

*A Study of the Teachings
of
Jesus Christ*

Written By

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Introduction

Jesus Christ testified of Himself saying, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter spoke of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ and through Him alone saying: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

The Bible teaches us that Jesus came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21, 1 Peter 1:1-2), and according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23-24), He was crucified on Calvary’s cross and became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all those who believe in Him. He is the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:11), for those “who are beloved of God” and “called as saints” (Romans 1:7), and then on the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Luke 24:46-47, Hebrews 8:1).

The Apostle John testified about Jesus saying: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). John said again about Jesus: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).

The Apostle Paul taught us that our faith in Christ comes about through our hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). However, Jesus revealed that not everyone is able hear and understand His words (John 8:43-45), but to those who have been given ears to hear, Jesus said, “let them hear” (Matthew 13:9, 23).

Jesus’ teachings are all given for the benefit of His sheep, God’s elect, who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear and understand His words. (Matthew 13:16). These will all hear His voice and follow Him as He calls each of them out by name (John 10:3). Jesus’ sheep are those whom the Father has given to Him; they will all come to Him, and none will be lost (John 6:37, John 10:29, Matthew 18:14).

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Jesus often delivered His teaching in the form of parables, to mixed crowds of people. Some in the crowds were numbered among God's elect, but others were not (John 6:63-65, 10:26). Jesus revealed the reason that He spoke to the crowds in parables, as we will see when we begin our study of His teachings with the parable of the sower in the first chapter of this book.

Jesus' parables used analogies or metaphors to compare things in the natural world with which everyone was familiar, to parallel spiritual truths. The connection between the natural figure or symbol and the spiritual lesson He communicated was not clear to many, and sometimes it was not immediately clear to His disciples. However, Jesus explained the parables to His disciples when He was alone with them because they were among those who had been given eyes to see and ears to hear.

As those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ, we also are among those who have been given eyes to see, and ears to hear and understand His words. Therefore, let us now look prayerfully and intently into His teachings, so that we may understand what God our Father has done for us when He called us to faith in His Son.

1.

The Parable of the Sower

The parable of the sower is recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:1-15). In Mark's Gospel, as Jesus began to explain the parable to the twelve and some of His followers, He said to them: "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?" (Mark 4:13). With Jesus' words here, we learn that a proper understanding of this parable is essential to understanding all His parables collectively, and therefore we will begin our study of the teachings of Jesus Christ with the parable of the sower.

The parable of the sower is probably the best illustration of the results that God will bring forth from the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in the hearing of men. In Matthew's account of the parable, Jesus first gave this teaching to the crowd that had gathered to hear what He had to say, as we read in Matthew 13:1-9. He gave the teaching in the form of a parable, using analogies or metaphors to convey His message, and then later we see that He explained the meaning of the parable to His disciples in Matthew 13:18-23. Between these two passages, Jesus revealed to His disciples that the understanding of His teachings has been hidden from many (Matthew 13:10-17).

Speaking to the crowd as recorded in Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus taught using the analogy of a farmer sowing or spreading seed over the ground, expecting to later reap a harvest from the plants that spring up from the seeds. The sowing of the seed is the metaphor that Jesus used to symbolize the proclaiming of the Gospel message, which is the outward call for men to repent and put their faith in Him for the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation to God. Many hear this proclamation of the Gospel, or this outward call, but as we will see from several other of Jesus' teachings, it has only been granted to God's elect to be able to come

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to Christ (Matthew 22:14, others), and only those who come to faith in Christ will bear spiritual fruit to the glory of God.

Jesus said that as the farmer went out to spread the seed, it fell upon different types of soil. Some of the seed fell beside the road, and the seed that fell there was eaten by the birds. Some of the seed fell in places where the soil was rocky, and the seeds sprang up quickly but were scorched by the sun because the soil they had fallen upon was shallow. Other seed fell among thorns, which choked the plants. However, some seed fell upon good soil where it produced a harvest, yielding thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was originally sown. Jesus then ended His parable by saying that whoever had ears to hear, meaning whoever was able to hear, let them hear and understand the lesson that He taught.

