Angels hovering over them (the real idea of the word 'passover') to protect them from the destroying Angel, was going to destroy them; the protecting Angel which hovered over them and led them through the wilderness was "turned to be their enemy"- i. e. to be the destroying Angel (Is. 63:10), the Sar ha-olam.

14:31: "That the world may know"- an allusion to David's words just before the victory over Goliath.

15:1- see on Lk. 13:8.

"I am". The Lord Jesus in John's Gospel describes Himself in terms of the "I am..." formula. Each time, He was referring back to the burning bush revelation of Yahweh as the "I am"; and by implication, the Lord's audience are thereby placed in the position of Moses, intended to rise up in response as he did.

If we opt out of realistic mixing with each other, we are effectively resigning from Christ. For He *is* His brothers and sisters. He didn't say 'I am the trunk and you are the branches', He said 'I *am* the vine, and you are the branches'. We *are* Him, His body. Our attitude to our brothers and sisters is our attitude to Him. We cannot claim to love God if we don't love our brother. It's as simple as this.

15:2- see on 2 Cor. 4:4.

The Lord Jesus spoke of how we as shoots on the vine tree are either 'cut off' or 'trimmed / purged' to be more fruitful (Jn. 15:2). There is a paranomasia here in the Greek text [i.e. a play on similar sounding verbs]- *airein* and *kathairein*. The point being that the purging process works through condemning oneself now; by going through the realization of our condemnation now, we are thereby purged so that we avoid condemnation at the day of judgment.

15:4 The Lord's common Upper Room theme of 'abiding' in Him uses the same word as Moses used when exhorting his people to 'cleave unto' God (Dt. 10:20; 11:22). This abiding involved loving God and keeping His commandments- all ideas which occur together in Dt. 13:4; 30:20.

15:5 He is the true vine, we are the branches (Jn. 15). To leave the tree is to leave Him. And severed from me, He said, you can do nothing, in spiritual terms (Jn. 15:5). Much as some think they can. And in the end, like a slow cancer, the brother or sister who was offended by whatever, will eventually die in that they leave the vine of Christ. It is from the body of Jesus that there comes nurture and nourishment, supplied by every member of the body (Eph. 4:16). And we, all of us, are the body of Christ. To cut ourselves off from it, formally or informally, openly or deep within our hurt hearts, is to deprive ourselves of the nourishment which He is willing to give through our brethren. It follows from Paul's inspired figure that not *all* our brethren are no good. There's a lot of goodness out there- those who give up lands, houses, parents etc. for the Lord's sake *will* find within His ecclesia a hundredfold of these things. But we will only share in these things if we are willing to look at the positive side in our brethren. For in many things we also offend others. Yet we know well enough we basically are sincere and willing to give to others. And as we expect others to relate to that good side in us, so we should to others. Nobody in the brotherhood is totally, purely evil- at least, seeing we cannot judge in that sense, we should not think that of any. We have to assume that each of our brethren is secured in Christ, and will be in the Kingdom. They have the Christ-man formed in them, however immaturely.

The Lord Jesus is the one vine, we are the branches. Severed from Him, we can do nothing, we will bring forth no fruit (Jn. 15:5). He didn't say that He was the trunk and we the branches. He is the whole tree, the ecclesia. Abiding in Christ therefore means abiding with the rest of the branches. Abiding in that vine involves God's word abiding in us (Jn. 15:7). If we read and meditate upon the word and respond as we ought, we will remain in the vine. Those who storm out of the body (or, more to the point, *consider* doing so), insisting that they still read their Bibles and do good works, ought to seriously consider the implications of the Lord's parable of the vine. Severed from the vine, they can do nothing. Likewise the man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart.

15:6- see on Mt. 13:6; Rev. 14:10.

We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

15:7 My words- see on Job 22:27,28.

If the Lord's words dwell in us, we will ask what *we* will, and it will be done. Yet only if we ask according to *God's* will can we receive our requests (Jn. 15:7 cp. 1 Jn. 5:14). The implication is that if the word dwells in us, our will becomes that of the Father, and therefore our requests, our innermost desires, are according to His will, and are therefore granted. The word of the Gospel becomes "united by faith with them that hear it" (Heb. 4:2 RVmg.). Through the medium of our response to God's word, our will becomes united with His. Therefore the word was what directed and motivated David's regular daily prayers (Ps. 119:164); they weren't standard repetitions of the same praises or requests, but a reflection of his Biblical meditation. He asks God to hear his prayers because He keeps God's word (Ps. 119:145,173). He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. He even goes so far as to draw a parallel between God and his own "reins" or inner self- both of them "instruct me" (Ps. 16:7). His inner self was so absorbed into the reality of God. He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's*

voice as it is in His written word. In successful prayer, therefore, our will merges with that of the Father. His will becomes our will; and *vice versa*. By this I mean that *our* will can become *His* will in that He will hear us and even change His declared will [Moses several times achieved this during the course of his prayer life]; prayer really does change things. Our will becomes God's just as His becomes ours. There is an awesome mutuality between a man and his God as he kneels at night alone, praying and asking for the very things which are now God's will.

Acts 2:28 quotes Psalm 16 concerning Christ's resurrection and ascension: "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance". So Christ's fullness of joy was to see God's face, and He has left us His joy (John 15). This was "the joy set before Him", and it is ours too. This is our fullness of joy, to see God's face, spiritually in this life, and physically in the future. After asking us to let His Words abide in us, Jesus said He had told us that so that our joy might be full (John 15:7,11). So the effect of the Word and of true repentance and turning to God is the same as seeing God's face- it should bring that same fullness of joy. Other passages make the same connection between the Word and God's face shining upon us- e.g. Ps.119:135 "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy statutes".

15:8- see on Jn. 12:23-26.

The Father is glorified in our fruit bearing; but it is a major theme of John that it is the cross of Christ which brings glory to Him. The connection is in the fact that a true response to the principles of the cross brings forth true spiritual fruit. The glory of God is His Name and the characteristics associated with it; and we will bear these if we respond to the spirit of the cross. In this sense the Lord Jesus could say that through His death, He would be glorified in us (Jn. 17:10). By beholding and perceiving His glory on the cross, we glorify Him (Jn. 17:24,10)

15:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

15:11- see on 1 Jn. 1:4.

15:12 We are to love each in an ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (Jn. 15:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in the 21st century. "By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11). As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us.

15:15- see on Jn. 16:12.

We are to be as Abraham- and the watchful Bible student will note the constant hints to this end. An example would be the way in which the Lord Jesus calls us His friends, because He has told them what He is going to do (Jn. 15:15). This is exactly the language God uses about Abraham- because He was His "friend", He showed Abraham what He was going to do (Gen. 18:17-19).

The Lord speaks of how we are not so much slaves, as friends of His, who are obedient to His commands (Jn. 15:15). To the Lord's first hearers, a slave was defined by his or her obedience to the master's commands. The Lord says that His followers are His friends, who do His commandments- but they're not slaves. He seems to be saying that they were indeed His slaves- but

a new kind of slave, a slave who whilst being obedient to the Master, was also His personal friend. It's lovely how the Lord speaks of such well known ideas like slavery, and shows how in the humdrum of ordinary life, He gives an altogether higher value to them. See on Jn. 10:28.

Another example of the Lord's positivism in the last discourse is to be found in Jn. 15:15, where the Lord says He no longer calls them servants with Him as their Lord, but rather does He see them as friends. He has just reminded them that they call Him Lord, and rightly so, and therefore His washing of their feet was what they must do (Jn. 13:13). Earlier, He had rebuked them for calling Him "Lord" but not *doing* what He said (Lk. 6:46- this is in a speech directed at the disciples- Lk. 6:20,27,40). And yet He told others that His disciples *did* His word (Lk. 8:21). He was so positive about them to others, even though they did not *do* the consequences of calling Him Lord [e.g. washing each others' feet- instead, they argued who was to be the greatest]. Perhaps when the Lord says that He will no longer relate to them as a Lord, with them as His servants, but rather simply as their friend, He is tacitly recognizing their failure, and preparing Himself to die for them as their friend rather than as their Master. And yet, as the Divine economy worked it all out, it was exactly through that death that they exalted Him as Lord and Master as they should have done previously.

15:16- see on Mk. 4:8; Jn. 14:12.

Another example of the challenging way in which the Lord treated His men is to be found in Jn. 15:16: "I have chosen you and ordained [Gk. *Etheka*] you". C.K. Barrett shows that *etheka* reflects the Hebrew *samak*, and that the Lord's phrase alludes to the ordination of a disciple as a Rabbi. Those guys must've looked at each other in shock. They who were barely literate, and knew how very human they were, whose small minds were creaking under the burden of trying to understand this Man they so loved... were being ordained as Rabbis, by a man who'd just washed their feet, which was what disciples usually did for their Rabbis. But yes, the Lord challenged them and us to have a far higher estimate of His opinion of us...

"I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go forth* and bring forth fruit... that whatsoever ye shall ask of the *Father* in *my name*, he may give it you" (Jn. 15:16) is full of connection with the world-wide preaching commission; and in this context, *whatever* we ask to this end will be given.

It is not as if the Lord Jesus has said to us: 'Would you like me to die for you on the cross, to gain your salvation?'. Because then we could say 'No, don't do it for me', and we would be free of obligation. But He has taken the initiative. He has already died for us, He suffered for me, He won my redemption. And He has called me to know this and respond to it. I *can't* say, with eyes even only half open to the cross, 'No, I don't want what You did for me. Take it away, no, I don't want it'. He has done it. He has called me. I can't say I don't want it. And for you too. We have not chosen Him of our own decision; He has chosen us, and asked us to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16). Reflected upon, this is one of the most tremendous imperatives which we have to a dedicated life of response to the principles of His cross: justifying the weak, showing a spirit of grace amidst hatred, imbibing the word, being concerned for the salvation of others amidst our own agonies, enduring apparently endless tribulation (notice, and circle in your Bible, all the occurrences of the word "and" in Mk. 15 A.V.)... that principle that *nothing else matters* apart from our response to His love, so great, so free. The whole horror, pain and tragedy of the cross was surely to show us that *He loved us far more than we have ever or will ever love Him*. And yet He asks us to accept His love, to respond to it, to love Him and in that love, show forth His character to others. With shame at the paucity and poverty of our own devotions, we can do little else but respond as fully and as best we can.

15:16-19 The twelve evidently saw Jesus of Nazareth as a Rabbi, their special, lovable, somewhat mystic teacher at whose feet they sat. But the disciples saw Jesus within the frames of Judaism. "What does this mean? He tells us..." (Jn. 16:17) is similar to a familiar Rabbinic formula. But of course Jesus was far more than a Rabbi, and He laboured to change their perceptions. For example, He stresses many times that *He* chose *them* to be His disciples (especially Jn. 15:16-19)- whereas in

Judaism, it was always disciples who chose a Rabbi: "Jesus chose the disciples, but the students of the rabbis almost always chose a teacher". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

15:16,19 "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you... out of the world" (Jn. 15:16,19) corresponds to the oft repeated theme of Moses that God has chosen Israel "out of all peoples" (Dt. 7:6 RVmg.), by grace (Dt. 4:37; 10:15; 14:2).

15:17- see on Eph. 1:5.

15:23 W.E. Vine comments that when the Lord talks about us 'asking' the Father for things (Jn. 15:23), He uses a Greek word which means the asking of an *inferior* (i.e. God) to do something for a *superior* (i.e. us). We see here the humility of God. See on Mt. 6:10.

15:24 Throughout the Joseph record there is the unwritten sense that the brothers had a niggling conscience that Joseph might be alive. This typifies the underlying Jewish conscience towards the Lord Jesus. They knew Christ as Messiah, but blinded themselves to the fact (Jn. 6:36; 9:41; 15:24 cp. 14:7).

15:25- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

"They hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The cross was lived out in the Lord's life.

This hating without a cause surely refers to their crucifixion of Him "without a cause". He again seems to use the past tense to describe His yet future death. There men would see the Father and Son, which has to be connected with John's recurring theme that in the cross men saw what Moses so wanted to see- Yahweh Himself manifested.

15:26 There is a definite link between the power of witness and the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that bears witness (Jn. 15:26); and yet we are the witnesses. We evidently don't possess the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit today, and all spirituality must involve our allowing the word of God to work upon us. So the Spirit bears witness in us in that the spirit of Christ, the joy, peace, love which we show as individuals and thereby as a community, gives as much credibility to our witness as did the performance of miracles in the 1st century. And so Paul told the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance". The "assurance", the power of confirmation, was in the credibility which the Spirit of Christ in their examples gave to their preaching of the word. And likewise in 1 Cor. 2:3-5: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God".

15:27 "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27) was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

The whole purpose of the Lord's life was that He should "bear witness" unto the Truth of the Father (Jn. 18:37). But John also records the Lord's expectations that all in Him should likewise "bear witness" (Jn. 15:27). And as John recounted the Gospel [of which the Gospel of John is a transcript], He stresses that by doing so he is 'bearing witness', living out the work of the Lord who lived as the faithful and true witness to men (Jn. 3:11; 19:35; 21:24 cp. 18:37).

We bear spiritual fruit by God's word abiding in us. If this happens, then God will purge (clean) us through His word so that we will bear more fruit (Jn. 15:27; Eph. 5:26). Thus response to God's word leads to that word being even more powerful to us.

The Comforter: An Angel?

The point has been made by several expositors that as Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God's Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension. A summary of the reasons for thinking this is now attempted:

- Is. 63:7-11 describes the Angel that guided Israel through the wilderness as the "Holy Spirit" - which is the Comforter.
- The Comforter was sent in God and Christ's Name (Jn. 14:26)- the Angel was sent in God's Name (Ex. 23:21)
- The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide (16:13), be a judge (16:8) and prophesy (16:13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God's ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God's Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them.
- The Comforter would "shew you things to come" (Jn. 16:13)- fulfilled by the Angel giving the Revelation to John.
- The Angel testified to the churches (Rev. 22:16)- "the Comforter. . shall testify of Me" (Jn. 15:26).
- The references in Acts to the Holy Spirit as a person are now easier to understand - e. g. "The Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas. . ." (Acts 13:2). Similarly the frequent occurrences of the ideas of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit together fall into place if the Holy Spirit has some degree of reference to a personal being in the form of an Angel. The error of the doctrine of the trinity is not in identifying the three common forms of God manifestation (i. e. through God Himself, Jesus and the Holy Spirit Angel), but in the blasphemous inter-relationships between them which it proposes. This idea is worth applying to our understanding of the baptismal formula.
- The work of the Comforter Angel may have been confined to the first century, in the same way as the Angel was particularly evident to the ecclesia in the wilderness during the initial Exodus period. Thus the words 'Angel' and 'Spirit' are obviously interchangeable in the book of Acts (e. g. 8:26,29; 10:3,19,20).
- In the same way as the angel of Israel dwelt in the temple after delivering them, so perhaps it is through Christ's Comforter Angel that He dwells in the spiritual temple of the New Israel.
- The Angel in Revelation "like the son of man" (i. e. representing Him but not Him personally) was this same Comforter Angel representing Jesus (Rev. 1:11 cp. 22:13,8,16). He carried the titles of Jesus, who carried the titles of God- e. g. "Alpha and Omega".
- We have seen that our prayers are presented to God through Christ by an Angel (Rev. 8:4) and that God answers prayer through commanding His Angels (Num. 20:16; Dan. 9:20,21). This perhaps allows us to interpret the 'Spirit' of Rom. 8:26,27 as having some reference to Jesus manifested in

the Comforter Angel; whilst remembering that Jesus is ultimately the only mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) it may be that the mechanical presentation of the incense of our prayers to Him is done by the Comforter Angel.

- The Comforter is called "the spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls literature, this phrase describes an Angelic Spirit who is the leader of the "good forces" and 'in whom' the righteous walk [*Testament of Judah* 20, 1-5]. The Aramaic translation of Job, and the targums on it, uses the term *prqlyt* to describe the Angelic spokesman [the *malak melis*] who makes a testimony in Heaven in Job's defence (Job 16:19; 19:25-27; 33:23).

- Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet* (AGJU, 1963), brings out many connections between the Comforter and the Angel 'Michael the Spirit of truth' in contemporary Jewish writings.

- When we read of the "spirit of the Lord" snatching away Philip, it seems logical to interpret this as the same Angel already mentioned earlier in the chapter (Acts 8:26,29,39). But this Angel is defined as the Lord's Angel- and the Lord in Acts is nearly always the Lord Jesus. Clearly we are led to understand the Lord Jesus as being associated with a specific Angel.

Additional Implications

The following are some additional implications which may follow from this idea:

- If there is only one Comforter Angel, this has a bearing on the previous discussion about how many Angels led Israel in the wilderness.

- "Ye have an unction from the Holy One (the Comforter/ Holy Spirit), and ye know all things" (1 Jn. 2:20) is clearly alluding to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14:26; but "Holy One" is Angelic language, as if the Holy One was also an Angel.

- The Comforter is 'one called alongside'- is this a reference to the literal, physical presence of the Angel?

- Heb. 3:7-11 reminds the early church of how Israel had provoked the Angel which led them through the wilderness by tempting and proving Him (God cannot be tempted, so this must refer to the Angel). The writer then goes on to warn them "wherefore. . .harden not your hearts", and exhorts them not to be like Israel in tempting God- in their case, a primary reference to the Comforter Angel which was leading them?

- The language of personification of the Spirit is found in 1 Cor. 2:10,11, suggesting reference to this Comforter Angel: ". . . God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit (the Comforter Angel): for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God. . . even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. . . comparing spiritual things (in the word) with spiritual". If the Spirit here refers to the Comforter Angel, then we have a summary of much New Testament teaching on the present work of the Spirit: individual effort of our own freewill ("comparing") is required, for which we will be blessed by the help of the Spirit-Angel in our understanding even more.

- The tongues sitting like flames of fire on the apostles at Pentecost was an Angelic manifestation; the Angels can be made "a flame of fire".