After Jesus had given this teaching, His disciples asked Him why He spoke to the people in parables (Matthew 13:10). Jesus' parables used metaphors and analogies to convey spiritual truths, and they were often not easily understood. His disciples were likely curious as to why He chose to use this method in His teaching, and why He did not communicate to the crowds in terms that they could more readily understand. Jesus explained why He spoke to the people in parables when He answered His disciples: ***"...To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."*** (Matthew 13:11).

Jesus' reply is very revealing, and it is in complete agreement with several Scriptures regarding God's sovereign choice of those to whom He shows mercy, while others are left in their sins (Romans 9:1-24, others). The ability to come to Christ and to understand God's word is given only to God's elect, to those whom the Father gave to Jesus (John 6:37). These are the ones whom God foreknew from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-11). In His time, God calls each of His elect to faith in Christ, justifies them, and will ultimately glorify them (Romans 8:29-30). For all the rest, Jesus taught that it has not been granted to them to understand the Gospel message and the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures, which He referred to as "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven".

Continuing in this passage of Matthew 13, after Jesus answered His disciples as to why He spoke to the people in parables, He then quoted from a passage in Isaiah 6:9-10, which speaks of God's hardening of some individuals. Though they hear the words of the Gospel message, they do not understand, and though they see, they do not perceive. This is the way it is with those to whom it has not been granted to understand the Gospel message from the Scriptures. These are the same

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individuals about whom Paul spoke in Romans 9:18; God has willed not to show mercy to them, but to harden them.

Those whom God has decided to harden are not among the ones appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48). Rather, they are among those who are appointed to disobey the Gospel message, as Peter taught (1 Peter 2:8). Their own will, desire, or decision in the matter has nothing at all to do with their salvation (John 1:13, Romans 9:16). They do not believe because God has not granted to them to come to faith in Christ (John 6:65). As Jesus said, it has not been granted to them to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:11).

After Jesus gave His parable to the crowds, He then explained the parable to His disciples, as we read in Matthew 13:18-23. Let us now look closely at each of the four cases in this parable of an individual hearing the Gospel message and let us consider the results in each case.

In the first case the seed fell beside the road where it was devoured by birds, and not upon good soil. Jesus said that this represents one who hears the Gospel message, but he does not understand it. In this case the devil comes and steals the word that was sown in his heart. This individual was unable to understand the word of God and is not saved, and he was therefore unable to bear any good fruit.

In the second case the seed fell upon rocky places. Jesus said that this case symbolizes the man who hears the word, and he receives the message with joy, which symbolizes an apparent conversion. However, he has “no firm root in himself”, as Jesus said, and he only perseveres in his faith a short time, quickly falling away when troubles or persecutions come into his life because of the word. We can interpret this second case as an individual who is not saved because God’s elect always persevere in their faith, and they never fall away. Our perseverance in our faith is brought about by God Himself (John 6:37-40, 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 Peter 1:1-5, others).

This second case also illustrates that some can believe they are saved, when in fact they are not, as Jesus also taught in His warning about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23. In this second case, just as in the first, the seed that was sown bore no fruit, because the individual who received the seed of the message did not in fact come to faith.

In the third case, the seed fell among the thorns. Jesus said that this symbolizes those who hear the word, but the worries and concerns of this life and

the deceitfulness of worldly riches choke the word, and it bears no fruit in their lives either. We can interpret this third case also as an individual who is not saved because a genuine faith in Christ will always be manifested by good works, and these good works are themselves fruit born to the glory of God.

As we consider this third case, let us remember that James taught: "...faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." (James 2:17. See also the entire passage of James 2:14-26). This is to say that a genuine faith is always accompanied by good works done in obedience to God's word. These good works are spiritual fruit born to the glory of God, and they will always be manifested in the life of a believer, even if only in some small degree. Conversely, good works themselves do not earn salvation for an individual, but a genuine faith in Christ will always be accompanied by good works. As James said, if someone claims to have faith but has no good works, his faith is dead; it does not exist.

Finally, in the fourth case the seed fell upon what Jesus described as "good soil". The good soil symbolizes the man who hears the word *and understands it* (again, consider Matthew 13:11), *bearing a harvest of good fruit, producing a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown* (Matthew 13:23).