- God "Granted repentance unto life" - the record does not say that He 'granted forgiveness', as if to suggest that this softening of the heart to repent was granted by the grace of God. This is an example of God in tandem with men's spirituality, which we have suggested in chapter 8 He does through His Angels. It is interesting that this action of God is described as being due to "the hand of the Lord"- an Angelic phrase- being with the people, encouraging them to believe (Acts 11:18,21).

- Paul seems to have conceived of God in terms of an Angel; not surprising, if he appreciated the doctrine of the Comforter Angel. This is implied by his exhortation on the deck of the ship: "The

Angel of God, whose (i. e. the Angel's?) I am, and whom I serve. . . I believe God (i. e. the Angel), that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:23,25).

- "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which. . . we were not able to bear?" (Acts 15:10) is surely language of limitation, as if God was tempted to make the Mosaic law obligatory for all believers again. Surely God Himself would not consider doing so; perhaps an Angel could?

- Jude 5 reminds the new Israel of the first century that Israel of old had been condemned due to their provoking of the wilderness Angel- a warning that takes on special power once it is recognized that the very same Angel was leading the early church.

- Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains many references to the Angel of Israel. He uses examples from Israel's history in which they rejected those who were types of Jesus- e. g. v. 9,10,22,25. It follows then that v. 35 must refer to this same aspect of Moses as a type of Christ being rejected. "This is Moses whom they renounced. . even him God sent to be a ruler and a redeemer with the hand of that Angel which appeared to him in the bush" (Diaglott). Israel resisted the work of the Angel supporting Moses, and so years later they were also rejecting the support of the same guardian Angel for the teachings of Jesus and His disciples, the greater than Moses. So v. 51 stresses "ye do always resist the Holy Spirit (the title of the Comforter Angel in Is. 63): as your fathers did, so do ye". Their fathers resisted the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century were doing just the same.

- If the Hebrew phrase "the living God" means, as suggested by some, 'the God of the living ones', then "the living God" would refer to the great Angel who dwelt between the Cherubim "living ones". 1 Tim. 3:15 then appears in a new light: "The church of the living God" - the church dwelt in by the mighty Angel of the Old Testament Cherubim. The Angel dwelling and walking in the ecclesia in the wilderness is linked with God- the same Angel? -living and walking in the Christian ecclesia (2 Cor. 6:16). It was because of the presence of this and other important Angels in the ecclesia that Paul could charge Timothy "before. . . the elect Angels" (1 Tim. 5:21), who were present physically at the ecclesia's meetings. Indeed, this may be the very reason why he asks sisters in Corinth to have covered heads at ecclesial meetings "because of the Angels", i. e. their especial presence there.

"He, the Spirit (Angel) of truth. . . will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come" (John 16:13). As I understand it, the work of the Holy Spirit Comforter was initially achieved through the miraculous gifts, and now through the spiritual strength we receive from the written word. Thus nearly all the statements made about the Comforter are also made concerning the written word (e. g. Jn. 15:26; 16:13 cp. 17:17; 16:8 cp. 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2; Titus 1:9; 16:8 cp. 12:40). The Angels being closely associated with inspiration, notably of the Revelation, the Comforter Angel now largely achieves His aims through the written word He has inspired. "Things to come" were shown us by the Comforter Angel inspiring Revelation, the ultimate prophecy of the future. The Comforter was to make known everything that was told Him. It therefore follows that even the mighty Comforter Angel only has the same words of prophecy to study regarding the future unfolding of God's purpose as we have. Therefore they with us earnestly look into these things, and search "what manner of time" must elapse before the final fulfilment of God's word.

16:1 The discourse in the upper room was intended by the Lord "to prevent your faith from being shaken" or, literally, 'scandalized' (Jn. 16:1). And yet He uses the same word to predict how "This night you will all be scandalized because of me" (Mt. 26:31). He knew they would stumble, or be 'scandalized'. Yet He hoped against hoped that they would not be; so positive was His hope of them. And exactly because He was like this, the pain of their desertion and stumbling would have been so

much the greater. And the Lord who is the same today as yesterday goes through just the same with us, hour by hour.

16:2 Realizing the need of each believer for the brotherhood will lead us to be more than careful before ever evicting anyone from our association. Indeed, forced expulsion from any social group is highly damaging to the victim. The Lord appreciated this when He said that when His followers were cast out of the synagogues, then they would be likely to stumble (Jn. 16:1,2). They were excommunicated exactly because of their faith in Him; and yet He foresaw that in the aftermath of that rejection, emotionally, sociologically, economically, they would be likely to stumble. Eviction of anyone from our fellowship ought therefore never to be done lightly, if ever. For by doing so, we are likely to make them stumble from the path to eternity; and nobody would want such a millstone around their neck at judgment day. We may in this life appear to be 'keeping the truth pure', 'doing the right thing' - but the Lord will judge the effect we had upon another's path to Him.

Initially, as we see from e.g. John's Gospel, the core issue in Christianity revolved around simply believing in Jesus. But soon, as we see from John's letters, it became important to counter wrong beliefs *about* Jesus. As controversy over interpretation developed, it was almost inevitable that the arguments led to exaggerations on both sides. We see it happen in political arguments today- the supporters of candidate X respond to criticisms of him by painting him as more exalted, wonderful and even Divine than he really ever could be. And as they do so, the critics become even more virulently against them. This is the nature of controversy. And as the Jews began expelling Christians from their synagogues (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and inventing many slanderous stories about Jesus, it was inevitable that those without a solid Biblical grounding in their faith would *react* rather than *Biblically respond* to this- by making Jesus out to be far more 'Divine' than He was.

The apostate among God's people, both in Old and New Testaments, sunk to the most unbelievable levels, but sincerely felt that they were doing God's will. These things included killing righteous prophets (Jn. 16:2), turning the breaking of bread service into a drunken orgy (1 Cor. 11:21), and turning prostitution within the ecclesia into a spiritual act (Rev. 2:20). For believers to come to the conclusion that such things were the will of God surely they were not just misinterpreting Scripture. There was an extra-human power of delusion at work. We have seen in the above verses that God is responsible for this kind of thing. Note that the Bible knows nothing of a super-human devil who does all this.

The early believers were initially members of the synagogues, and Paul always visited the synagogue services in his travels. Peter and John went up to pray in the temple at the ninth hour along with everyone else (Acts 3:1). Early ecclesial meetings were based upon the synagogue system (James 2:2). The Lord didn't tell them to leave because they might catch some 'guilt by association'. He knew that if they forthrightly preached the Truth, they would be excommunicated: "the time will come when they will expel you from their synagogues", He had foretold; as if He expected them to stay there until they were chased away. Those who reject the Lord Jesus will treat us likewise (Jn. 15:18-21). However, it must be said that the Lord was perhaps making some concession to the weakness of His new people by allowing them to remain members of the synagogue system, and keep parts of the Law. As the New Testament period progressed, the Holy Spirit through Paul increasingly urged upon the believers the need to cast out the bondwoman of Judaism, to trust completely in grace not law. Consider, too, Paul's command in 1 Cor. 11:14 that brethren do *not* wear head coverings in ecclesial meetings. Assuming this to have been a universal principle which he intended to be followed in all ecclesias [and the reasons he gives are based upon universal principles], this was really signalling an exit from the synagogues, where men *had* to attend with covered head. Now they could no longer go on attending the synagogues to fulfil their Christian worship; they had to realize the extent of the implications of the Lordship and Headship of Christ, as the image and glory of God. Yet sadly, the brethren increasingly returned to the synagogues rather than separated from them.

16:3 Not knowing the Father and Son was the reason why they killed the Lord (Acts 13:27,28). Because they killed Him, we must expect persecution at their hands. John stresses that because they knew not the Father nor Son, they crucified Jesus (8:19,28; 15:21). This sheds light on 17:3: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". Knowing the Father and Son means to discern the meaning of the cross. And this is life eternal, in the same way as water of life comes from the smitten rock, and as the bread of life is in the flesh that was given on the cross for the life of the world.

16:5- see on Jn. 13:36-38.

16:6 Indeed, the whole of the Lord's last discourse to the twelve reflects His positive view of them- at the very time when their commitment to Him was in some ways at its lowest ebb. For they all forsook Him in His hour of need. He comments that they are filled with sorrow because of their misunderstanding about His departure from them. But He goes on to liken this sorrow to the sorrow of a woman in labour, who forgets that sorrow as soon as her child is born (Jn. 16:6, 20-22). In the analogy, the travailing woman is the disciples, and the new born child is the resurrected Jesus. For "then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord". Their 'sorrow' was thereby interpreted by the Lord as their longing and striving towards His resurrection. But this is a very positive way of interpreting their sorrow. Their sorrow was based on their misunderstanding (Jn. 16:6). Yet the Lord saw that deep underneath that sorrow, even though they didn't perceive it themselves, they were actually yearning for His resurrection. This was partly due to His penetration of their psychology, but it also reflects the simple fact that He certainly counted them as more spiritual than they actually were. He tells them to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full", having just defined their future joy as the joy of seeing Him risen from the dead (Jn. 16:24,22). But did they ask to see His resurrection? Not as far as we know; for He upbraids them with their slowness to believe His predictions of resurrection. But despite all that, He said that they *would* have that joy which would come from asking to see Him risen from the dead. They didn't ask for this, but they would still have the joy. Why? Because He perceived them to have 'asked' for what they didn't actually ask for in so many words. He read their basic inner yearning for Him as a prayer for His resurrection, even though they were far from understanding that He would ever rise again once dead. It's rather like God saying that the righteous remnant in Jerusalem had shaken their head at the Assyrian invaders and laughed at them in faith- when this was certainly not the case on the surface (Is. 37:22). And this Lord is our Lord today, interpreting our innermost, unarticulated desires as prayers to the Father (Rom. 8:26,27).

16:11 "The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned.

16:12 The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh.

16:13 Spirit- an Angel? See on 1 Jn. 4:1; Jn. 14:12.

16:16 If I go... I will come again... A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to my father" (Jn. 14:3; 16:16). This may refer to Moses going up and down the mountain, disappearing from Israel's sight, and then returning with the covenant- to find Israel worshipping the golden calf.

The New Testament speaks in challenging terms of how real is to be our relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Lord's enigmatic words of Jn. 16:16 indicate just *how* close the Comforter was to make Him come to His people once He was in Heaven: "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father". I suggest that the "little while" in each clause is one and the same. In "a little while" they would not see Him physically, but exactly because He would be with the Father, He would send the Comforter, and enable His people to 'see' Him in the sense that John usually speaks of in his Gospel. This 'seeing' of Jesus, this perception of Him, is effectively a 'seeing' of the Father.

It's easy to misinterpret Jn. 16:16: "A little while and ye behold me no more... ye shall see me". Elsewhere in John, beholding or seeing the Son doesn't refer to physically seeing Him, but rather to understanding and believing in Him (Jn. 1:14,29,36,50; 6:40; 12:21; 14:9,19; 17:24 etc.). The Lord surely meant: 'Soon, you will no longer see / understand / believe me... but, in the end, you *will* understand / believe in me'. And John, the author or speaker of this Gospel record, was one of those being referred to. So he, and all the disciples, would've been appealing to people to see / understand / believe in Jesus, whilst openly telling them that they themselves had once lost that understanding / belief which they once had, even though they regained it later.

16:17- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

16:21 The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we chose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off at the last day. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man...shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14). See on Mt. 3:11.

16:23 Moses cried to Yahweh to take away the frogs, "and Yahweh did according to the word of Moses" (Ex. 8:12,13); the requests of prayer become almost a command to God; by His grace, we will ask what we will and He will do it for us (Jn. 16:23). W.E.Vine makes the point that the Greek here implies a superior asking an inferior to do something. Not only is this an essay in the humility of God's self-revelation, but it surely shows how if we seriously believe in the power of prayer, what we request really will be given. "Thou shalt also decree a thing (in prayer) and it shall be established unto thee" (Job 22:28). Rev. 9:13 portrays prayer as a command to the Angels. The prayer of command is to be found in the well known words of Ps. 122. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem", David exhorts. And the response [made so much clearer when the Psalm is sung]: "Peace be within thy walls... I will now say, Peace be within thee" (Ps. 122:6-8). The way peace is 'commanded' to be in Jerusalem by those who pray is because they so believe that the answer will surely come.

The wonder of the resurrection would totally affect our attitude to asking for things, the Lord taught in Jn. 16:23,26. "In that day [of marvelling in the resurrected Lord], ye shall ask me nothing... if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you [RV]... in that day you shall ask in my name...". What are we to make of all this talk of asking and not asking, in the 'day' of the resurrected Lord Jesus? My synthesis of it all is this: Due to the sheer wonder of the resurrection of the Lord, we will not feel the need to ask for anything for ourselves. The gift of freedom from sin is

enough. Because if God gave us His Son and raised Him from the dead, we will serve for nothing, for no extra 'perks' in this life; and yet, wonder of wonders, *if* we shall ask, in His Name, we will receive. But we must ask whether the implications and wonder of the fact of the Lord's resurrection have had such an effect upon us...?

16:25 The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet they got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" (*parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke *to them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

God was especially in Christ at His death. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

John's references to the hour coming nearly always refer to the crucifixion. Jn. 16:25 must be interpreted in this context: "The hour comes, when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall show you plainly of the Father". The plain showing forth of the Father was in the naked body of His crucified Son; there, all the theory which Jesus had taught was exemplified in stark, plain terms. The Father was ultimately revealed. Isa 64:1-4 had foretold: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence... For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him". This latter verse is quoted in 1 Cor. 2 about how the "foolishness" of the cross is not accepted by the wise of this world. Only the humble and spiritually perceptive eye of faith realized that there in the naked shame of Golgotha, God Himself had rent the heavens and come down, as all the faithful had somehow, in some sense foreseen and yearned for. There, in the battered body of Jesus, was God revealed to men.

As noted on Jn. 2:4; 4:21-23 and 5:25-29, the hour that was to come is a reference to the cross. There, we see and hear the preaching / word of ['which is', Gk.] the cross. There on the cross, there was no allegory. There we were shown plainly the Father. He went on: "Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (16:32). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. Philip had just asked to be shown the Father, just as Moses had asked (14:9,10). And the Lord is saying that in the cross, they will see plainly of the Father. And perhaps therefore we are to understand 17:24 as meaning that Jesus prayed that the disciples would physically see and spiritually understand His cross: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". "I am", "my glory", given by the Father, and the lamb slain from "the foundation of the world"...this is all language of the cross.

16:26- see on Mt. 6:13; 1 Pet. 2:5.

This unity of Spirit between us, the Son and the Father explains an apparent contradiction in the Lord's discourse in the upper room: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *me* anything (being) in my name, that will I do

(Jn. 14:13,14 RV)... If ye shall ask anything of *the Father*, he will give it you in my name... and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:23,26 RV). Who do we pray to? The Father, or the Son? Who 'does' the answer to our prayers? God, or Christ? The context of the Lord's words was that "the Father is with me... I am in the Father, and the Father is in me... the Father abiding in me doeth the works", even as the believers are in the Son and in the Father, as they are in us. This means that the question of who to pray to is on one level irrelevant. Our spirit bears witness with their Spirit, and there is only one spirit. This unity of the believer with the Father is only made possible through the Son, and so our formal prayers should be addressed to God through Christ, in recognition of this fact. But as we have seen, the essence of prayer is not formal request. To pray "in my name" could mean 'in union with me'; yet Christ was at one with the Father. The Psalmist petitioned Yahweh to hear him "for His Name's sake" (Ps. 25:11), just as we are to pray to Jesus 'in His Name'. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27) without us verbalizing our spirit in formal prayer. In the same way as the priests helped / assisted the Old Testament worshippers rather than actually offered their prayers or sacrifices, so with the Lord Jesus. Paul spoke of how he would be helped "through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus" (Phil. 1:19 RSV). Their prayers ascended directly to God, but the response was helped by the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mental desire to help; and because He is so sublimely at one with the Father, this means that the help will surely come. The rapport between our spirit and His Spirit is again reflected by the way Rom. 8:6,27 use the same phrase, "the mind of the spirit", to describe firstly the mind of *our* spirit, and then, the mind of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

We are told that we will no longer need Christ to ask the Father for us, we will be able to have a direct relationship with the Father in prayer (Jn. 16:26). We will not need to be like the disciples, who in their immaturity asked Jesus to pass on their requests to God (Jn. 11:22). He sees our spirit anyway, He knows our need anyway; this knowledge doesn't depend on the Lord's mediation. And yet against this we must balance the undoubted fact that the Lord is in fact our advocate and interceder. The advocate identifies with the one he helps, stands next to him, knowing his case fully. But as Christ is our advocate, so we should be to our brethren ("comfort" in 2 Cor. 2:7 is s.w. 1 Jn. 2:1). This doesn't necessarily mean that we interpret our brother's words to God, but rather than we pray for our brother, in our own words; we are with our brother, supporting him, knowing his weakness. So on one hand we have a direct relationship with the Father. On the other, the Lord Jesus is our vital, saving advocate with Him. I don't think these two aspects can be reconciled by re-translation or expositional juggling. The fact is, through what the Lord achieved, we theoretically don't need His mediation. He was our High Priest to bring us to God on the cross. He no longer needs to enter into the Holiest Place (cp. heaven) to gain our atonement, for this He did once for all (Heb. 9:26). We should be able to pray with the earnest intensity of Elijah or Moses, who prayed without an intercessor, and were heard. But we lack that intensity. And therefore the Lord Jesus holds up our feeble 'groanings' before the Father. Likewise He is our 'advocate', although theoretically a righteous man doesn't need an advocate. John almost writes as if 'Of course, you won't sin, but if very occasionally you do, Jesus can act as a powerful advocate for you'. And yet in reality, He is acting in the advocate role for much of our sin-stricken lives.

16:27 Consider Jn. 16:27,30-32:

Jesus: "You...have believed that I came out from God"

Disciples: "[Yes], we believe that thou camest forth from God"

Jesus: "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone".