In each of the first three cases, no fruit was born; no harvest was produced. However, in the fourth case where the seed fell upon the good soil, fruit was born, and a harvest was realized. The "good soil", as Jesus used the analogy, symbolizes God's elect. God's elect are those to whom it has been granted to hear and understand the Gospel message (Matthew 13:11, John 6:65), which is symbolized by the seed being sown, and they are those who do indeed come to faith in Christ and bear fruit. Their genuine faith will always be accompanied by good works, or a love that manifests itself by its actions, and these good works are themselves fruit born to the glory of God.

Jesus said: "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (John 15:8). We show ourselves to be Jesus' disciples by the fact that we bear fruit. We demonstrate that we have indeed been called to faith in Christ and are in truth His disciples by bearing spiritual fruit to the glory of God, whereas all the others bear no fruit.

Therefore, when men read or hear the word of God, which is the "seed" of the Gospel message, that "seed" will fall upon different types of soil, so to speak. However, the only place where individuals will in God's time be brought to faith in

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Christ is where the seed falls upon the “good soil”, which is to say where the seed of the Gospel message is proclaimed in the hearing of God’s elect.

Even though the Gospel is proclaimed widely in the world today, and many hear the message outwardly, only God’s elect will be effectually drawn to Christ, as we have discussed in detail elsewhere. These elect individuals, these chosen by God, are symbolized by the “good soil” in Jesus’ parable of the sower. When the seed of the word of God is sown in their hearts, these and only these are the ones who are able to hear the word and understand it. Having received God’s call to faith in Christ, we will always manifest our genuine faith by good works done in obedience to the word of God, and these good works are themselves fruit born to His glory.

Once again, we will consider Jesus’ words recorded in Mark’s Gospel as He began to explain the parable of the sower to the twelve and some of His followers. He said to them: “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13). With these words of Jesus in mind, we will ask ourselves what teachings given to us in the parable of the sower are essential for us to understand, if we are to understand His other parables and teachings.

One of the most important points emphasized in the passage containing the parable of the sower that we should keep in mind as we are trying to understand all the teachings of Jesus Christ is that *it has not been granted to everyone to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven*, or the word of God as recorded in the Scriptures (Matthew 13:11). Jesus is not speaking of some privileged class of believers to whom a deeper understanding of the word of God has been granted. Rather, He is speaking of all those to whom it has been granted to understand “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26-27). It has been granted to all of God’s elect to hear and understand the Gospel message as recorded in the Scriptures, and having heard and understood the message, these will all come to faith in Christ and bear fruit to the glory of God. (Matthew 13:23).

Only God’s elect, or those whom Jesus calls His sheep, will hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). *All the rest will not be able to hear and understand* (John 6:44, 6:65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

With Matthew 13:11 in mind, we should understand that most times when Jesus is giving His teachings, He is addressing a mixed audience. As He is

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teaching, the “seed” of His words is falling upon different types of “soil”, so to speak. However, the only place where the seed will come up and bear fruit, is where it falls upon the “good soil”, or in the hearing of God’s elect, those whom the Father has given to Jesus (John 6:37).

We must also understand that, according to this parable and other Scriptures as well, there is no such thing as a Christian who does not bear fruit. Some would insist that that the second case considered above where the seed fell among rocky places and the third case where the seed fell among thorns could represent believers. Such an interpretation is invalid because it is contradicted by other teachings that Jesus gave to us. (Consider John 15:8, Matthew 7:15-23, Hebrews 6:4-8). We demonstrate that we are in truth Jesus’ disciples by the fact that we bear fruit. Every genuine believer “indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

The interpretation of the parable of the sower that has been detailed here is in complete agreement with other teachings of Jesus, and it is also in agreement with many other teachings in the Bible. With the understanding that we receive from this parable, we will now move on to consider other parables and teachings that Jesus gave to us.

2.

The Vine and Its Branches

In John 15:1-8 Jesus taught as He did many times by using an analogy from things in the natural world. To teach His disciples about spiritual fruitfulness on this occasion, He compared Himself to a vine, and men to branches.