Although they didn't really believe, He said that they did. He wasn't so in love with them that He was blind to their failures. But He was all the same so positive about their practically non-existent faith. And what's more, He goes on to tell the Father His positive perspective on their faith:

"They...have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send

me" (Jn. 17:8). But the Lord had only just been telling the disciples that they *didn't* really believe that He had come out from God...! Yet He counted them as if they did, and reflected this to the Father in prayer. And this is surely how the Lord intercedes for us today.

16:30- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: " You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person.

16:31- see on Jn. 17:6.

"Do ye now believe? (said almost sarcastically)... ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" - cp. Joshua and Moses in their goodbye speeches questioning Israel whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away.

16:31,32- see on Mt. 28:10.

16:32- see on Jn. 10:5.

"Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. See on Jn. 19:19.

Each of them ran off to their own little family, to safeguard their own petty little human possessions, and left Him alone; alone, when He most needed some human comfort and compassion, a wave from a friend in the crowd, a few silently mouthed words, a catching of the eye, perhaps even the courtesy of a brief hand-shake or clap on the shoulders before the 11 ran off into the night, the word 'thank-you' called out as He stumbled along the Via Dolorosa. But nothing. They cleared off, they got out, every man to his own. And the pain of betrayal with a kiss by a man He was gracious enough to think of as His equal, with whom He had shared sweet fellowship (Ps. 55:13,14). And to hear Peter's cursing, perhaps cursing of Him; his denial that he'd ever known the guy from Nazareth. And yet in the face of *all this*, the Lord went on: He laid down His life *for us*, we who betrayed Him, scattered from Him, hated Him, did Him to death in the most degrading and painful way our race knew how. In the face of rejection to the uttermost, He served us to the end, even to death, and even to the death of the cross.

17:1 The echoes of Deuteronomy in the Lord's goodbye speeches shouldn't be missed; for Moses at this time truly was a superb type of the Lord Jesus. Deuteronomy concludes with two songs of Moses, one addressed to the Father (Dt. 32), and the other to his people (Dt. 33). It is apparent that the Lord's final prayer in Jn. 17 is divisible into the same two divisions- prayer to the Father, and concern for His people. It has been observed that the prayer of Jn. 17 is also almost like a hymn- divided into seven strophes of eight lines each. It would appear to be John's equivalent to the record in Mk. 14:26 of a hymn being sung at the end of the Last Supper.

The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

17:2 The connection between the universal authority of the Lord and the need to preach it is made in Jn. 17:2,3: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, *that* he should give eternal life to [men]... and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". The great commission says that because He has power over all flesh, therefore we must preach Him. Jn. 17:2 says that because He has this power, He can give men eternal life through the knowledge of Him. The extent of our obedience to the preaching commission- and who can argue that we don't have freewill as to the extent to which we fulfil any command- this is the extent to which eternal life is given to men. Their eternal destiny is placed in our hands. The authority to save all men and women has been given to the Lord, but the extent to which this becomes reality depends upon our preaching it.

17:3- see on Jn. 10:15; 1 Jn. 1:3.

He usually speaks of Himself in the third person- e.g. "the son"; but in Jn. 17:3 He refers to Himself in prayer to the Father as "Jesus Christ", as if He was consciously aware of how we would later see Him.

Images of Jesus matter. He will say to many in the last day that He has never known them, for they never knew Him- for all their pure doctrine and good works. Life eternal is about knowing God and Jesus (Jn. 17:3)- and the Greek word here doesn't mean to merely know in an academic sense, but to know intimately and personally. Only if we *really* see / perceive the Son will we be saved; "you have seen me and yet believe not" the Lord told the Jews, warning them that only those who see the Son *and* believe in Him will have eternal life (Jn. 6:36, 40). If we really know the Son then we will likewise know His love and sacrifice is enough to truly grant us the life eternal. If we truly see the Son and believe in Him, then we will know that we (will have) eternal life- because His grace, His love, His desire to save will be so clearly evident to us through the study and knowledge of His personality. If we know Him, we will be sure of our salvation. Knowing Him, coming to know Him, is this important. We will be humbly confident that in the very, final end- we will be there. There is therefore the factual, doctrinal 'knowledge' or 'seeing' which by grace has been granted us. But beyond that there is the true seeing and believing into the Man Jesus, with the definite Hope which that brings. If we *truly* know Him we will count literally all else as loss (Phil. 3:8).

We should not be in the faith, labouring towards the Kingdom, just so that we personally can have eternal life. Indeed, "eternal life" in John's Gospel refers to knowing and understanding God rather than simply to infinity (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20).

As God is infinite, it will take eternity to get to know Him. Life eternal will be all about getting to know God and Jesus (Jn.17:3). By all means compare this with how David saw the Kingdom as a time of *enquiring* after God in His temple (Ps.27:4).

According to Jn. 17:3 and its various Old Testament foundations, to know God is to live for ever. Eternal life is all about knowing His Name. Hos. 6:2,3 LXX puts it like this: "We shall rise [from the dead] and live in His presence, and have knowledge; we shall press forward to know the Lord". If we start knowing God now, and press ever forward to know His Name yet more... we have started the essence of the life which we will eternally live. And of course 'knowing the Lord' involves a personal union with Christ, experience and relationship with Him, of which intellectual knowledge is only a part. For in John's Gospel, seeing, knowing and believing are related; "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:7-9) is paralleled with "If you believe in God, believe in me" (Jn. 14:1).

We start the process of knowing the Father's Name in this life; and in this sense we embark upon what will be for us [by His grace] the experience of the eternal life.

17:5- see on Jn. 1:14.

Significantly, the idea of 'apocalypse' alludes to this Jewish idea of predestined things 'existing' in Heaven with God; for 'apocalypse' means literally an unveiling, a revealing of what is [in Heaven]. In this sense the believer at the resurrection will receive what was already laid up in store for him or her in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; Mt. 25:34). Because of this, Hebrew can use past tenses to speak of that which is future (e.g. Is. 5:13; 9:2,6,12; 10:28; 28:16; 34:2; Gen. 15:18 cp. Acts 7:5). Things can thus "be" before they are created: "They were and were created" (Rev. 4:11). And thus when the Lord Jesus speaks of the glory which He had with God from the beginning (Jn. 17:5), there is no suggestion there that He therefore existed in glory from the beginning. He didn't ask for that glory to be restored to Him, as trinitarianism demands; instead He asked that the glory which He already had in the Divine purpose, be given to Him. Significantly, there is a Greek word which specifically refers to personal, literal pre-existence: *pro-uparchon*- and it's never used about the Lord Jesus.

"The glory I had with you before the world was" (Jn. 17:5)

What does the Bible mean when it speaks about "glory"? The glory of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai- and what he heard was the declaration of God's Name or character, that Yahweh is a God full of grace, mercy, truth, justice, judgment etc. (Ex. 33:19; 34:6,7). Jesus alludes to what happened at Sinai by saying that He has "glorified you... manifested your name" (Jn. 17:4,6). Whenever those characteristics of God are recognized, manifested or openly shown, God is glorified. In this sense, God is the "God of glory" (Ps. 29:3 etc.). He is totally associated with His Name and characteristics- it's not that He just shows those particular attributes to men, but He Himself personally is someone quite different. He *is* His glory. And this is why Jn. 17:5 parallels His glory with God's very own "self".

That glory of God was of course always with God, right at the beginning of the world. He hasn't changed His essential characteristics over time. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. As John begins his Gospel by saying, the essential "Word", *logos* of God, His essential plans, intentions, personality, was in the beginning with Him. It was "made flesh" in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), in that the Lord Jesus in His life and especially in His death on the cross revealed all those attributes and plans of God in a concrete, visible form- to perfection. The request of Jesus to be glorified is therefore asking for the Name / attributes / characteristics / glory / word of God to be openly revealed in Him. Surely He had in mind His resurrection, and the glorifying of God which would take place as a result of this being preached and believed in world-wide.

But in what sense was this the glory which Jesus had with God before the world was? As we have said, the "glory" of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life "that glory which was with [the Father]" when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness.

There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn.

7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him" .

What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. That glory was with God from the beginning. Jesus was in the mind and plan of God from the beginning. It was God's original plan to resurrect and glorify and justify His Son. And in Jn. 17:5, Jesus is asking that this will happen. The glory which Jesus had "before the world was" is connected with the way that He was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20), the way God promised us eternal life (through His Son) before the world was (Tit. 1:2). 2 Tim. 1:9 speaks of us as being called to salvation in Christ "before the world began", He "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). In the same way as we didn't personally exist before the world began, neither did Christ. Indeed 1 Cor. 2:7 speaks of *us* having some form of glory with God "before the world began". It's the idea of this "one glory" again- God's glory existed, and it was His plan to share it with His Son and with us; and He speaks of those things which are not as though they are, so certain are they of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). In Jn. 17:5, the Lord Jesus is 'pleading the promise' of these things.

Jewish Perspective

We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of 'pre-existence' was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be 'with God' didn't mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn't mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God with her "favour". The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed". The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the "Throne of Glory" pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn't have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being "foreknown"- the Greek

word used is the root of the English word 'prognosis'. If God 'foreknew' His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being 'foreknown'. Otherwise the language of 'foreknowing' becomes meaningless.

17:6 "The men which thou gavest me out of the (Jewish) world... they have kept thy word" (Jn. 17:6). Cp. the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Dt. 33:9), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between Christ and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

Jn. 1:14 says that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the logos of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person ("flesh") of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in "the world" didn't perceive it (Jn. 1:14).

The Lord's High Priestly prayer of intercession in John 17 [so called because of the way He speaks of 'sanctifying Himself'] reveals how positive He felt about the disciples- even though He knew and foretold that they were about to betray Him, deny Him and leave Him alone in His hour of greatest human need. His grace towards them here is quite profound. He describes them to His Father as those who "have kept your word" (Jn. 17:6)- referring to His own parable of the good ground, those who keep the word and bring forth fruit with patience (Lk. 8:15). Again, He tells His Father about them: "They have believed that You did send me" (Jn. 17:8). But He had just upbraided them for their *unbelief* in Him (Jn. 16:31), and would do so again in a few days time (Mk. 16:14). Yet He presents His weak followers to the Father as so much better than they really were; and this is the same Lord who mediates for us today. Likewise, the Lord assures the Father that they were not "of the [Jewish] world" (Jn. 17:14,16), even though as we have shown in these studies, they were deeply influenced by the Jewish world around them. Perhaps the Lord looked ahead to the day when they would be spiritually stronger, and yet He presents the immature disciples to the Father from the perspective of how He hoped they would one day be. Thus He says that He has already "sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18)- but this was only done by Him in its fullness *after* His resurrection. He speaks of how He was glorified in them before the [Jewish] world (Jn. 17:10)- when He knew Peter was about to deny Him and shame His whole cause and mission. But surely the Lord looked ahead to the hope He had in Peter and all of them, that they would go out into the world and glorify Him. Indeed, the whole prayer of Jn. 17 reveals how the Lord presented them to the Father as men who in many ways they simply were not. When they say "We believe... that thou camest forth from God", He comments: "Do ye now believe?" and predicts their scattering. Yet in prayer to the Father, He says that they did believe "Surely... that I came out from thee" (Jn. 17:8,25). Their faith was anything but "sure". Likewise, we have shown above that they failed to really perceive His death, and thus failed to perceive the essence of *Him*. In the face of this tragedy, this frustration and pain, the Lord could calmly tell the Father: "I am glorified *in them*" (Jn. 17:10)- in they who understood so little, indeed who refused to understand. Even worse, the Lord had just been telling them that they didn't really love Him fully (Jn. 14:15,23,28). And yet He speaks to the Father of them as if they are *so* committed to Him.

The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6).

17:7 The Lord imputed more understanding to them than they really had. The Last Supper discourse showed clearly enough that they didn't understand or "know" (Jn. 14:7,9; 16:5,18). Yet in the Lord's

prayer of Jn. 17, He uses the perfect tense of the verb 'to know' when He says "Now they have come to know..." . It's almost as if He increasingly imputed things to them which were not yet so, as increasingly He faced up to the reality and implications of His death for them. The disciples didn't "know" the things the Lord spoke to them about His origin and purpose- they only "knew" them after the resurrection (Lk. 18:34; Jn. 10:6; 12:16; 13:7). Jn. 14:7,9 is plain: "If you had known me... yet have you not known me", He tells the disciples. And yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did "know" Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn't then "know", but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that "In that day you shall know" (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to "know" Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively.

17:8- see on Jn. 16:27; 17:6.

The Lord told the Father that He had given the disciples His words, "and they have received them" (Jn. 17:8). This is evident allusion to the editorial comment in Dt. 33:3 about how all Israel received God's words through Moses. Likewise "I manifested thy name... they have kept thy word" (Jn. 17:6,26) = "I will proclaim the name of the Lord... they have observed thy word" (Dt. 32:3; 33:9). One marvels at the way the Lord's mind linked together so much Scripture in the artless, seamless way in which He did.

17:9- see on 1 Tim. 2:2.

"I pray not for the (Jewish) world, but for them (the disciples, cp. the Levites) which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:9). As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14). The Levites represent us (John 17:6 = Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between Christ and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful.

The Lord Jesus worked through individuals. His strategy was not so much to win the multitudes for His cause as to firmly found the faith of a few women and 12 men who would then take His message to the world. The men He chose were like us- impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, burdened with all the prejudices of their environment. Their mannerisms were probably awkward and their abilities limited. But He prayed for them, as we should for those converts the Lord grants us, "not for the world" [perhaps, not *so much for the world as for*] those few whom the Father had given Him out of the world. Everything depended upon them, for "through their word" the world was to believe (Jn. 17:6,9,20). With all the powers of the universe at His command, the Lord could have chosen a programme of mass recruitment. But He didn't. They were to follow Him, so that later they would become fishers of men on a larger scale than He chose then to work on (Mk. 1:17). They would later bear witness because they had been with Him from the beginning (Jn. 15:27). In the few years they were with Him, those men learnt of Him

17:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

His comment that "I am glorified in them" (Jn. 17:10) was evidently said in hope and faith that they would glorify Him- for before His death He "was not yet glorified" (Jn. 7:39). Indeed, Jn. 12:16 suggests that the disciples only "glorified" Him after the resurrection, once they remembered and understood His words and actions properly. It was through "bearing much fruit" that the disciples would glorify Him (Jn. 15:8)- and they evidently hadn't started doing that. Indeed, when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the Father was indeed glorified in Jesus- but not through the disciples, who ran away in denial of their Lord (Jn. 12:28; 13:31). And yet the Lord Jesus confidently asserts to His Father, to God Almighty, that He was glorified in the disciples (Jn. 17:10).

17:11 "Holy Father... righteous Father" (Jn. 17:11,25) was a form of address which the Lord had in a sense lifted from Moses when he addresses God as "righteous and holy" (Dt. 32:4 LXX).

There are many points of contact between Christ as the seed of the woman in the garden of Gethsemane and Eve in the garden of Eden- e.g. "The woman whom Thou gavest Me" (John 17:11) recalls Adam's "the woman which Thou gavest Me" (caused me to be sinful in Your sight- as we did to Jesus on the cross in the same garden). Not least there is the contrast between the struggles against temptation which took place in the same garden.

1 Jn. 3:23 associates believing on the Name with loving each other; and in Jn. 17:11 Christ prays that God will keep us all as one *through His own Name*. If you get hold of one of the Bible analysis programs on a computer, you can find all the places where God's Name is associated with unity. There are so many of them. Quite often God's Name is connected with His being "the Holy *One*" (Is. 29:23; 47:4; 54:5; 57:15; 60:9; Ez. 39:7). God being the Holy *One* is a further statement of His unity. Of course, we are speaking of ideal things. False doctrine and practice, the uncertainty of knowing exactly who carries God's Name, these and many other limitations of our humanity make it hard to achieve the unity which this theory speaks of. But the unity we do achieve is a foretaste of the Kingdom; unless we *love* this idea of unity, we will find ourselves out of place in the Kingdom. "In *that day* there shall be one Lord, and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ...one baptism, one God"; in other words, Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today. See on Jn. 5:23; Mk. 13:32. There are several connections between there being one Name of God- one set of principles with which He identifies Himself- and unity between believers. David had his people exalt God's Name "together", in unity (Ps. 34:3). The fact that there will be one Lord and His Name one in the future will inspire unity amongst the whole world. By being kept "in the name", we are made one (Jn. 17:11)- by sharing in and developing that unique set of characteristics that comprise God's Name / personality, unity between us is enabled by the love, forgiveness, justice etc. which we will show.

The account of the tabernacle labours the point that the whole house of God, this huge but delicate structure, was held together by "clasps of brass to couple the tent together, that it might be one" (Ex. 36:18 and often). "That it might be one" is alluded to by the Lord when He prayed for His people, "that they might be one" (Jn. 17:11,21-23). The record of the tabernacle stresses how the system was based around a mass of boards, tenons, curtain couplings etc. God's dwelling place, His house, hangs together by millions of inter-personal connections. "Out of church Christians", in the sense of those who think they can go it alone in splendored isolation, are totally missing the point.

17:13 The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, "my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", "my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

17:14 It seems He asked the Father that His disciples should be with Him at the cross- "I will that where I am, there they may also be" (Jn. 17:24 RV- hence John's emphasis that they really did behold Him there). He so wishes for us to at least try to stand with Him there and enter into it all. See on Lk. 22:15.

17:15 . It's observable that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed most parts of His model prayer in His own life situations. "Your will be done... Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4) were repeated by Him in Gethsemane, when He asked for God's will to be done and not His, and yet He prayed that *the disciples* would be delivered from evil (Jn. 17:15).

17:16 Repeatedly, the Lord made the point that His men were “not of the world” (Jn. 17:16). But He Himself made the point that if His Kingdom- i.e. the people under His Kingship- were of this world, then they would fight for Him (Jn. 18:36). And that is exactly what they tried to do in Gethsemane! They acted then as if they were indeed “of this world” by trying to fight for Jesus physically. And yet the Lord saw through to their inner spirit, and presented this to the Father as being actually not of this world.

17:17 "Sanctify them through (i.e. through obedience to) thy word" (John 17:17). As the Levites were sanctified (1 Chron. 23:13 Heb.). The Levites were consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal (motivated by the word) to rid Israel of apostasy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's "holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). Through his allusions to this, Christ was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the community they knew.