Jesus spoke of two different categories of men in this passage: those who abide or remain in Him, and those who do not. Those who abide in Christ are believers, and it is only because we “abide in the Vine” that we are “branches” that can, and will indeed, bear fruit to the glory of God.

Jesus summarized His teaching in this passage when He said: “***My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.***” (John 15:8). The bearing of fruit to the glory of God is how we give evidence that our faith is genuine; it is how we show ourselves to be in truth, Jesus’ disciples. It is also important for us to understand that God Himself will work in our lives to bring about this bearing of fruit to His glory, according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26.

A few verses later in John 15, Jesus said: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10). Here in John 15:10, and also in John 14:21-24, Jesus taught that men demonstrate a genuine faith in Him by the fact that they walk in obedience to His commands.

The Apostle John also gave us this same teaching in 1 John 2:3-6 and 1 John 5:3-5. Believers will at times sin after they are saved, but the life of every believer will be characterized fundamentally by obedience and submission to God’s word, in contrast to those of the world whose lives will be characterized fundamentally

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by sin and self-seeking. Through our obedience to God's commands, especially when we find ourselves suffering in a hard place in life, we bear fruit to His glory, showing ourselves to be His disciples. (Consider also Matthew 26:38-39 and Philippians 2:8.)

God did not leave us with only the teachings of His Son Jesus Christ, but He also assigned others to expound upon those teachings and to provide additional light on all that He intends to reveal to us as His people. This is the reason that we have the full canon of the Scriptures as it is given to us in the books of the Holy Bible. Therefore, when we are endeavoring to interpret any teaching that Jesus gave to us, we should interpret it not only in the light of the teaching itself, but also in the light of other teachings that He gave to us, and in the light of all the Scriptures as a whole.

As believers, as those who abide in the Vine, we are those whom Jesus characterized as "good soil" in the parable of the sower, who receive the "seed" of the word of God and bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred times what was sown (Matthew 13:1-23). We are those "good trees" that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 7:15-23, and we can be recognized by the good fruit that we bear, in contrast to others who bear bad fruit. We are the wheat in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). The wheat bears good fruit, whereas the tares cannot and will in the end be burned. As those who abide in the Vine, we are those whom the writer of Hebrews mentioned, who drink in the "rain" of the word of God and produce a good and useful crop. By contrast, others will drink in this same "rain" of the word of God but will bear only thorns and briars (Hebrews 6:4-9).

Those of us who are genuine believers abide in the Vine, by God's grace and by His power, ***and we will all bear fruit to the glory of God, by which we prove that we are in fact Jesus' disciples.*** In contrast to genuine believers, unbelievers do not abide in Christ, and therefore they are unable to bear fruit. For anyone to bear fruit to the glory of God, they must "abide in the Vine", which is to say that they must be in union with Christ. In other words, they must be a believer. This is the message of Jesus' teaching in John 15:1-8, and this teaching agrees with other teachings in the Bible as well, several of which we have considered above.

As we study John 15:1-8, we should understand that our position as those who abide in the Vine has ***nothing*** to do with ***any*** works of our own. As Paul taught us: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; ***and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may***

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boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis added). If we obtained our salvation through any works of our own, even some perceived “right decision” that we made, then we would be able to boast that we were humble enough, or wise enough, etc., etc. to make the “right decision” to believe, when others did not.

At the same time, we should understand that we do not maintain our own salvation through any works of our own, for then we would be able to boast that our works were good enough to keep us saved. The Scriptures teach that our salvation is not a result of any works of our own, rather it is the gift of God given to us as His elect, as those whom He chose before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1:4-5).

As genuine believers, we will bear fruit to the glory of God as a result of the fact that we “abide” in the Vine, in union with Christ. ***This fruit will be produced because by God’s grace we have been called to faith in Christ*** (John 6:44, 65, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Peter 1:1-2, others), ***and it is by God’s power, not by our own power, that we abide or remain in Christ*** (John 6:37-39, John 10:27-30, Matthew 18:10-14, Romans 8:38-39, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 Peter 1:3-5, others).

3.