17:18 The Son was “sanctified and sent into the world” (Jn. 10:36). And yet we too are sanctified (Jn. 17:17,19), and likewise sent into the world (Mk. 16:15). As the Lord was sent into the whole world, so are we (Jn. 17:18). As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world [Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21 - this is perhaps John's equivalent of the great commission]. God sent forth Christ to save the world, and likewise we are sent forth in witness (Gal. 4:4 cp. Mt. 9:38; 22:3; Acts 13:4). The Saviour Himself said that as He was sent into the world, so He sent us (Jn. 17:18).

17:19 Speaking of the cross, the Lord said that for our sakes He sanctified Himself [as a priest making an offering], that we might be sanctified in truth (Jn. 17:19). Quite simply, if we behold and believe the cross, we will respond.

17:20

The Great Commission In John

In the same way as John matches the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus with a more spiritual interpretation in Jn. 1, so he likewise refers to the great commission, expressing it in more spiritual terms throughout his gospel. I bring together here some comments that have been made elsewhere in these studies, to show the number of allusions:

- Jn. 10:32: “If I be lifted up from [RVmg. ‘out of’] the earth, will draw all men unto me”. Straight after the Lord's death and resurrection the great commission was given, to bring all men unto Him and His cross.

- God sanctified / consecrated Jesus and sent Him into the world (Jn. 10:36). But this sanctification was through His death on the cross (Jn. 17:19). Jesus was sanctified on the cross and sent into the world in the sense that we His people would be impelled by His cross to take Him into all the world. We would be sent into all the world in His Name.

- As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world (Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21)- the very language of the great commission. Jesus ‘came down’ to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and ‘all men’ saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.

- In Jn. 12:23-26, the Lord foretold aspects of His coming sacrifice: “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit [spoke in the context of potential Gentile converts]. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it...if any man serve me, let him follow me”. Here the Lord goes on to assume that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise “bear much fruit”, and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: “I have chosen you... that ye should go [cp. “Go ye into all the world...”] and bring

forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit.

- The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. And once the fullness of unity is achieved, our communal way of life will have hastened the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3).

- Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. I would suggest that John's Gospel does in fact record the great commission, but in different and more spiritual words: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God's forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: 'I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don't fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven'. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. "Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" becomes the equivalent of "he that believeth not shall be damned". Note that the Greek for 'retain' strictly means 'to hold / bind', and that for 'remit' means 'to loose'. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: "...so shall ye be my disciples...that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide". The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher's obedience to his Lord's commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).

- "These are written ["in this book" of John's Gospel] that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ... and that believing ye may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31 RV)- belief, life, "in his name", these are all references to the great commission. It's as if John is saying that he fulfilled it by the writing and preaching of his Gospel record. John's equivalent to an appeal for baptism may be his concluding appeal to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and as a result of that belief, to receive life "in his name" - into which we are baptized.

John's record of the great commission is not merely found at the end of his gospel. When John records how the disciples were to proclaim "the word" to the world (Jn. 17:20), he is surely intending connection to be made with how "the word" had likewise been made flesh in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14); and how it was that same "word" which Jesus had given to His men, just as His Father had manifested that word through Himself. Our witness is to be in our making flesh of the word in real life, just as it was in the Lord.

17:20 The significant role which John assigns to women is reflected in the way he records the Lord Jesus praying for those who would believe in Him through the word of the disciples (Jn. 17:20), and yet John seems to be alluding back to the way people believed in Jesus because of the word of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:39,42).

17:21- see on Jn. 13:35.

The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death (Jn. 17). Reading Jn. 17:20 as a parenthesis: "For their sakes I sanctify myself [in the death of the cross]... that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:19,21). The glory of God would be the source of this unity in Christ (Jn. 17:22); and that Name and glory were declared supremely on the cross (Jn. 12:28; 17:26). The grace, mercy, judgment of sin, the goodness and severity of God (Ex. 34:5-7)... all these things, as demonstrated by the cross, bind men together. And thus in practice, both a too strict and also too loose attitude to doctrine and practice, an unbalanced understanding of the glory of God, will never bring unity.

17:22 Jesus prayed in Jn.17:6,8,22 "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me... I have given unto them the words Thou gavest Me... the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". So here we have a clear link between the word, the Name and the glory, the word dwelling in us making us part of the glory and Name of God.

17:23 Hezekiah's faith was strengthened by having the right motives: "Save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone" (2 Kings 19:19). This is alluded to by the Lord in His prayer just before His death: "That the world may know" (Jn. 17:23).

We have suggested elsewhere that the great commission is repeated in John's Gospel but in more spiritual language. The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. It could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated.

This almost uncanny sense of unity is referred to in Eph. 4:3 as "*the* unity"; although, as Paul shows, the *keeping* and experience of that unity is dependent upon our patience with each other and maintenance of "the one faith" (i.e. the unifying faith that gives rise to the one body). This unity is potentially powerful enough to convert the world. Through it, "the world may know", "the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21,23). And yet, in Johanine thought, "the world may know" was a result of the Lord's death (Jn. 14:31), and yet also of the love that would be between His people (Jn. 13:35). The Lord's death would inspire such a love between His people that their resultant unity would let the world know the love of the Father and Son. Paul alludes to all this when he says that because of the new unity and fellowship between Jew and Gentile, "all men (would) see", and even to the great princes and powers of this world would be made known by the united church "the manifold wisdom

of God" (Eph. 3:9-11). The miraculous Spirit gifts were given, Paul argues, to bring the Jewish and Gentile believers together, "for the perfecting (uniting) of the saints", into "a perfect man", a united body. And thus, once Jewish and Gentile differences were resolved within the ecclesia by the end of the first century, the gifts were withdrawn.

The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. And it could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, unity in the church broke up, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated. Seeing the great commission is to be powerfully obeyed in our last days, we simply *must* learn the lesson.

17:24- see on Jn. 7:34.

"That they may behold my glory" is a reference to His desire that they would perceive the crucifixion as the manifestation of glory, after the pattern of the theophany of Exodus 34.

"Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17:24). This a reference to the description of Moses as having been prepared in God's plan from the beginning: "He prepared me [Moses] before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant" (*Assumption of Moses* 1.14). Once we appreciate this and other such allusions to popular Jewish belief about Moses, then the passages which appear to speak of personal pre-existence are easier to understand. The Jews didn't believe that Moses personally pre-existed, but rather that he was there in the plan / purpose of God, and with the major role in that purpose, from before creation. The Lord was applying those beliefs and that language to Himself, showing that He was greater than Moses. But by doing so, He wasn't implying that He personally pre-existed.

John opens his gospel with reference to the fact that they *did* behold His glory. His glory was especially manifested in His death, as shown elsewhere in these studies and in 'The rock that followed them'. "Where I am" and His future glorification are linked into one and the same event, even though the glorification was not then apparent. This use of language is to be connected with the way John's Gospel speaks several hour of the hour coming, and yet having already come (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:32). I have suggested that all these references have application to the Lord's death.

That they also... may behold – Christ's glory was declared in the cross (Jn. 13:30-32). Is this Him requesting that the disciples might somehow be there at the cross with Him? His sending away of John and Mary would therefore have been a great sacrifice for Him- choosing not to have the comfort for which He had earlier asked.

If our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. And yet our will is not yet coincidental with His; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer. The Lord Jesus is the great example in all this. He tells the Father in prayer: "I will that they... be with me" (Jn. 17:24) and yet elsewhere in the same prayer He says "I pray that..." (Jn. 17:9,15,20). Our will is essentially our prayer, just as His will was His prayer. The implications of our will becoming God's will, of the sacrifice of our natural will, are enormous. Our will is the thing we cling to the most, and only give up at the very last. Our will alone is what we truly have, our dearest thing- and we are called to sacrifice it. I see in the OT significance of the blood poured out far more than merely our physical life force- rather does it further symbolize our essential will.

17:26 *declared*- As Christ declared God's Name just before his death (Jn. 17:26), so did Moses (Dt. 32:3 LXX).

"I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me... I have declared unto them thy name" (John 17:8, 26). As Moses gave all God's words to Israel on his return from the Mount; "every one shall receive of thy words" (Dt. 33:3). Moses "received the lively oracles to give unto us" (Acts 7:38). "I have proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Dt.32:3 LXX) was surely in Christ's mind; and those words are in the context of Moses' song, which roundly exposed Israel's future apostasy. The character, the fundamental personality of God, is declared through appreciating human weakness and apostasy. Christ's words of Jn.17:26 were likewise in the context of revealing apostasy and future weakness. Thus through recognition of sin we come to know God; this is the fundamental message of Ezekiel and other prophets. Through knowing our own sinfulness we know the righteousness of God, and vice versa. Thus properly beholding the righteousness of God as displayed on the cross ought to convict us of our sinfulness, as it did the people who saw it in real life (they "smote upon their breasts" in repentance, cp. Lk. 18:13).

Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.). The death of the cross was therefore the very definition of love; love is a crucifixion-love, a conscious doing of that which is against the grain of our nature. And you will have noticed that all these references add that we ***must therefore*** respond by showing that love to our brethren. It is not an option. To be unloving is to deny the very essence of the cross of Christ.

18:5- see on Mt. 26:75; Jn. 18:17.

18:10 The Lord knew that Peter had a sword / knife hidden in his garment when in Gethsemane. But He did nothing; He didn't use His knowledge of Peter's weakness to criticise him. He knew that the best way was to just let it be, and then the miracle of healing Malchus must have more than convinced Peter that the Lord's men should not use the sword. For their Master had healed, not murdered, one of the men sent to arrest Him.

18:15 John, the disciple beloved by his Lord, brings out the apparent paradox- that he was 'on friendly terms with the High Priest', the great 'satan' of the early Christians, and yet also 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. When John knew full well that the Lord Jesus had taught that a man cannot be friends of both Him and of the persecuting world.

18:17 The failure of Peter is effectively emphasized by the very structure of the Gospel accounts. John frames the interrogation of the Lord against the interrogation of Peter. The Lord peerlessly and bravely witnesses to the Truth, and is condemned to death for it; whilst Peter flunks the issue time and again to save his own skin. Whilst the Lord unflinchingly declares His identity before the High Priest, Peter is presented as doing anything to deny his identity as a disciple. Peter's denials are presented by the records as if in slow motion, for the reader to gaze upon in detail. Peter's denial "I am not" is placed by John in purposeful juxtaposition to the Lord's brave self-identification in Gethsemane: *ego eimi*, "I am" (Jn. 18:5,17). And yet this 'setting up' of the leader of the early church as a failure was done *by* the early church writers, ultimately inspired as they were! The Gospel writers were *glorifying* in their weakness and their Lord's supremacy. They were standing up for their unity with Him by grace, but openly and pointedly proclaiming the vast mismatch between them and Him.

18:18- see on Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:32.

18:19 The cross is realistically intended to be lived out in daily experience. The record of the crucifixion and trials of the Lord are framed in language which would have been relevant to the first hearers of the Gospel as they too faced persecution and suffering for their faith. John's account of the interrogation of the Lord by the Jewish leaders, accusing Him of being a false prophet, was surely written in the way it was to provide encouragement to John's converts [the "Johannine community" as theologians refer to it] to see how their court appearances before the Jews were in fact a living out of their Lord's cross. They too were to 'speak openly to the world' and 'bear witness to the truth before the world', living out the cross in the way in which they responded to the great commission.

18:21 Peter would have reflected how his denial had been in spite of the fact that the Lord had prayed he wouldn't do it- even though He foresaw that Peter would. Just a short time before the denials He had commented, probably in earshot of Peter and John, "ask them which heard me, what I spake unto them" (Jn. 18:21 RV). Perhaps He nodded towards them both as He said it, to encourage them to speak up rather than slip further into the temptation of keeping quiet. He had used the same phrase earlier, just hours before: "These things have I spoken unto *you*" (Jn. 16:33).

18:27 John's account of Peter's denial of the Lord is to me very beautifully crafted by him to reflect his own weakness. He [alone of the evangelists] records how he knew a girl who kept the door to the High Priest's palace, and how he was even known to the High Priest. He speaks to the girl, and she lets Peter in. Then, she recognizes Peter as one of the disciples, that he had been with Jesus, and he makes his shameful denial. But John's point is clearly this: he, John, was known to the same girl, and to Caiaphas- but they never accused *him* of having been with Jesus. Because they sadly didn't make the connection between John and Jesus. Yet when they saw Peter- they knew him as an up front disciple of Jesus. And when Peter ran out in fear and shame, John remained in the High Priest's palace- unrecognized and unknown as a disciple of Jesus. The door girl must have realized that John and Peter were connected- because John had asked her to let Peter in. But she never made the accusation that John also had been one of Jesus' followers. In all this, John reveals his own shame at his lack of open association with the Lord. Significantly, Acts 4:13 records how the Jews later looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publically, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publically and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord.

18:28-32 The records are in fact written in such a way as to encourage us to re-live the crucifixion process as it were in slow motion. The record of the trials likewise is written in a way which encourages us to imagine it and live it out in our imaginations in slow motion. Donald Senior has pointed out how John's account of the trial scenes alternate between what is happening "inside" and "outside":

- (1) "Outside" - The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, Jn. 18:28-32
- (2) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 18:33-38
- (3) "Outside" - Pilate declares Jesus innocent, 18:38-40
- (4) "Inside" - The Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus, 19:1-3
- (5) "Outside" - Pilate again declares Jesus not guilty, 19:4-8
- (6) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 19:9-12
- (7) "Outside" - Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion, 19:13-16.

18:36 He told Pilate: "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (Jn. 18:36). But His servants just *had* tried to fight, to this very end! Thus He imputed righteousness to His men and was very positive about them to others.

18:37- see on Jn. 15:27.

In Jn. 18:37 Jesus told Pilate in the context of His upcoming death that He had come into this world to bear witness to the truth- the cross was the supreme witness and exhibition of the truth. There was no doctrine preached there, but rather the way of life which those doctrines ultimately lead to.

In the context of commenting on His impending death, the Saviour said that He came to bear witness unto the Truth; for this cause He came into the world (Jn. 18:37 cp. 12:27, where the cross is again "this cause" why He came). His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God.

"Every one that is of the truth (born of the word- Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:23) heareth My voice" (Jn. 18:37)- a response to the word makes us all the more sensitive to the shepherd's voice in future.

18:40 The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb... for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

19:1 Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back.

19:5 The mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by Him as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

19:9 Because the Lord was so excluded from society (see on Jn. 8:42), He would have been so focused upon His Heavenly Father. And that would have been felt and perceived. Reflect how the Centurion muttered: "Truly this was the Son of God". The Lord's creation of a new family was radical then; and it's just as radical today. In passing, the Lord must have been so tempted to say that Joseph was his father. It would've made things *so* much easier for Him. Just as we are tempted

to sorely to effectively deny our Heavenly Father, and act like we're just the same as this world. According to the rabbinic writing *Qiddushin* 4:2, a fatherless person must remain silent when asked "Where are you from". And this is exactly what Jesus did when asked this very question in Jn. 19:9. This refusal to call Joseph His father cost Him His life. He refused to call Himself the son of Joseph. Indeed, E.P. Sanders makes the point that the fatherlessness of Jesus not only meant that He would not have been counted as a child of God or son of Abraham; because of these exclusions, He would have been put in the category of "a sinner". If Joseph did indeed abandon Mary, she would have been classified as "a whore", and Jesus would have been the "son of adultery", putting Him in the same "sinner category". In this we see a wonderful outworking of how God having a son resulted in that Son being counted as a sinner, even though He was not one. He was treated as "a sinner", and thereby He came to know how we feel, who truly are sinners.

19:11 The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18). Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate "thou couldest have no power against me" (Jn. 19:11) was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about Rome becoming mighty "but not by his own power". Or how His crucifixion "night to the city" (Jn. 19:20) connected with Jerusalem thereby being guilty of His blood (Dt. 21:3).

It is inevitable that to someone of His intellectual ability as the Son of God, to a man with His sense of justice and with His knowledge of the Jews and their Law, everything within Him would have cried out at the protracted injustices of His trials. He had the strong sense within Him at this time that He was hated without cause, that the Jews were "mine enemies *wrongfully*" (Ps. 69:4). "Are ye come out as against a thief...? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me" (Mt. 26:55). "Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me... If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (Jn. 18:21-23). All these indicate a keen sense of injustice. It must have welled up within Him when He saw the servant come with the bowl of water for Pilate to solemnly wash his hands in. Yet His response was one of almost concern for Pilate, lest he think that the guilt was *solely* on him (Jn. 19:11; cp. His concern for Judas' repentance, Jn. 13:27). The Lord did not just passively resign Himself to it with the sense that all would have to be as all would have to be. He struggled with the injustice of it all. Some form of anger even arose, it would seem. This fact must have pushed Him towards that dread precipice of sin. His possession of human nature and the possibility of failure meant that there were times when He was much nearer sin than others. But He didn't just keep away from the precipice, as He didn't spare Himself from being tired and tested by the crowds and thereby drawn closer to the possibility of spiritual failure. He came into this world to show forth the Father's glory, and to do His will was His meat and drink. This hangs like a tapestry to the background to the crucifixion.

19:13 The judgment seat of Christ is not a means by which the Father and Son gather information about us, consider it and then give a verdict. It will be for *our* benefit. Our behaviour is constantly analyzed by them and 'judged'. The idea of sitting upon a judgment seat or giving judgment doesn't necessarily involve the idea of weighing up evidence. To 'judge' can mean simply to pronounce the final verdict, which the judge has long since known; not to weigh up evidence (consider Mt. 7:2; Jn. 3:18; 5:22; 7:24,51; 8:15,16,26; 16:11; 18:31; Acts 7:7; 23:3; 24:6 Gk.; Rom. 2:12; 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 10:30; 13:4; 1 Pet. 4:6; James 5:10,22). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17).

It is possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: "And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel". See on 1 Pet. 2:23.

The whole account of the crucifixion in John shows how the Lord gave His life up of Himself; the Jews and Romans had no power to take it from Him, and throughout John's accounts of the trials and crucifixion, it is apparent that it is the Lord and not His opponents who is in total control of the situation. Even though 'the Devil' is seen as a factor in Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:27,30), it is clear that Jesus was delivered up [s.w. 'betrayed'] by the "determinate counsel [will] and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It wasn't as if God fought a losing battle with a personal Satan in order to protect His Son from death. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench, as if He is the authentic judge (Jn. 19:13), is an example of how the Lord Jesus is presented in John as being totally in control; His 'lifting up' on the cross is portrayed as a 'lifting up' in glory, enthroned as a King and Lord upon the cross. Other examples of John bringing out this theme of the Lord being in control are to be found in the way He confronts His captors (Jn. 18:4), questions His questioners (Jn. 18:20,21,23; 19:11), gets freedom for His followers (Jn. 18:8), and makes those come out to arrest Him fall to the ground.

The mention that Jesus stood before Pilate "in a place that is called the Pavement" (Jn. 19:13) reminds us of Ex. 24:10, where Yahweh was enthroned in glory on another 'pavement' when the old covenant was made with Israel. The New Covenant was inaugurated with something similar. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) would have been easily perceived as an allusion to the way that Yahweh Himself as it were dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1). And yet the Lord Jesus in His death was the "[place of] propitiation" (Heb. 2:17), the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). In the cross, God met with man and communed with us, commanding us the life we ought to lead through all the unspoken, unarticulated imperatives which there are within the blood of His Son. There in the person of Jesus nailed to the tree do we find the focus of God's glory and self-revelation, and to this place we may come to seek redemption. See on Jn. 19:19.

Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to

Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

19:17 Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6). The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs...just two more...last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' or even 'The skull of Gol[iath]' may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull (1 Sam. 17:54). "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily

sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

“The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar”. This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

19:18 John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: “They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one” (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them “two others” (Jn. 19:18) and “... the legs of the first and of the other” (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker"). The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did. Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He

was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. The text suggests there may have been a gap of minutes between them arriving at the place and the actual nailing. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this... or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm... four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Real Cross

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen 'em? I seen plenty of 'em. I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust

and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity, would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18cm. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the maldistribution of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would

have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief, He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

19:19- see on Mt. 26:65; Jn. 1:14; 3:14; 8:56; 13:37; 16:25,32; 19:13; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:20.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH. This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, *a man* full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

The Hebrew Inscription Over The Cross

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhv

Thus Pilate tried to have the last laugh over the Jews by writing the Lord's 'crime' over His body in such a way which spelt out the name 'Yahweh'. Hence the Jews demanded it be taken down immediately, and Pilate responded by alluding to the Yahweh Name in saying that what he has done, he has done.

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.
- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

19:20- see on Jn. 19:11.

19:23 Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison (Gen. 39:13).

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18).

Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked.

Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment (Mt. 27:35)?

There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's...in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry,

and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

19:24 The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross. Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

19:25 They were amazed at His teaching that a rich man could hardly enter His Kingdom (Mt. 19:25- all three synoptic records have this incident)- presumably because they were under the impression that the rich were rich because they were blessed by God and were righteous. We see here their immaturity.

The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't. The fact it doesn't, and therefore accepted women as witnesses, was actually quite a radical thing. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	Cross	Burial	Resurrection
Matthew	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"
Mark	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
Luke			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

His mother's sister It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions... must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James...and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark's account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19:22; 23,24;

then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end... and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all. John began his gospel by saying that the word was manifest and flesh and he saw it- and I take this as a reference to the Lord's death. Through this, a new family of men and women would be created (Jn. 1:12). See on Lk. 23:48.

19:26

"Woman behold thy son"

Unearthed victims of crucifixion seem to have been impaled on stakes about 10 feet high. The cross would not have been as high as 'Christian' art usually represents it. The feet of the Lord would only have been about 4 feet above ground. His mother and aunt stood by the cross- the tragedy of His mother being there needs no comment. She would have seen the blood coming from the feet. Her head would have been parallel with His knees. His face marred more than the sons of men (Is. 52:14), sore from where His beard had been pulled off (Is. 50:6), teeth missing and loose, making His speech sound strange, fresh and dried blood mixing... and His mother there to behold and hear it all. She must have thought back, and surely He did too; for He was only a man. Mother around the house as a child, mending clothes, getting food, explaining things, telling Him about Simeon's prophecy, of how a sword would break her heart as well as His. This isn't just emotional speculation. Ps. 22:9,10 emphasizes the Lord's thoughts for His mother and His babyhood with her: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou keptest me in safety (AVmg.- a reference to Herod's persecution) when I was on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". The temptation would have been to go on and on. Was I too hard on her in Cana? How I must have stung her when I said "Behold *my mother* and my brethren" are these half hearted, superficially interested people (Mt. 12:49). She was the best best best mother I could have ever had. Like any man would think. And He was a man. Not a mere man, but a man. I wonder if He said those words of breakage, of severance, between Him and her, because these feelings welling up within Him were affecting His concentration on the Father.

"*But* there stood by the cross..." makes the connection between Mary and the clothes. It seems that initially, she wasn't there; He looked for comforters and found none (Ps. 69:20- or does this imply that the oft mentioned spiritual difference between the Lord and His mother meant that He didn't find comfort in her? Or she only came to the cross later?). His lovers, friends and kinsmen stood far off from Him (Ps. 38:11), perhaps in a literal sense, perhaps far away from understanding Him. If Mary wasn't initially at the cross, John's connection between the dividing of the clothes and her being there would suggest that she had made the clothes. In any case, the four women at the cross are surely set up against the four soldiers there- who gambled over the clothes. Perhaps the other women had also had some input into the Lord's clothing.

If indeed Mary and the few with her came from standing far off to stand by the cross, they were sharing the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus: 'In the light of the cross, nothing, nothing, absolutely *nothing* really matters now. The shame, embarrassment nothing. We will stand for Him and His cause, come what may'.

I can only ponder the use of the imperfect in Jn. 19:25: 'There were standing' *may* imply that Mary and the women came and went; sometimes they were there by the cross, sometimes afar off. Did they retreat from grief, or from a sense of their inadequacy, or from being driven off by the hostile crowd or soldiers, only to make their way stubbornly back? Tacitus records that no spectators of a crucifixion were allowed to show any sign of grief; this was taken as a sign of compliance with the sin of the victim. He records how some were even crucified for showing grief at a crucifixion. This was especially so in the context of leaders of revolutionary movements, which was the reason why Jesus was crucified. This would explain why the women stood afar off, and sometimes in moments

of self-control came closer. Thus the Lord looked for comforters and found none, according to the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. And yet His mother was also at the foot of the cross sometimes. For her to be there, so close to Him as she undoubtedly wished to be, and yet not to show emotion, appearing to the world to be another indifferent spectator; the torture of mind must be meditated upon. Any of these scenarios provides a link with the experience of all who would walk out against the wind of this world, and identify ourselves with the apparently hopeless cause of the crucified Christ. The RV of Jn. 19:25 brings out the tension between the soldiers standing there, and the fact that: "But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother...". The "but..." signals, perhaps, the tension of the situation- for it was illegal to stand in sympathy by the cross of the victim. And there the soldiers were, specially in place to stop it happening, standing nearby...

John taking Mary to his own home *may* not mean that he took her away to his house in Jerusalem. In any case, John's physical home was in Galilee, not Jerusalem. "His own (home)" is used elsewhere to mean 'family' rather than a physical house. This would have involved Mary rejecting her other sons, and entering into John's family. Spiritual ties were to be closer than all other. This must be a powerful lesson, for it was taught in the Lord's final moments. Whether we understand that John took Mary away to his own home (and later returned, Jn. 19:35), or that they both remained there to the end with the understanding that Mary was not now in the family of Jesus, the point is that the Lord separated Himself from His mother. The fact He did this last was a sign of how close He felt to her. She was the last aspect of His humanity which He had clung to. And at the bitter bitter end, He knew that He must let go even, even, even of her. Jn. 19:28 speaks likewise as if the Lord's relationship with His mother was the last part of His humanity which He had to complete / fulfil / finish. For it was "after this", i.e. His words to His mother, that He knew that "all was now finished".

And yet another construction is possible. It would seem that John *did* have a house in Jerusalem. Mary was John's aunty, and so she was already in his 'house' in the sense of family. This might suggest that the Lord didn't mean John was to accept Mary into the family, as they were already related. It is reasonable to conjecture that perhaps He sent her away to John's house, for *her* benefit. He didn't want her to have to see the end [see section 52 for more comment on this]. For me, if I had been in His situation, I would have preferred to die with her there. At least there was the one and only human being who knew for sure, and He knew she knew for sure, that He was the Son of God. She was the one, on earth, that He could be certain of. She had pondered all these things for 34 years. And He knew it. But if He sent her away for *her* benefit, we have yet another example of the Lord rejecting a legitimate comfort; as He rejected the pain killer, the footrests (see 54), the opportunity to drink before He asked for it ...indeed, the cross itself was something which He chose when other forms of obedience to the Father's will may have been equally possible.

The thoughts presented here concerning Mary offer several possibilities, not each of which can be what really happened; not least concerning the question of for how long she stood by the cross. But this, to my mind, doesn't matter. Each man, yes, each and every one of us, must go through the process of the cross in his own mind, and thereby be inspired. These are only thoughts to help on the way. The whole record is designed, it seems, to provoke reverent meditation. One can only, for example, meditate in a vague way on what Mary's feelings will be when she rises from the sleep of death to see her son. As we will recognize Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, so surely she will have that sense that "this is my boy". Reflecting upon the Lord's relationship with His mother as He died leads us a little deeper into His tension and ineffable sadness which the cross crystallized. His soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that Christ's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality.

Thus He jumped at His mother's request for wine as being a suggestion He should die there and then (Jn. 2:4). So many men reached their most intense at the end of their lives: Moses spoke Deuteronomy, Paul and Peter wrote their finest letters then. And the Lord was matchlessly superb at His end. He reached a peak of spirituality at the end, to the point where He showed us, covered in blood and spittle and human rejection as He was, what the very essence of God really was. He declared the Name of Yahweh in the final moments of His death.

A mother always feels a mother to her child. That's basic human fact. The way the Lord as it were ended that mother-child relationship with Mary thereby carries all the more pain with it. The way the Gospel records refer to Mary as the mother of others amongst her children, e.g. "Mary of James" (Lk. 24:10) shows the Gospel writers paid tribute and respect to this break that had been made. Perhaps this explains why the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, chose not to identify themselves as the brothers of Jesus- Jude calls himself the brother of James (Jude 1), and James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus (James 1:1). In this way they both reflected the way that human relationship to Jesus now meant nothing at all.

It's been observed by many that what a man needs most as he dies... is not to face death alone. To have someone with him. The way the Lord sent Mary and John away from Him at the very end is profound in its reflection of His total selflessness, His deep thought for others rather than Himself. It also reflects how He more than any other man faced the ultimate human realities and issues which death exposes. He wilfully faced them alone, the supreme example of human bravery in the face of death. And He faced them fully, with no human cushion or literal or psychological anesthesia to dilute the awful, crushing reality of it. Remember how He refused the painkiller. And through baptism and life in Him, we are asked to die with Him, to share something of His death, the type and nature of death which He had... in our daily lives. Little wonder we each seem to sense some essential, existential, quintessential... loneliness in our souls. Thus it must be for those who share in His death. I'm grateful to Cindy for a quote from a wise doctor, Kurt Eissler: "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him". How inadvertently profound that thought becomes when applied to the death of our Lord, and to us as we imagine ourselves standing by and watching Him there. "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him".

The Sayings From The Cross (2):

"Woman behold thy son"

We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Son of God, to truly begin to enter into them. The least we can do is to meditate upon their different facets, and begin to realize that if the cross really does come before the crown, then we can expect a life which reflects, in principle at least, the same basic agonies. The relationship between Christ and Mary brings home two crystal clear points: Firstly, the sheer human pain and pathos of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and those near Him; and secondly, the way in which He had to sacrifice His closest human relationship for the sake of His devotion to God.

The Pain Of God

There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16).

Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39)

The Pain Of It All

There is something ineffably, ineffably sad about the fact that the mother of Jesus was standing only a meter or so away from Him at the foot of the cross. Absolutely typical of the Biblical record, this fact is recorded by John almost in passing. This is in harmony with the way the whole crucifixion is described. Thus Jn. 19:17,18 seems to focus on the fact that Jesus bore His cross to a place called Golgotha; the fact that there they crucified Him is mentioned in an incidental sort of way. Mark likewise: "And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments..." (Mk. 15:24). In similar vein the agony of flogging is almost bypassed in Mt. 27:26: "and when he had scourged Jesus...".

Simeon had early prophesied Mary's feelings when he spoke of how her son would be "spoken against" and killed: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul *also*" (Lk. 2:35). This means that the piercing of Christ's soul was felt by His mother at the same time. And so we picture that woman in her 50s at the cross, with a lifetime behind her of meditating upon God's words, meditating upon the strange road her life had taken, a road travelled by no other woman, keeping *all* these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51; implying she didn't open up to anyone), a lifetime characterized by a deep fascination with her firstborn son, but also characterized by a frustrating lack of understanding of Him, and no doubt an increasing sense of distance from His real soul. Recall how when Mary asked Jesus for wine at the feast, He saw in her mention of wine a symbol of His blood. She asked for wine, on a human level; and He responded: 'Woman, what have I to do with you, can't you see that the time for me to give my blood isn't yet?'. They were just on quite different levels. It seems almost certain that Christ was crucified naked. If we crucify him afresh (Heb. 6:6), we put him to an "open" or naked (Gk.) shame. The association between shame and the crucifixion is stressed in Ps. 22 and Is. 53; and shame is elsewhere connected with nakedness.

We know that the Jews felt that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier; this is recorded to this day in the Mishnah. They had earlier taunted Him about this (Jn. 8:19). Translating into dynamic, modern English, it is not difficult to imagine the abuse they shouted at Him as He hung on the cross. Their mocking of His claim that God was His Father was doubtless related to this. And there can be no doubt that their scorn in this direction would have fallen upon Mary too. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt. Ps. 22:9,10 were among Christ's thoughts as He hung there: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me

hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". If dying men do indeed think back to their childhood, His thoughts would have been with His mother.

She had sought Him *sorrowing* when He was 12, all her life she had been plagued by this problem of knowing He was righteous, the Son of God, her Saviour, and yet she didn't fully understand Him. How deeply would the pain of all this hung over her as she watched Him in His time of dying. Doubtless she had (on the law of averages) lost other children, but this one was something special. She was a woman a real mother, and her special love for Jesus would have been noticed by the others. This probably had something to do with the fact that all her other children had rejected Christ as a "stranger", i.e. a Gentile; perhaps they too believed that this Jesus was the result of mum's early fling with a passing Roman soldier (Ps. 69:8). Inevitably people would have commented to Mary: "He's a lovely boy, isn't he". And although one doesn't sense she was arrogant in any way, her motherly pride would have risen. For He was a lovely boy, ever growing in favour with men, rather than falling out of favour with some over the petty things of village life. Remember how we sense her motherly pride surfacing at the wedding in Cana. At the cross she would have recalled all this, recalled Him as a clinging 5 year old, being comforted by her in childhood illnesses, recalled making and mending His clothes- perhaps even the cloak the drunk soldiers were gambling over. And as she beheld Him there, covered in blood and spittle, annoyed by the endless flies, alone in the darkness, evidently thirsty, with her helpless to help beneath- surely her mind would have gone back 34 years to the words of the Angel: "He shall be great". "He shall be great". And then the mental panic to understand, the crying out within the soul, the pain of incomprehension of death.

There is a great sense of pathos in those words of Jesus: "Woman behold thy son". It sounded first of all as if Jesus was saying 'Well mum, look at me here'. But then she would have realized that this was not what He was saying. We can almost see Him nodding towards John. He was rejecting her as His mother in human terms, He was ceasing to be her son, He was trying to replace His sonship with that of an adopted son. The way He called her "Woman" rather than mother surely reflects the distance which there was between them, as He faced up to the fact that soon He would leave human nature, soon His human sonship would be ended. In passing, note how He addresses God at the end not as "Father" but "My God"- as if His sharing in our distance from God led Him to feel the same. Hence His awful loneliness and sense of having been forsaken or distanced from all those near to Him. "Behold thy mother ...behold thy son" suggests Jesus was asking them to look at each other. Doubtless they were looking down at the ground at the time. We get the picture of them looking up and catching each others eye, then a brief silence, coming to understand what Jesus meant, and then from that hour, i.e. very soon afterwards, John *taking* Mary away. We are invited to imagine so much. The long, long discussions between them about Jesus, punctuated by long silences, as they kept that Passover, and as they lived together through the next years. Above all we see the pathos of them walking away, backs to Jesus, with Him perhaps watching them.

All this would have contributed to His sense of being forsaken. The disciples forsook Him (Mt. 26:56), His mother had now left Him, and so the words of Ps. 27:9,10 started to come true: "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God... when my father and my mother forsake me". All His scaffolding was being removed. He had leaned on His disciples (Lk. 22:28), He had naturally leaned on His mother. Now they had forsaken Him. And now His mother had forsaken Him. And so He pleaded with His true Father not to leave Him. And hence the agony, the deep agony of Mt. 27:46: "My God, my God, Why hast *thou* (this is where the emphasis should be) forsaken me?". The disciples' desertion is a major theme, especially in Mark 15 (written by Peter, the most guilty?). The young man followed, but then ran away; Peter followed, but then denied (Mk. 14:51,54); all the disciples fled (:50); Joseph and Nicodemus denied Him (:64). By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in the hospital the night before the operation, in the nursing home as death

looms near, or in any great moment of crisis. The Lord needed, desperately, His men with Him. Hence the hurt, undisguised, of "could you not watch with me one hour?"