Beware of False Prophets

In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets. He said they would come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, meaning that they will come to us claiming to be Christians, but inwardly they are “ravenous wolves”. When Jesus characterized these pretenders as ravenous wolves, He was warning of the danger they represent and the damage they can do among the flock of those who are in truth His sheep.

When Jesus spoke about false prophets in this passage, He was not speaking about those who may falsely claim to have a word from the Lord, as in the sense of an Old Testament prophet, but He was speaking about anyone who will claim to be a Christian who is in fact not a genuine believer. In other words, they are false prophets in the sense that their “profession” to be a Christian is false, even though they may be quite convinced that they are.

Jesus continued His teaching, saying that we will recognize these false prophets by their fruits. He then puts the question to His listeners, asking them if grapes can be gathered from thorn bushes, or if figs can be gathered from thistles.

He continued by using an analogy or comparison to illustrate His teaching, as He does in all His parables, when He compared false prophets to bad trees that can bear no good fruit. He said that every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree will bear bad fruit, and He said further that “a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (verse 18). He then pronounced judgement on false prophets when He said that every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus concluded His teaching in this passage by saying:

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Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

As Jesus ended His teaching about false prophets, He revealed that there will be “many” who will claim falsely to be Christians. They may be quite convinced that they are genuine believers. They will acknowledge Jesus as Lord (verse 21), and they will have many works to offer as evidence of the genuineness of their faith, but they are in fact unregenerate. They are deceived about the faith that they believe they possess. They are “false prophets” in the sense that their profession to be a believer is in fact false, and they will one day hear from Jesus the words: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

In interpreting and understanding the teachings of Jesus Christ, one of the fundamental principles that we should always keep in mind is that a genuine believer will *always* bear good fruit. There is no such thing as a believer who does not bear good fruit. Conversely, those who are not genuine believers are unable to bear any good fruit. This principle is illustrated here in Matthew 7:15-23, and in several other passages as well.

We saw one example of fruit bearing occurring only in the lives of believers in the parable of the sower. In this parable the “seed” of the word of God was “sown” on different types of “soil”, and the soil was the metaphor that Jesus used to represent men. The only place where the seed came up and did indeed bear fruit is where it fell on the “good soil”.

In other words, the only place where the seed of the word of God bore fruit is where it was received in the hearing of God’s elect, who are represented by the “good soil” in the parable. These are the ones who have been given “ears to hear” (Matthew 13:9). These are the ones to whom it has been granted to know and to understand the “mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven”, or the word of God as it is revealed in the Holy Bible (Matthew 13:11). These are the ones who will, through the hearing of the word of God, be brought to faith in Christ. As a result of their genuine faith, they will indeed bear fruit, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23), and God Himself will work in their lives to bring this fruit bearing to pass, according to the principle that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26.

In another parable we considered previously, we saw that Jesus compared Himself to a vine, which gives life to the branches that abide in the Vine (John 15:1-8). The branches in this parable symbolize men. It is only because we abide in the Vine, in union with Christ, that we can and will bear fruit. We demonstrate that we are in truth Jesus' disciples by the fact we do indeed bear fruit (John 15:8). Others who are not in union with Christ will not be able to bear fruit, and such "branches" will be gathered up and thrown into the fire (John 15:5-6).

In His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus is once again, as He does in many of His teachings, making distinctions between those who are His and those who are not. We see in this teaching and others as well that one of the defining characteristics of a genuine believer is that they will always bear good fruit. As Jesus said: "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ***So then, you will know them by their fruits.***" (Matthew 7:17-20, emphasis added).

Regardless of their claims to be believers and their pretense of righteousness, all that these "bad trees" can leave behind is the bad fruit of works done in disobedience to the word of God. Even though they may be convinced of their own salvation, these unregenerate individuals are in truth the tares among the wheat that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:24-30, and they can bear no good fruit.

As He concluded His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus revealed that "many" would profess to be His disciples, even though they are not. They will acknowledge Him as Lord and claim to have done righteous acts and works of service in His name (verses 21-23). However, these unregenerate individuals are in fact wolves in sheep's clothing; they are false prophets whose profession to be a believer is false. They are bad trees that can bear only bad fruit, and in the end, Jesus will say to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:23).