Col. 2:11-15 describe the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus as His 'circumcision'. The cross did something intimate and personal to Him. Through the process of His death, He 'put right off the body of his flesh' (RVmg.). He shed His humanity. The saying goodbye to His mother, the statement that she was no longer His mother but just a woman to Him, was, it would seem, the very last divesting of 'the body of his flesh'. It seems to me that such was His love of her, so strong was His human connection to her who gave Him His human connection, that the relationship with her was the hardest and in fact the final aspect of humanity which He 'put off' through the experience of crucifixion. And this is why, once He had done so, He died.

There cannot be any of us who are not touched by all this. We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. What can we expect but a sense of pathos in our lives, broken and sacrificed relationships, the loss of the dearest of human love. There seems to be a growing group of believers in their 20s -50s, some happily married, well blessed with the things of this life, who seem to preach a gospel of happy-clappy belief, of tapping each other under the chin and speaking of how much joy and happiness their religion gives them. And those who don't experience this are made to feel spiritually inferior. Yet that 'other' group are, world-wide, growing into the majority of the body of Christ. A real meditation upon the cross of our Lord and the frequent exhortations by Him to share in it places all this in perspective. We must suffer with Him if we are to be glorified with Him in His Kingdom. The joy and peace of Christ which is now available is the joy and peace which He had in His life, a deep deep joy and peace from knowing that we are on the road to salvation. Know yourselves, brethren and sisters. Search your lives. If we are truly, truly trying to share the cross of Christ, if we are beginning to know the meaning of self-sacrifice, of love unto the end, we will know the spirit of Christ on that cross, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen". We will be able to share His mind, to know the fellowship of His spirit, of touching spirits with Him. And in that is joy and peace beyond our ability to describe.

19:27 I take the comment that John therefore took her to his own [home] as meaning His own house, back in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). The same construction is used in Jn. 16:32 cp. Acts 21:6 as meaning house rather than family. "Took to" is a verb of motion as in Jn. 6:21. His feelings for her were so strong, so passionate, that He saw it could distract Him. He wanted to stay on earth with her, and not go to His Heavenly Father. This accounts for His again using the rather distant term "Woman", and telling her that now, He wasn't her Son, John was now, and she wasn't His mother, she must be John's mother. And many a man has chosen to leave mother for the sake of the Father's work, as Hannah sacrificed her dear Samuel, to be eternally bonded in the gracious Kingdom to come. And even if one has not done this in this form, there is scarcely a believer who has not had to make some heart wrenching break with family and loved ones for the Lord's sake. Only His sake alone could inspire men and women in this way.

19:28 This wasn't just ingenious thinking on the spur of the moment. Victims lived for around two days on the crosses, but this was only due to a regular supply of liquid being handed up to them. One wonders if the person who organized the drink was one of the relatives of the thieves, or perhaps His own relatives. Surely His mother and aunty and Mary had come prepared to do all they could for Him in this final agony. They knew what the relatives of the crucified had to do. The thieves had probably received liquid already during the ordeal. But our sense must be that the Lord didn't. Perhaps His mother even suggested it, with an inward glance back to the sweet days of early childhood: "Do you want a drink? I can get you one". But as He refused the painkiller, as He refused to push down on the footrests, so He refused to quench His thirst.

Note that the sponge was placed on a hyssop plant, which is only 50cm. long at the most. This is internal evidence that the cross was quite low, and the Lord's feet only a few feet above the ground.

The Sayings From The Cross (5):

"I thirst"

The Lord Jesus began to quote Psalm 22 in His final moments on the cross, and He earnestly desired to complete the quotation ⁽¹⁾. He asked for something to wet His throat so He could complete the last few verses. This indicates not only His earnest desire to say out loud "It is finished" with all that meant ⁽²⁾, but also the level of His thirst. Every word He spoke out loud was an expenditure of effort and saliva. He was intensely aware of this. He realized that unless He had more moisture, He just would not be able to speak out loud any more. And yet He so desperately wanted His last words to be heard and meditated upon. His sweat in the Garden had been dropping like blood drops; the nervous tension of bearing our sins sapped moisture from Him. There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12), as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

The Psalms, especially 22 ⁽³⁾, indicate the extent of His dehydration- largely due to the amount of prayer out loud which He did on the cross ("The words of my *roaring*"). Heb. 5:7 speaks of His strong crying and tears (again an expenditure of moisture) while on the cross; and Rom. 8:26 alludes to this, saying that our Lord has the same intensity in His present mediation for us. The physical extent of His thirst is expressed by that of Samson, when in an incident typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, he nearly died of thirst in the midst of a spectacular victory (Jud. 15:18) ⁽⁴⁾. A perusal of that incident will enable us to enter into the thirst of our Lord a little more.

The Messianic Psalms also speak of the great spiritual thirst of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings. The intensity of His physical thirst therefore reflected His spiritual thirst, His desire to be with the Father, His desire to finish His work and achieve our salvation. We are better able to imagine His physical thirst than His spiritual thirst. Yet we are surely intended to see in that physical thirst a cameo of His desire for spiritual victory, His thirsting after God's righteousness.

Christ's Spiritual Thirst

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear ⁽⁵⁾ before God? My tears have been me meat...while they continually say unto me (on the cross), Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:1-3)

"O God... my God (cp. "My God, my God")... my soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1)- cp. Christ as a root growing in a spiritually dry land on the cross (Is. 53:1)

"I stretch forth my hands unto thee (on the cross): my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land" (Ps. 143:6).

The thirsty land surrounding Christ on the cross represented spiritually barren Israel (Is. 53:1; Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as Christ really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins:

"Thou shalt serve thine enemies... in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Dt. 28:48) ⁽⁶⁾. This is so relevant to the cross.

"They shall not (any more) hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:10) occurs in the context of comforting Israel that they will no longer be punished for their sins.

"Ye are they that forsake the Lord... therefore... ye shall be hungry... ye shall be thirsty... ye shall be ashamed" (Is. 65:11,13). This too is exactly relevant to the cross.

"Let (Israel) put away her whoredoms... lest I... set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3).

"I will send a famine in the land, not a ... thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord... in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Am. 8:11,13).

This literal and spiritual thirst which was a punishment for Israel's sins came upon the Lord Jesus. He genuinely felt a thirst for God, He really felt forsaken, *as if* He had sinned, He truly came to know the feelings of the rejected sinner. And because of this He really is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us in our weakness, to enter right into the feelings of those who have gone right away from God, as well as those who temporarily slip up in the way (Heb. 5:2).

Notes

(1) See *"Why hast thou forsaken me?"*.

(2) See *"It is finished"*.

(3) There are Messianic passages in Lamentations which also make the same point.

(5) Christ's thirst was to come and appear before God. Appearing before God is Priestly language. Now He appears in God's presence in order to make mediation for us (Heb. 9:24), and He will appear again as the High Priest appeared on the day of Atonement, bringing our salvation. This means that Christ thirsted not so much for His own personal salvation, but for ours; He looked forward to the joys for evermore at God's right hand (Ps. 16:11)- i.e. the offering up of our prayers. How this should motivate us to pray and confess our sins! This is what our Lord was looking forward to on the cross. This is what He thirsted for.

(6) This is an exact picture of Christ on the cross. And Paul likewise alluded to this language when describing his own sufferings for the sake of taking the Gospel to Israel (2 Cor. 11:27), as if he too felt that he was a sin-bearer for Israel as Christ had been. This is to be understood in the same way as his appropriating to Himself the prophecies concerning Christ as the light of the Gentiles.

19:30 All crucified men bow their heads on death. The record of this therefore suggests that He lifted up His head to the Father, and then nodding His head towards His people, gave His Spirit towards them- those who had walked out across the no mans' land between the crowd and the soldiers, those who stood there declaring in front of all their allegiance to this crucified King. Yet the spirit of Christ is essentially the mind and disposition of Christ rather than an ability to perform miracles etc. The power to be like Him is passed to us through an inbreathing of His example on the cross. In this sense, the Lord's lifting up in glory on the cross enabled Him to impart His Spirit to us (Jn. 7:37-39). Notice that Christ gave up His last breath of His own volition- the withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this. This cry *was* the giving up of the Spirit. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. As He wasn't pushing down on the footrests, breathing was agonizingly difficult. I suggest He took one last great breath, with head uplifted, the nails tearing at that sensitive nerve in His hands as He did so, and then He felt His heart stop. In that last two seconds or so, He expired in the words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". Thus He *gave* His life- for us. The centurion, when he saw *how* He died (Mk., NIV), believed. The display of self-mastery, of giving, of love so great, *so* free, was what made that man believe (perhaps he was Cornelius?). It has been observed that the phrase "He gave forth His spirit" is unique; death isn't

described like that in contemporary literature. "Nowhere in antiquity is death described as the giving forth of one's spirit" (I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (New York: Alba House, 1989) p. 131).

The Sayings From The Cross (6):

"It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)

It is apparent that all of Christ's last words on the cross were full of intense meaning. This was a final victory cry. The spirit of the New Testament is that the cross was a pinnacle of victory, not of temporal defeat. There is no way that Christ was just muttering the equivalent of 'Well, that's it then'. "It is finished" encompassed so much. That tiny word "it", not even present in the Greek or Aramaic which Jesus actually spoke, compasses so much; the whole purpose of God. "When Jesus *therefore* had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished" indicates that our Lord asked for a drink specifically so that He could say these words, and those that followed ("Into thy hands I commend my spirit"). Considering the difficulty of speech as He hung there and His intense thirst, He evidently meant us to hear these words- and meditate upon them.

The Glory Of God

So we ask the question: *What* was finished? The key to this question is in Jn. 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do". "The work" is therefore parallel with Christ's glorification of God. "It is finished" therefore reflects Christ's appreciation that He had now totally glorified His Father. But we need to ponder what exactly it means to glorify God. The glory of God refers to the characteristics intrinsic in God's Name; thus when Moses asked to see God's glory, the attributes of the Name were declared to him. Christ understood that in His death He would manifest God's Name / character to the full, although of course He had also manifested it in His life: "I have declared unto them (the believers, not the world) thy name, and *will declare it*" in His forthcoming death (Jn. 17:26).

It is a major theme of John's Gospel that God was glorified in the death of Christ:

"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" at the cross (Jn. 12:28)

"Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (i.e. the achievement of God's glorification was internal to Jesus, within His mind, where characteristics are found). If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" on the cross (Jn. 13:31,32)

"And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self (i.e. your fundamental being and character) with the glory which I had with thee... I have manifested thy name" (Jn. 17:5,6).

"I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it" on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Christ's perfect character is only appreciated by the believers, and therefore it is only to them that God's Name / glory / very own self is revealed by Christ's example. It was to us that God's glory was finally revealed in the death of Christ. To those who wanted to see it, there was almost a visible righteousness exuding from Christ in His time of dying. "Truly this man was the Son of God... Certainly this was a righteous man" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46) was the response of the Centurion who was "watching Jesus"; and collating the Gospels, it seems he said this twice. "It is *finished*" implies that Christ's manifestation of the Father was progressive. He was "made *perfect*" by His sufferings, only becoming the author of our salvation when He had finally been perfected by them (Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9). This surely teaches that Christ died once He had reached a certain point of completeness of manifestation of the Father. If we accept this, we should not think of Christ just hanging on the cross waiting to die. He was actively developing His manifestation of the Father's characteristics, until finally He sensed He had arrived at that totality of reflection of the Father. Likewise in our carrying of the cross we are not just passively holding on until the Lord's return or our death. We

should be actively growing; for surely we only die once we have reached, or had the opportunity to reach, a certain point of spiritual completeness. This may well explain why some believers die young relatively soon after baptism; they reach their intended completeness, and are therefore taken away from the grief of this life. The perfection of Christ's manifestation of the Father was steadily progressing until at the point of death He completely manifested Him. Thus at Christ's most forlorn and humanly desperate point, utterly exhausted, with no beauty humanly that we should desire Him, utterly despised, rejected and at best misunderstood by every human being, the Lord Jesus at that point was supremely manifesting the Father; He was manifesting God's very own self at that point when He cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:5). It is axiomatic from this that the Gospel of God will be generally rejected by men. The Lord foresaw that His cross would be the final consummation of God's plan in that He at times almost spoke as if He saw His death as His glorification. Thus He speaks of the cross as a going to the Father (Jn. 16:16,17,28). The description of Him as the snake *lifted up* in the wilderness is in the context of Christ ascending to Heaven (Jn. 3:12-14), as if the lifting up of the snake was a reference to both the crucifixion and ascension of the Lord.

"We ought..."

At the point Christ expired, He laid down His life. So close was the link between Father and Son at this point, so deeply was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that John could later comment: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He* laid down His life for us: and we ought (in response) to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). The love of Christ and the cross are paralleled in 2 Cor. 5:14. To behold Christ there at the end, to imagine the sound of those words "It is finished", to begin to sense Christ's spiritual supremacy at that point, should deeply deeply motivate us. Christ loved us with a love which was love "unto *the end*" (Jn. 13:1)- the same word translated "finished" in "It is finished". As Christ said that, His love for us was complete, it was love unto the end, love right up to and beyond the limits of the concept of love. And we are actually asked to imagine that love, the growth of it for us until it was finished, perfected in the laying down of His life- and respond to it.

The Lord thought as much: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it (in his forthcoming death, cp. Jn. 12:26): *that* the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). "In this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16). Herein was the definition of love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His son for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10). By beholding the finished perfection of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of Christ will dwell in us, and the love of God will be deeply in our hearts. There is almost a mystical power in reflecting upon the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross; somehow by beholding His glory, His matchless display of God's righteousness at the end, we will start to reflect that glory in our very beings. "We all, with open (RV "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory (moral attributes, the peerless character) of the Lord (Jesus), are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit (mind and influence) of the Lord (Jesus)" (2 Cor. 3:18). Time and again is it stressed that the Lord did all this "for us". Jn. 10:14,15 link His knowing of us His sheep, and His giving His life for us. It was because He knew us, our sins, or kind of failures, who we are and who we would be, and fail to be... that He did it. And knowing our brethren, building understanding and relationship with them, is how and why we will be motivated to the same laying down of life for them.

The Work Of God

But the work finished by the Lord Jesus was not just the faultless display of God's characteristics. The Son's manifestation of the Father was to the end that we might be saved (a point fundamental to an appreciation of the Gospel). The work that Christ ended when He cried "It is finished" was the execution of the whole will of God; for the work that He finished was God's will: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of...my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn. 4:32,34). The will of God is that we might be sanctified, counted as righteous, and ultimately given salvation (1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 10:10). "I came down from heaven... to do...the will of him

that sent me...and this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:38-40). God's will is that we should "see", i.e. understand, the righteousness of Christ, and believe that this will be imputed to us, and thereby we can be saved. To have an appreciation of the righteousness of Christ is therefore something absolutely essential for us to develop.

To achieve that fullness of righteousness and salvation for us meant more to the Lord Jesus than physical food; His great physical hunger in John 4 was bypassed by the fact that He was bringing about the salvation of a fallen woman. He had a baptism, i.e. a death and resurrection, to be baptized with, and He was "straitened until it be *accomplished*" (Lk. 12:50), the same word translated "finished" in Jn. 19:30. He agonized throughout His life, looking ahead to that moment of spiritual completion. The more we appreciate this, the more we will be able to enter into His sense of relief: "It is finished / accomplished". And this too should characterize our lives; ever straining ahead to that distant point when at last we will attain that point of spiritual completeness. The incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was recognized by Jesus as but a cameo of His whole life; our salvation through His perfect manifestation of the Father was the end in view, it was this which was all consuming for Him. He was not motivated solely by a desire *firstly* for His own salvation, as some of our atonement theologians have wrongly implied. His meat and drink was to do the Father's work and will, which was to save us through imputing Christ's righteousness to us. This is what motivated His obedience, His perfection; it was our salvation which was the last thing in His human consciousness as He cried "*It is finished*". His attitude, both at the start of His ministry and in His approach to His death, was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God... by the which will we are sanctified (counted righteous) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

Old Testament Allusions

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" ultimately finished when Christ cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30; it alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would "finish transgression... make an end of sins... make reconciliation for iniquity... bring in everlasting righteousness... and to anoint the Most Holy", as if a new sanctuary were being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. "It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

Ex. 40:33 is perhaps the clearest basis for the words of Jn. 17:4. This describes how Moses "reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); "So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for "reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's "seed" being glorified in the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect. Surely, surely this should inspire us to have the confidence that this is still how He sees us, both individually and collectively? The mystery of God will ultimately be "finished" in the Kingdom (Rev. 10:7); and yet on the cross Christ could see that effectively "It is finished" at that point, in that the way had now been made absolutely certain. So confident was the Lord in the power of His sacrifice, so great was His sense of purpose and achievement! And nothing has changed with Him until this day.

"It is finished" has some connection with the Lord loving His people "to the very end" (Jn. 13:1- *eis telos*). To the end or completion of what? Surely the Lord held in mind Moses' last speech before he died. Then, "Moses had finished writing all the words of this Law in a book, even to the very end (LXX *eis telos*)" (Dt. 31:24). It was Moses' law which was finished / completed when the Lord finally died. Again we marvel at the Lord's intellectual consciousness even in His death throes. The fact He had completed the Law was upmost in His mind. This alone should underline the importance of never going back to reliance upon that Law, be it in Sabbath keeping or general legalism of attitude.

Progressive Revelation

Putting all this together, we see our Lord realizing that He had achieved the perfect reflection of the Father's glory, His character; He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do. He knew that the perfection of that manifestation which He had achieved would be imputed to us, and therefore He looked forward to us as if we were perfect, He foresaw our salvation, He saw us in the Kingdom. It is quite possible that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom⁽¹⁾. It can be noted that Christ's working of the work of God is associated with His miracles. Each of them was part of the work which the Father had given Him to finish (Jn. 5:36). The Lord's miracles were not motivated by a desire to do solve the need of this present evil world; they were "signs" which spoke of the Father's character; they were a progressive manifestation of the glory of the Father in order to deepen the faith of the disciples (Jn. 2:11). This is why each of them can be seen as deeply parabolic, teaching so much about the character / glory of the Father. Any temporal physical help which they provided was only an incidental by-product.