4.

The Wheat and the Tares

Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, which is sometimes referred to as the parable of the tares of the field or the parable of the weeds, is recorded in Matthew 13:24-30. He later explained the parable to His disciples in verses 36-43.

Jesus began this parable by saying that the kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and then they went away. Later, when the wheat plants came up and bore grain, the tares also appeared.

When the servants of the landowner noticed that tares had come up with the wheat, they came to him and asked him if he had not sown good seed in his field. He replied to them saying that an enemy had sown the tares in among his wheat.

The servants then asked him if he wanted them to go and pull up the tares. He answered them: "No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:29-30).

After they had left the crowds, Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked Him to explain the parable to them. He answered them saying:

"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send

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forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:37-43).

From the explanation given to His disciples, we can see that Jesus is the One who sows the good seed, the field is the world, and the good seed represents the sons of the kingdom. The tares are the sons of the evil one (the devil), and he is the one who sows them.

The good seed, or the wheat, is the metaphor that Jesus used to symbolize the “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:38), or God’s elect. God’s elect are those who have, or will at some point in time, be brought to faith in Christ. These individuals will indeed bear fruit, bearing a harvest “useful to those for whom it is tilled”, as the writer of Hebrews said (Hebrews 6:7). In contrast to the good seed which bears fruit, Jesus spoke of tares, which symbolize unbelievers. The tares bear no good fruit, and indeed they *cannot* bear any good fruit (Matthew 7:18-19, John 15:6).

Just as the “good soil” symbolizes God’s elect in the parable of the sower, the “good seed” symbolizes God’s elect in the parable of the wheat and the tares. God’s elect are the ones to whom it has been granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to all the others it has not been granted (Matthew 13:11). God’s elect hear His word that was sown in their hearts, they understand it, and they do indeed come to faith in Christ. As a result of their genuine faith, they bear fruit: some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times what was sown (Matthew 13:23).

The “good seed” in the parable of the wheat and the tares are those who have been given “ears to hear” (Matthew 13:9, 43). They are those who belong to God, those whom Jesus calls His sheep, and they will all hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). All the rest will not be able to hear (John 6:44, 6:65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

When we consider that the “field” in the parable of the wheat and the tares represents the world, we should also consider that that any large church congregation is a microcosm of the world. There will be “tares” mixed in with the “wheat” in these congregations.

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While everyone in these congregations might claim to be a Christian, we should remember Jesus' warning about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23. He said they will come to us "in sheep's clothing", claiming to be Christians, but He characterized them inwardly as "ravenous wolves" because of the damage they can inflict in the lives of those who are in truth His sheep. Though they will claim to be Christians, and even claim to have done many good works in Jesus' name, they will one day hear from Him the words: "I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Here in the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus gave us a teaching that is very similar to His teaching in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23, the parable of the Vine and its branches in John 15:1-8, and His warning about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23. The lesson that is given to us in all four of these passages is this: ***professing believers will demonstrate or give evidence that their faith is genuine by the fact they do indeed bear fruit to the glory of God.*** This bearing of fruit is how we show ourselves to be Jesus' disciples (John 15:8). There is no such thing as a Christian who does not bear fruit. Conversely, an unbeliever will not, and in fact he cannot, bear fruit to the glory of God, any more than the tares of the field can produce wheat.

There are also other lessons that we can learn in the parable of the wheat and the tares. We can recall that as Jesus concluded the parable in verses 27-30, the servants of the landowner came to him after they noticed the tares mixed in with the wheat, and they asked him if he had not sown good seed in his field. The landowner replied, saying that an enemy had done this. The servants then asked if he wanted them to go and pull up the tares. The landowner answered them saying: "No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them." (Matthew 13:29).

The lesson here is that it can sometimes be hard to distinguish the tares from the wheat, especially in the case of a young believer. When one is first born again, he may not fully understand that God his Father requires obedience from him, and that he can no longer participate in sin without the consequences of the chastening and correction of God in his life (Hebrews 12:5-11). Therefore, he may for a time appear to be no different than others in the world. However, he will soon learn that he is no longer his own; he has been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and His God will intervene in his life to correct him.

Another lesson can be gleaned in the final verse of this parable. After the landowner told his servants not to attempt to pull up the tares, he then said to them:

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“Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’” (Matthew 13:30).

Here Jesus spoke of the final separation and judgement that will occur between believers and unbelievers. Those who have been brought to faith in Him, the righteous, will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). However, for those who have not: “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:41-42). We can see another very similar lesson on this final separation and judgement that will occur between believers and unbelievers in Jesus’ parable of the net, which is given to us in Matthew 13:47-50.

5.

The Ten Minas

In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus gave the parable of the ten minas. A mina was a unit of money (and also of weight), which was equal to about three month's wages for a laborer at that time. Jesus began His parable by saying:

“A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business with this until I come back.’ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. (Luke 19:12-15)

The first servant came before the nobleman (who symbolizes Jesus Himself), saying that with the mina he had been given, he had earned ten more minas. The nobleman commended him saying: “Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.” (Luke 19:17).

A second servant came before him, saying that with the mina he had been given, he had earned five more minas. The nobleman commended this servant also, saying that he would be rewarded with authority over five cities.

Then another servant came before him saying: “Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.” (Luke 19:20-21).

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The nobleman was angry with this unprofitable servant, and replied to him saying:

“By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?’ Then he said to the bystanders, ‘Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Master, he has ten minas already.’” (Luke 19:22-25).

Jesus concluded His parable with the nobleman’s reply to those who objected to taking the mina from the unprofitable servant and giving it to the servant who had gained ten minas. The nobleman said to them: “I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.” (Luke 19:26-27).

One of the lessons that we can glean from the parable of the ten minas is that there are degrees of reward for “good” and “faithful” servants (Luke 19:16-19), and there are degrees of punishment for “wicked” or “worthless” servants (Luke 19:20-27). The “good servant” who gained ten minas was given charge of ten cities, and the one who gained five minas was given charge of five cities. By contrast, the wicked servant who gained nothing lost even the little that he had, and those who were openly hostile toward the noblemen, he ordered to be brought before him and slaughtered (Luke 19:27).

Another lesson that stands out in the parable of the ten minas is that the good and faithful servants were productive, or fruitful, whereas the wicked or worthless servant was unfruitful. So once again in this parable, as He does in several other of His teachings, Jesus is making distinctions between those who are His and those who are not. Here and elsewhere, Jesus taught that genuine believers will always be productive, bearing fruit to the glory of God the Father, whereas unregenerate individuals will not bear fruit, and in fact they cannot.

We learned a very similar lesson in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23), where the “seed” of the word of God bore fruit only where it fell on “good soil”. The “good soil” was the analogy that Jesus used to symbolize God’s elect, who hear the word of God, understand it, and do indeed come to faith in Him,

bearing fruit, with some bearing one hundred times, some sixty times, and some thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 12:23).

Just as the seed in the parable of the sower symbolizes the word of God, so also the mina in the parable of the ten minas symbolizes the word of God. Some hear the word of God, and by His grace they have been given ears to hear and understand it; they come to faith in Christ, and they bear fruit (again, Matthew 13:11, 23). At the same time, others receive the word of God in their hearing, but they do not come to faith in Christ, and therefore they are unable to bear fruit. (Matthew 13:4-7, 19-22).

One lesson that is given to us in both the parable of the ten minas and the parable of the sower, as well as in other teachings of Jesus that we have discussed, is that there is no such thing as a genuine believer who does not bear fruit. Jesus taught us in John 15:8 that we prove ourselves to be in truth His disciples by the fact that we bear much fruit to the glory of God.

Our fruitfulness as genuine believers comes about only because we “abide in the vine”, in union with Christ (John 15:1-8), which means that we have been brought to faith in Christ; we have been saved. Our salvation was not brought about by way of our own will, choice, or decision, but by God’s grace and His sovereign choice (John 15:16, Romans 9:16). We are among those whom the Father has “given” to His Son (John 6:37). We are those who have been drawn to Jesus by the Father, and we will all be raised up at the last day (John 6:44). We are those to whom it has been granted by the Father to come to Jesus (John 6:65).