The progressive nature of Christ's manifestation of God's glory through the miracles is suggested by Jn. 2:11: "This *beginning* of miracles did Jesus...and manifested forth his glory". Likewise Matthew's Gospel has at least four references to the fact that Christ "finished" or "ended" revealing God's words (Mt. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 "It is finished". His words were a manifestation of the Father's glory / character. Thus in Jn. 17 Christ associates His manifestation of the Father's Name / glory with His (progressive) giving of the Father's words to the disciples. Thus at the very end Christ must have felt that now He had reached the end of that progressive revelation, now He was manifesting the fullness of God, a God who *is* love- as He hung naked, covered in blood and spittle, totally misunderstood, deserted by His superficial disciples. At that point He was fully, fully, completely, manifesting the Father.

Our Perfection

In His final physical agony, the mind of our Lord was full of thoughts of our salvation. Such was the extent of His devotion to us. It has taken us hundreds of English words to just begin to enter into the intensity of spiritual thinking which was going on in the mind of our Lord. And yet He asks us to share His cross, to run our whole life with endurance even as He endured on the cross (Heb. 12:1,2), to personally enter into His sufferings; to be likewise filled with an overpowering concern for the salvation of others and the reflection of God's character in our own. It seems that Paul was able to enter into the mind of the Lord Jesus in this. "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9), your finishing, your rearing up as a perfect tabernacle; this was Paul's attitude to spiritually weak Corinth. "I have *finished* my course" (2 Tim. 4:7) uses the same word as in Jn. 19:30 ("It is *finished*"). 2 Tim. 4 has a number of other allusions to Christ's final sufferings. As the Lord felt He had finished the work just before He actually had (Jn. 17:4), so did Paul in 2 Tim. 4; He felt He had entered into that sense of finishing which his Lord had on the cross. Our aim is to be perfected, to come to the full knowledge of Christ, "unto a perfect man (a finished man; the same word as in "It is *finished*"), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13). As our Lord moved towards that point of ultimate spiritual completeness, so do we too. At last we will attain that perfection, at last we too will know the feeling of "It is finished" - as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

Notes

(1) See "*Father, forgive them*".

19:32- see on Jn. 19:18.

19:34 A connection of thought arises from the word "pierced". Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

19:35 It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. There are links between the concept of 'truth' and the cross. In Ps. 60:4 God's Truth is displayed on the banner

(s.w. "pole", on which the snake was lifted up). John struggled with words, even under inspiration, to get over to us the tremendous truth and reality of what he witnessed at the cross (Jn. 19:35). God is the ultimate Truth, and the cross was the ultimate declaration of His Truth.

19:36 The prophecy of Ps. 34:20 about not a bone of the Lord being broken is clearly applied to Him in Jn. 19:36. But the context is clearly about all of us- any righteous man. The preceding verse speaks of how the Lord delivers the righteous man out of all his tribulations- and this verse is applied to other believers apart from the Lord Jesus in Acts 12:11 and 2 Tim. 3:11,12. The chilling fact is that we who are in the body of the Lord are indeed co-crucified with Him.

19:37- see on Jn. 1:14.

The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. "The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The prophecy of Zech. 12:10 concerning looking on the pierced Messiah is quoted in Rev. 1:7 concerning the judgment seat; and yet in Jn. 19:37 concerning the cross. See on Jn. 12:42.

The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how Christ's death was and is effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

19:38 It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience. It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre". The text records that they desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus

only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

Besought The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

19:39 Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. no. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues... would have considered crazy, But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil". Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to

give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he “waited for the Kingdom of God” when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom. We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord’s body would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted. There is significant extra-Biblical information about Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus’ daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.

The life of radical grace is infectious. Mary’s lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord’s body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord’s body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely the nature of Mary’s giving inspired that of Nicodemus. Paul likewise writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had “inspired very many” to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God’s super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise.

20:1 Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- “O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory” (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord’s teaching, that her brother’s resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father’s glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord’s teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has “wisdom” as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord’s feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as “the wisdom of God”. She anxiously heard His words. And thus she

sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early” (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

John’s record seems to reflect how he saw parallels between himself and Mary in their witness to the resurrection. They both “came to the tomb” (Jn. 20:1,4), stood outside, “stooped” and looked into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11), “beheld... saw” (Jn. 20:5,12). Yet Mary was the first to see the risen Lord. The testimony of a woman didn’t count in the 1st century world, and yet God chose her to be the first witness. In doing so, He was teaching that the work of witness and the sheer power of what we are witnesses to can transform the most hesitant and inappropriate person into a preacher of the irrepressible good news, even with the whole world against them. It’s as if John is saying in his account of the Gospel that Mary was in some ways his pattern; he and her were to be connected. He wasn’t ashamed to thus identify himself with the witness of a woman. Ps. 68 is prophetic of the Lord’s death and resurrection. Verse 18 is specifically quoted in the New Testament about His ascension. Verse 11 predicts that: “The Lord gave the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host”. This primarily concerns the publishing of the Lord’s resurrection, although the imagery is based upon the singing of Miriam and the women of Israel after the Red Sea deliverance. Clearly enough, women were to play a major part in the witness to the Lord’s resurrection. This was shown by the women being commanded to go tell their brethren that the Lord had risen indeed. And yet there is ample evidence that it was women who in practice were the more compelling preachers of the Gospel in the first century ecclesia. The simple fact is that God delegated to women the duty of witnessing to what was for Him the most momentous and meaningful act in all His creation- the raising of His Son from the dead. He was clearly making a point- that those whose witness this world may despise, are those He uses. And in this we can take endless personal encouragement, beset as we are by our own sense of inadequacy as preachers.

John’s record presents the resurrection through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She went alone to the tomb while it was yet dark. This doesn’t contradict the other accounts, which pick up the story at sunrise, when all the women were together there.

20:2 Mary Magdalene was the first believer to call Jesus “the Lord” (Jn. 20:2)- despite His repeated teaching that this was his true position. They had called Him “Lord and Master” but not *the* Lord. Her example soon spread to her less perceptive brethren- for they likewise soon were speaking of Him as “the Lord” (Jn. 20:25; 21:7). Although the resurrection made Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), yet to her, it was as if He was risen and glorified already. This is an indication to me that she did really believe He would rise, but her humanity, her grief, the intensity of the moment, led her to act and speak as if this wasn’t the case. Consider all the descriptions of Jesus as “the Lord” even during His ministry; so certain was He that He would indeed be made Lord and Christ- and realize, how the fact Mary Magdalene too called Him “Lord” before seeing the proof of His resurrection indicates that she shared this perception.

20:5 Each of the Gospel writers reveals a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. The preaching of the twelve disciples is really an admission of their own weaknesses. For example, John mentions that when he and Peter arrived at the tomb, he [John] “did not go in”, but Peter did, and therefore believed before he did (Jn. 20:5). We see here John’s gentle humility, and reflection in his own preaching of how he esteemed others better than himself, and of stronger faith. John says that “he saw and believed”, but goes straight on to say that he at that

time did not understand that Jesus must rise from the dead (Jn. 20:8,9). He surely means that he *later* believed, but not right then.

20:6 Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary Magdalene (Lk. 24:11).

20:7 It does us good to reflect soberly and deeply upon the events of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. To reconstruct in our own minds what really happened, that we might know Him the better. That on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, 1970 years ago...there really was a man lead out to crucifixion. And that three days later, in a dark tomb, a tightly wrapped body came to life, and in a microsecond was standing outside his burial garments. The only sound would have been of the graveclothes collapsing or subsiding as the support of the body inside them was removed. The napkin wrapped around His head (cp. Jn. 11:44) would suddenly have become a crumpled turban. The clothes would have been like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged. John saw the linen clothes “lying”, but according to one authority the Greek word can apparently stand the translation “collapsed”. That John saw the clothes “lying” is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence- ‘He saw, as they were lying [or ‘collapsed’], the linen clothes’. John also records his deep impression that the head napkin was not with the other clothes, but by itself. Apparently it was normal practice to bind the body and the head in graveclothes, but not the neck. It could be that John is saying that he was most struck by the way there was a slight gap between the collapsed body bindings and the head napkin- the gap where the neck of Jesus had been. This head napkin was “wrapped together”, but here we can with fair confidence say that the Greek word means more ‘twirled’. The word aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty napkin still preserved. And so John saw the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, and the shell of the head cloth, with a gap between the two where the Lord’s neck had been. And John “saw [this] and believed”. Now of course it is possible to reconstruct the whole scene otherwise. What I am saying is that in our personal following of the Lord we love, we each need to try to reconstruct for ourselves how it would have been. The artless style of the inspired records encourage us in this- one only has to compare them against the fantastic Apocryphal Gospels, with their descriptions of Jesus bursting from the tomb in power and glory, to see in the most obvious terms what is inspired and what isn’t.

20:11 Jn. 20:11 records that Mary “stood without”, and yet the same word is used in a rather negative context elsewhere in the Gospels: Lk. 8:20 Mary and His brethren standing without; Lk. 13:25 the rejected “stand without” with the door closed, seeking for their Lord; Jn. 18:16 Peter stood at the door without. It’s as if she was in the shoes of the rejected. And yet she is graciously accepted in a wonderful way by the risen Lord. And she is our representative.

20:13 The Lord, straight after His resurrection, repeats verbatim the Angels words to Mary: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel’s words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with them especially after His resurrection.

20:14 Jewish women were not supposed to talk to men in public. The fact that Mary addresses the man whom she thinks of as “the gardener” shows how her love for Jesus, her search for Him, led her to break out of gender roles. She perceived that through His death, there was now neither male nor female, but a new kind of family (Jn. 20:14,15).

It is emphasized that Mary Magdalene beheld the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40)- the same word is used about how she came *to see* the sepulchre (Mt. 28:1); she *saw* Jesus standing (Jn. 20:14). People beheld the spectacle of the crucifixion (Lk. 23:48) and repented, smiting their breasts in recognition of their sinfulness. She was representative of us all. John’s Gospel is full of references to the crucifixion, and especially the idea of ‘seeing’ / perceiving its’ real meaning. Jn. 1 “we beheld his glory”; the word was made flesh on the cross specifically. “This is the will of him that sent me, that

every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (Jn. 6:40) connects with the idea of looking unto the bronze snake (which represented Christ on the cross) and receiving life. “And he that seeth [on the cross] seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:45,46). Note again the linkage between seeing and believing; which Jn. 3 applies to belief in the crucified Jesus, as Israel had to believe in the bronze snake on the pole. The light of the world was defined in Jn. 3 as the light of the cross. In seeing / perceiving Christ on the cross, we perceive the essence of God- for the Father was so intensely manifested in the Son. There, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The emphasis on Mary Magdalene being the one who beheld the cross, the one who perceived the things of the Lord’s death and resurrection, is surely to set her up as our example. For we can look at the cross without perceiving the glory and wonder it all, neither perceiving the urgency of the imperative in the things which were so uniquely crystallized there.

20:15 Mary addresses the gardener as “sir”, but this is the same Geek word [*kurios*] as is translated “Lord” a few verses earlier, when she describes Jesus as “the Lord” (Jn. 20:2,15). It seems to me that she half knew that this person standing there was Jesus. She was half expecting it. “They have taken away the Lord” (Jn. 20:2) almost sounds as if she felt Him to be alive and already made Lord and Christ. But the sheer grief of the situation distracted her from seeing that it was really Him. In this kind of thing there is, to me at least, the greatest proof of inspiration. It is all so real and therefore credible. She couldn’t dare believe that her wildest hope of every grieving person was actually coming true. And in this we surely see some echoes of the slowness to believe that we have actually made it which it seems there will be after the judgment seat experience.

He was still the same Jesus. The Lord was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke the bread. How He broke a loaf of bread open with His hands *after* His resurrection reflected the same basic style and mannerism which He had employed *before* His death. Not only the body language but the Lord’s choice of words and expressions was similar both before and after His passion. He uses the question “Who are you looking for?” at the beginning of His ministry (Jn. 1:38), just before His death (Jn. 18:4) and also after His resurrection (Jn. 20:15). And the words of the risen Lord as recorded in Revelation are shot through with allusion to the words He used in His mortal life, as also recorded by John. See on Jn. 21:5,20.

The Lord asked the confused Mary: “Whom seekest thou?” (Jn. 20:15). He had used these words three times in His ministry (Jn. 1:38; 18:4,7). He used words which she ought to have recognized as a catch phrase of the Lord, and thereby have realized that it was the Lord speaking to her. She did, eventually, make the connection; she lived up to the spiritual potential which the Lord realized in her. She replies by exclaiming: Rabboni! When three years earlier the Lord had “*turned* [as He did again to Mary]... and saith... What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi...” (Jn. 1:38). And now Mary sees the similarity which the Lord has set up, and joyfully realizes the reality of His resurrection through it.

That God’s Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: “My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself”. No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: “That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable”. I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

20:17 Mary was told to spread the good news of the resurrection: “Go to my brothers and say to them...” (Jn. 20:17). And she obeyed: she “went and announced...” (Jn. 20:18). Putting this alongside the other gospel records, this is all in the context of the disciples being commanded to take the good news of the risen Lord to all men. Surely Mary is being set up as an example of obedience to that command. She overcame all her inhibitions, the sense of “Who? *Me?*”, the embarrassment at being a woman teaching or informing men in the first century... and as such is the

pattern for all of us, reluctant as we are to bear the good news. “Among the Hebrews women only had limited rights and above all could not act as witnesses”. And yet, the Lord chose Mary to be the witness to His resurrection to His brethren. He turned societal expectations on their head by setting her up as the bearer of the good news to them. Why? Surely to shake all of us from the safety of our societal and human closets; that we, whoever we are, however much we feel inadequate and ‘this is not for me’, are to be the bearers of the Lord’s witness to all men.

Mary was told to go and tell her brethren: “I ascend unto my Father...” (Jn. 20:17). She was not to tell them ‘Jesus is going to ascend...’. She was to use the first person. Why? Surely because in her witness she was to be to them the voice of Jesus. And so it is for us all; we are witnesses in Him, we are Jesus to the eyes both of our brethren and this world.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene alone perceived [from Ps. 110?] that the Lord must ascend after His resurrection- for surely this was why she kept clinging on to Him after He rose, fearful He would there and then disappear Heavenwards. And therefore the Lord comforted her, that there was no need to cling on to Him so, for He was not just then going to ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17). But another reading of this incident is possible, once it is realized that the OT associates clinging to another’s feet with making a request of them (2 Kings 4:27).

20:18- see on Mk. 3:14.

Mary went to tell others “what she had seen and heard” (Jn. 20:18), and John in one of his many allusions back to his Gospel uses these very words about all the apostles- “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you” (1 Jn. 1:1,3). He and the other brethren took Mary as their inspiration in the work of witness, as should we.

Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His “brethren” straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It’s as if He didn’t want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God”. This allusion would therefore be saying: ‘OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn’t essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God’.

Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them (Jn. 20:18). By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen “a vision of Angels” (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord’s appearance to them as them having “seen a spirit” (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To ‘spiritualize’ is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to JWs, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the ‘laws’ of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed. See on Mk. 16:9.

When John records Mary Magdalene as saying “I have seen the Lord” (Jn. 20:18), he is consciously alluding to Jn. 14:19 and Jn. 16:16, where the Lord had prophesied that the disciples would see Him. It’s as if John saw her as the representative of them all. Further evidence of this is found in the way John records the Lord as saying that He calls His sheep by name, and they recognize His voice (Jn. 10:5)- and by then recording how Mary Magdalene was the one who recognized the Lord’s voice when He called her name (Jn. 20:16), as if she represents all the Lord’s sheep. A woman rising early and searching for the Man whom she loves, asking the watchmen whether they have

seen him, then finding him, seizing him and not letting him go...this is all the fulfilment of Song 3:1-4, where the bride of Christ is pictured doing these very things. Mary Magdalene is therefore used by John as a symbol for all the believers, or at least for the Jewish Messianic community searching for Jesus. Compare too the Lord's reassurance of Mary Magdalene with language of Is. 43:1 to the whole community of believers: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name..."

20:20- see on Lk. 24:41.

20:21- see on Jn. 17:20.

The resurrection narratives emphasize how Angels said the same words; how in the face of repeated disbelief, Jesus tried repeatedly to reassure them. This theme of repetition continues with Jesus saying twice "Peace be unto you!"

20:23- see on Lk. 11:4.

I would suggest that John's Gospel does in fact record the great commission, but in different and more spiritual words: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you... If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God's forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: 'I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don't fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven'. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. "Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" becomes the equivalent of "he that believeth not shall be damned". Note that the Greek for 'retain' strictly means 'to hold / bind', and that for 'remit' means 'to loose'. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: "...so shall ye be my disciples...that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide". The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher's obedience to his Lord's commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).

20:24 There's meaning in the fact that Thomas' other name, Didymus, is given (Jn. 20:24). 'Didymus' means literally 'the double', presumably implying he was a twin. But 'Didymus' is a form of the same Greek word we find in Mt. 28:17, describing the 'doubt', literally the doubleness, i.e. the double mindedness, which there was in the disciples. Again, the element of doubt and lack of faith is being emphasized.

20:25 Jn. 20:27 records the Lord's challenge to Thomas: "Do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer" (Gk.). And then He pronounces to Thomas: "You have [now] believed" (Jn. 20:29, Syriac text). It's as if John is challenging his hearers and readers in the same way, and setting up his buddy 'doubting Thomas' as their pattern. John makes the point that Thomas didn't initially believe the 'preaching' of the Gospel of the resurrection by the other disciples. When John records Thomas as saying "If I do not see... and put my finger... I will never believe" (Jn. 20:25), he is connecting back to the Lord's very similar words: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (Jn. 4:48). It's as if John is bringing out the weakness of faith in his friend Thomas, the struggle there was to believe, knowing it would elicit a chord in his hearers, thus building a bridge between the hearers and the preacher. And John goes on to record that there is a greater blessing for those who believe, not having seen the Lord, than there is for preachers like himself, who had believed because they had seen and touched the Lord (Jn. 20:29). It's as if John shows the

utmost humility before his audience, imputing to them greater faith than he had. And Peter does likewise, alluding here when he says that his readers love the Lord, although they [unlike he] had never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

20:26 They still weren't obedient to their risen Lord- they didn't go immediately into Galilee. They remained at least eight days in Jerusalem, until Jesus appeared to Thomas there.

20:28 Although Thomas' exaltation "My Lord and my God!" may appear an off-the-cuff gasping out of praise, can I suggest there was far more to it than that. I suggest he was alluding to or quoting Ps. 35:23: "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, my God and my Lord" . The Lord Jesus had indeed arisen and stirred up in resurrection, and Thomas realized that it was to his judgment. When we look closer at the Psalm, it seems to reveal something of the thoughts of the Lord Jesus. He had desired God to awake to *his* need. And now Thomas shares those same thoughts, through his relationship to Jesus. And this is a very Johannine theme; that the relationship between Father and Son is to be shared by the believers, on account of the way they relate to the risen Lord Jesus. Or perhaps Thomas had Ps. 91:2 in mind: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my fortress, my God; in him will I trust" . When Thomas addressed Jesus as "My Lord and my God" , he was likely alluding to the way the Emperors [Domitian especially, according to Seutonius] demanded to be called " *Dominus et Deus noster*" - Our Lord and our God. Thomas was saying something radical- he was applying to the Lord Jesus the titles which those living in the Roman empire were only to apply to Caesar. And our exaltation of the Lord Jesus should be just as radical in practice. Further, I note that Yahweh Elohim is usually translated in the Septuagint 'Kyrios, ho theos mou'- Lord, my God" . Am I going too far in thinking that Thomas saw in the risen Jesus the fulfillment of the Yahweh Elohim name? He would thus have been fulfilling the Lord's prophecy in Jn. 8:28: "When you lift up the Son of man, then you will realize that I Am..." . Finally the disciples were grasping that "All men may honour the Son just as they honour the Father" (Jn. 5:23). Thomas' expression of praise was thus blasphemy to both Jews and Romans. A true perception of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus leads us to a unique position which cannot be accepted by any who are not truly of Him.

Again and again we have to emphasize that we read the Biblical documents at a great distance from the culture in which they were first written. It was quite understandable for a person to carry the name of their superior, without being that superior in person. And so it was and is with the Lord Jesus. To give just one of many possible confirmations of this: "[In 2 Esdras 5:43-46]... God's spokesman, the angel Uriel, is questioned by Ezra as though he were both Creator and Judge [which God alone is]. Ezra uses the same style of address to Uriel ("My lord, my master") as he uses in direct petition to God. This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology [i.e. the study of who Christ is]". The acclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God!" must be understood within the context of first century usage, where as Paul says, many people were called Lord and "god" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). If we're invited by our manager "Come and meet the president", we don't expect to meet the President of the USA. We expect to meet the president of the company. The word "president" can have more than one application, and it would be foolish to assume that in every case it referred to the President of the USA. And it's the same with the words "Lord" and "God" in their first century usage. Hence a Jewish non-trinitarian like Philo could call Moses "God and king of the whole nation" (*Life Of Moses* 1.158)- and nobody accused him of not being monotheistic! Significantly, there is in the New Testament the Greek word *latreuo* which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words [especially *proskuneo*] used about the worship of believers (Rev. 3:9, Daniel (Dan. 2:46 LX), kings of Israel etc. (1 Chron. 29:20 LXX).

20:29- see on Lk. 1:45.

20:31- see on Jn. 17:20.

John's Gospel was written for the specific purpose of bringing others to faith- like most of the New Testament, it is essentially a missionary document (Jn. 20:30). Jn. 20:31 makes it clear that the purpose of John's Gospel was to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ: "This has been written in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, holding this faith, you may possess life by His name". C.H. Dodd comments: "The tense of the verbs... the aorists... would necessarily have implied that the readers did not so far hold the Christian faith or possess eternal life". "That ye might believe" implies John intended his readership to be unbelievers rather than believers in the first instance. Jn. 19:35 implies that the community for whom John was writing had John as the basic source of their knowledge about Jesus, and was highly respected as their spiritual father. 'John' is therefore his inspired write-up of the Gospel he had taught his converts, and therefore it has various specific features highly relevant to them. Acts likewise seems to be written as a preaching document, recording the speeches of basic apologetics which were made to both Jews and Gentiles. The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. John seems to suggest that he chose which miracles to record so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn. 20:31). The implication is that he wrote his Gospel with the intention of it being used as a preaching document.

The Gospel records are transcripts of the original preaching of the Gospel delivered by e.g. Matthew or John. Thus John wrote down his gospel "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (Jn. 20:31). His first letter was written, it seems, to the converts which his Gospel preaching had made: "I write these things to *you who believe in the name of the Son of God* so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:13). It has even been suggested that John was writing in order to win converts to Christianity from a specific synagogue somewhere in the Diaspora. Another suggestion is that John is aiming at converting Samaritans or at least, a group of Gentiles perhaps associated with a synagogue. For John records how Samaritans came to Jesus, how "the world" includes them and not just Jews (Jn. 4:42); how physical descent from Abraham is irrelevant now (Jn. 8:33-41); how the true Israelite is anyone who has been born again (Jn. 1:47; 3:3-8), and John stresses that the true sheep of Jesus for whom he died are not just Jews (Jn. 10:16; 11:51,52). John records Jesus' explaining that He has already done the sowing, but the reaping of the Samaritans / Gentiles is up to us the reapers (Jn. 4:35-38). The lesson is that we must each preach the Gospel to others in a way that is relevant to them, not compromising the basic message, but articulating it in ways that connect with their needs and situation. The New Testament is simply full of encouragement and example in this.

21:1 Mt. 28:10 sounds as if Jesus intended not to reveal Himself to the disciples until they met in Galilee. However, Jn. 21:1 stresses that He revealed Himself to them in Galilee *again*; and Jn. 21:14 notes this was the third time that the disciples as a group saw the risen Lord. Perhaps the degree of their unbelief was unexpected even to the risen Lord.

This incident occurred after the disciples had already met Jesus in a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16). Their going fishing might imply that they just returned to their old business. Meeting the risen Christ still didn't have a permanent effect upon them.

21:2 The Gospel writers each conclude their message with some reference to their own incredible slowness to believe the very Gospel which they were now preaching to others. Between them, the preaching of the twelve makes it clear that they saw the risen Lord in Jerusalem, at least twice, were commissioned as preachers of that good news...and yet returned to Galilee in disbelief and resumed their previous occupations. And of course they recall their Lord's rebuke of them for their slowness and blindness. Truly they were appealing to their hearers on the basis of their own humanity and weakness of faith. They weren't painting themselves as immaculate, never doubting believers. They were so strongly portraying their humanity, knowing that they were appealing to men and women who were equally human and frail of faith. John perhaps especially brings out their blindness at this

time. He describes how they were fishing on the lake, having given up, it seems, their faith in Jesus, despite His appearances to them. Yet John describes that incident in language which evidently alludes to the account in Luke 5 of the Lord's first call to them by the same lake, whilst they were fishing. Consider the similarities:

- They have fished all night but caught nothing
- The Lord tells them to cast their nets
- They obey and catch many fish
- The effect on the nets is mentioned
- Peter reacts emotionally, and in both records is called 'Simon Peter'
- The presence of "the sons of Zebedee" is mentioned both times (Jn. 21:2; Lk. 5:10)
- Jesus is called 'Lord'
- The same Greek words are used for climbing aboard, landing, the nets etc.

The point being that John is saying: 'Durr! We were so dumb, not to realize the similarities more quickly! *Of course it was Jesus!* But we were so, so pathetically slow to accept it. After the encounter by the lake in Lk. 5, Jesus made us fishers of men. But we refused to be, initially. So He had to re-commission us yet again after this second incident'. John uses the verb *helkein* to describe how they 'drew' the nets to land- the same word used elsewhere by him for people being 'drawn' to Jesus (Jn. 6:44; 12:32). He is recognizing that they had had to be re-taught the call to be fishers of men, because they had pushed off to Galilee in disbelief and disobedience to the great commission to go and catch men. Perhaps John records Peter being asked the same question "Lovest thou me?" three times, in order to show how terribly slow they all were to accept the teachings of the Lord which now they were asking others to accept.

21:3 - see on Mk. 10:28.

21:5 There's a rather nice indicator of the Lord's conscious effort to show His 'humanity' even after His resurrection. It's in the way the risen Lord calls out to the disciples at the lake, calling them "lads" (Jn. 21:5). The Greek *paidion* is the plural familiar form of the noun *pais*, 'boy'. Raymond Brown comments that the term "has a colloquial touch... [as] we might say 'My boys' or 'lads' if calling to a knot of strangers of a lower social class". Why use this colloquial term straight after His resurrection, something akin to 'Hey guys!', when this was not His usual way of addressing them? Surely it was to underline to them that things hadn't changed in one sense, even if they had in others; He was still the same Jesus. See on Jn. 20:15.

21:6 Further evidence that some from all nations must be acceptably in Christ before His return is found by considering the account of the "hauling in" of the fish nets in Jn. 21:6,11. It is the same word as in Jn. 12:32: "When I am lifted up from the earth [in death], I shall *draw* all men unto myself". The nets were not torn [*schizein*] in that there must be no division amongst true preachers of the Gospel who all teach the same basic Gospel- contrast this with how John frequently mentions the *schizein* which occurred amongst those who would not fully accept the Lord's message (Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). The 153 fish caught in the net may refer to 153 being the total number of species of fish recognized by the Greek zoologists. The Lord's cross will draw all men- i.e. men from all nations- unto Himself through our preaching, through our undivided drawing in of the nets. The drawing in of nets is used by the Lord elsewhere as a figure for His return and judgment- only when they are all drawn in can the bad fish be cast away. So the conclusion has to be faced: there must be fish caught in the net, i.e. Men and women who have responded to the true Gospel, amongst "all men", every species of humanity, before the Lord's return. If we are convicted that we teach the true Gospel, then it follows that there must be true Christian communities amongst "all men" before the Lord returns; and thus His return will be hastened by our establishment of those groups. When the Gospel goes into all the world, then shall the end come.

21:7- see on Acts 11:17.

Peter knew Jesus had risen, and he had met him and been “glad” when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. But “when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea” (Jn. 21:7), and then meets the Lord and as it were they settle the score relating to his denials. Again by a fire, the three fold “lovest thou me?” probed Peter’s denials, and the threefold commission to “feed my sheep” confirmed his total re-enstatement to grace. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn’t. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don’t really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

When Peter realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore in Jn. 21, this was probably the second or third time he had met the risen Lord. But when John says “It is the Lord”, Peter throws himself into the water to rush to Him as if it’s the first time they have met after the denials. Surely it was a higher appreciation of what Christ’s Lordship entailed that suddenly struck him at that moment, and he now rushed eagerly to Him, believing surely in His gracious forgiveness. No wonder in a month or so’s time he was appealing for men to repent and accept forgiveness on the basis that really, Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ convicted Peter (and all men) of both their sinfulness (as they see themselves in the peerless light of His moral majesty) and also of the reality of His forgiveness. “I am a sinful man, *O Lord*” (Lk. 5:8) is a case in point. A case could be made to argue that Peter’s use of ‘Master’ tends to be at times when he is weak or doubting (Lk. 5:5; 8:45; Mk. 11:21); whilst he saw Jesus as a master who simply gives directives to His slaves, there was not such great inspiration to faith. But the utter and surpassing Lordship of Jesus had quite a different message. Peter’s perception of Jesus as ‘Lord’ climaxed when he perceived that “It is the Lord!” whilst fishing on Galilee after the resurrection. His sense of the greatness of this more-than-man led him to do something counterinstinctive and even absurd- he adds clothes before jumping into the water to swim to Him, in order to be attired as best he could be before Him. It would seem that He was imitating the body language of the Lord when He washed Peter’s feet- he tied a towel around Him [s.w. as Peter wrapping his outer garment around him, Jn. 13:4,5 cp. 21:7].

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21:9- see on Lk. 22:32.

Anyone who has reflected on any length of ecclesial experience will realize the truth of the fact that so many of our spiritual exercises in preaching and pastoral work are in fact for *our* benefit, although we may feel that they are only for the benefit of others. This is especially true of preaching: reflect how the disciples laboured so hard to catch all the fish according to the Lord’s command, but when they reached land with all the fish, they found the Lord already had fish and prepared them for breakfast (Jn. 21:9). All the labour for the fish was for their benefit: not because the Lord needed fish (cp. converts); He already had His.

Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, He thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21:9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us.

The Lord Jesus was male, and yet in so many ways He combined feminine sensitivity with His almost heroic, classic masculinity, as the King, warrior, brave captain who gave His life for His friends. You see it even after the resurrection- He cooked a meal for the guys as they were out fishing (Jn. 21:9). From our cultural distance it's not immediately obvious, but in first century Palestinian terms this was so obviously the work of a woman. The men fished, the woman sat on the beach preparing food for the hungry workers when they returned off night shift. But it was a man, a more than man, the exalted and risen Lord of the universe, who chose and delighted to do this very feminine, thoughtful and sensitive action of service. The incident isn't merely an insight into the Lord's humility even after His resurrection. It speaks of how He incorporates in His person both male and female characteristics, as the ideal and perfected humanity, the Man fully and ultimately in the image of God. And there are other examples in His life. He perhaps rejoiced to lead His disciples to the breaking of bread through setting up the sign of a man carrying a pitcher of water- which was evidently women's work. The way the Lord held John to His breast at the last supper is likewise a classic female image.

21:12 The Lord had to tell the disciples after the resurrection to "Break your fast" (Jn. 21:12 RV). Despite the Lord having appeared to them as recorded in John 20, they were fasting for the dead. No wonder the Lord urged them to break that fast. But the point is made, by John himself, as to how terribly slow they were to believe in His resurrection.

21:13 Consider how the Lord's words to Peter in Jn. 21:13 would have offered him tremendous comfort in Acts 12:8, if he appreciated them.

21:14 The reference in Jn. 21:14 to "the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples" must mean that this was the third time recorded in John that Jesus revealed Himself to them all together as a group at one and the same time.

21:15 Jesus had already met Peter twice since His resurrection, but hadn't raised the obvious issue of Peter's denials. And now He does it only *after* He has first eaten with Peter. We must bear in mind that to eat together, especially to take bread and give it to others (Jn. 21:13- reminiscent of the breaking of bread, the same words for 'bread', 'take' and 'give' are found in Mt. 26:26) implied acceptance and religious fellowship. The Lord firstly fellowshiped with Peter and only then moved on to probe the issue of his disloyalty, after having first affirmed His abiding love for Peter. He had tried to arrange circumstance to provoke Peter to himself engage with the issue- for the triple questioning, the triple invitation to work for Him, all took place by a fire of coals- just as Peter's triple denials had. We see clearly portrayed here the gentle, seeking spirit of the Lord

"Lovest thou me?" was a question for Peter's benefit, not in order to give the Lord information which He didn't have. His great sensitivity to Peter led Him to foresee the obvious question in Peter's mind: 'Has He forgiven me?'. And the Lord is saying that Peter knows the answer insofar as Peter knows how much he loves Jesus, on the principle that whoever loves much has been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). The allusion back to that incident in Luke 7 is confirmed by the way that the phrase 'to love more' occurs elsewhere only there, in Lk. 7:42: "Which of them will *love* him [Jesus] *most* [s.w. "more"]". Jesus had already forgiven Peter; the answer to Peter's concern about whether he had been forgiven was really 'Yes you have, if you believe it; and if you believe it, you will love me, and according to how much you love me, you will know how much forgiveness you have received'. In all this, we see the careful sensitivity of the Lord Jesus to His people, foreseeing and feeling our doubts and fears, our questions; and responding to them in a profound way.

"You know that I love you" was met by the Lord with the comment that Peter must feed His sheep. This wasn't so much a commandment / commission, as the Lord explaining that Peter's love for Him personally would be reflected in the degree to which Peter loved the Lord's sheep. John

grasped this clearly, when he underlines throughout his letters that we cannot have love for God without loving our brethren. The Father and Son are to be identified with their people.

Lovest thou me more than these? is grammatically ambiguous. The reference could be to the nets and ships, or to Peter's other brethren. On both fronts, Peter needed provoking to self-examination. For he was proud of his profession and too eager to return to Galilee and get back to work; and he had boasted earlier that "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I". There are purposeful ambiguities in some parts of God's word, not every sentence is intended to have a final 'right interpretation' which stands for all time; the ambiguities are to provoke our self-examination.

21:18- see on Acts 12:8.

21:18,19 Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to "follow me". Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that "thou wouldest not". The Lord foresaw that Peter's unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal 'Acts of Peter'. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: 'Domine, quo vadis?'- 'Lord / Master, to where are we going?' (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be. In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn't able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter's problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called, the question of *Quo Vadis?* Only then, at the very very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down. If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us. And for us, *Quo Vadis?*

21:19 After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die: "when thou shalt be old (i.e. more spiritually mature?), thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee (as Christ was carried to the cross) whither thou wouldest not (even at that last moment, Peter would flinch from the cross). This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (as Christ's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life. Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me". This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting

distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life. John's Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John's Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord's opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keep on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of 'follow me' is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John's Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that "hereunto were ye called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call "Follow me", and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion.

21:20 Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of 1st century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him.

21:23 There is a fatal fascination with the question of why some weren't called. But who are we as the clay to argue with the potter's grace? John's Gospel closes by addressing this question. Peter was following Jesus, walking behind Him, in response to Jesus' command to follow Him. But John was also following Jesus, and Peter turned around, turned back from following Jesus [just as he lost his focus on Jesus when he was walking on the water towards Jesus]... to notice John was also following. "Peter therefore seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (Jn. 21:19-23). The fate of others, the nature of their following or not of Jesus, is not [in this sense] directly our concern; our focus must be upon single-mindedly following Jesus as we by grace have been called to do.

21:24 The Gospel of John is the eyewitness account of John- he says that he testifies to all he has written (Jn. 21:24).

Books, MP3s and other media by Duncan Heaster are listed at heaster.org

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