We are God’s elect; we are Jesus’ sheep. In His time, He calls each of us out by name, and we all do indeed follow Him (John 10:3-4). We have been given eternal life and *no one* can snatch us out of His hand or His Father’s hand (John 10:27-30). As genuine believers, we will all bear fruit to the glory of God the Father. By contrast, all the rest do not believe because they are not Jesus’ sheep (John 10:26), and it has not been granted to them to come to Jesus and to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven (John 6:65, Matthew 13:11).

The teaching in the parable of the ten minas is similar to the teaching in the parable of the talents, which is given to us in Matthew 25:14-28. *In both of these parables, the fruitful servants were commended as “good” and “faithful” servants (symbolizing genuine believers), and they were rewarded. By contrast, the unfruitful servants were condemned as “wicked” and “worthless” servants (symbolizing the unregenerate), and they were punished.* Only genuine believers

can, and will, bear fruit to the glory of God. All the others will not bear fruit, and in fact they cannot (Matthew 7:17-20, John 15:5-6).

Jesus gave us a similar lesson about spiritual fruitfulness in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). The wheat, which symbolizes genuine believers, bears fruit. However, the tares, which symbolize professing, but unregenerate individuals mixed in among genuine believers, cannot bear fruit.

We see another similar lesson in Matthew 7:15-23. In this passage Jesus warned us to watch out for false prophets. He said that we would know them by their fruits. The false prophets in this passage were those who professed to be genuine believers but were not. They were bad trees that could bear no good fruit (Matthew 7:18), and they would one day hear from Jesus: “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23).

Another important point that we can learn from the parable of the ten minas and other passages as well, is that every time we see a reference to a “servant” or a “disciple” in the Bible, it does not necessarily represent a genuine believer. (Consider John 6:66, 1 John 2:19). There are tares mixed in among the wheat; there are wolves in sheep’s clothing mixed in among the sheep. In other words, there are professing but unregenerate individuals mixed in among genuine believers in most every congregation, who will receive the word of God in their hearing, but they do not come to faith in Christ. Because they are unregenerate, they can bear no good fruit. (Hebrews 6:4-8).

The parable of the ten minas is yet another of Jesus’ teachings which reveals to us that all genuine believers will bear fruit, while professing but unregenerate individuals will not bear fruit because they cannot. They cannot bear fruit any more than the tares of the field can produce wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). ***All genuine believers will bear fruit to the glory of God, and God Himself will work in our lives to bring these things to pass, according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26.***

6.

The Sheep and the Goats

Many of Jesus' teachings illustrate differences between those who are His and those who are not, and as we have learned previously from several of these teachings, all genuine believers will bear fruit to the glory of God. In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats given to us in Matthew 25:31-46, we can see some of the ways that this fruit will be manifested in our lives as God's people. We can also see that such fruit is absent in the lives of unbelievers.

In this parable Jesus used the analogy of a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats in a flock to describe the way that He will ultimately separate those who are blessed by His Father from the wicked. Jesus characterized those who are blessed by God as His sheep, and He said that their inheritance and place in God's kingdom has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world. Jesus' teaching here may bring to mind Ephesians 1:4, where Paul taught that we as God's people were chosen by Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him.

Continuing in this parable, Jesus taught about the good works that will be manifested in our lives as His blessed people. These works will demonstrate a love for our fellow believers and will include such things as giving of the resources that God has given to us so that others in the Body of Christ who are in need may be helped. Other examples of these works of love that Jesus mentioned are visiting brothers who are in prison or looking after other believers who may be sick or infirm in some way.

When we do good works like these, then we sacrifice something of ourselves for the benefit of other believers. As we do so, we will, even if only in some small measure, share in the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured for the sake of His

people (Mark 10:45, Romans 8:17), and through this suffering and sacrifice we will bear fruit to the glory of God according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26.

As Jesus continued His teaching in this parable, He revealed that those who are His sheep will all give evidence of their genuine faith by works of love that will be manifested in their lives. He taught that just as we have shown love, mercy, and compassion to the least of His brethren, we have also done the same for Him. He then proclaimed that the destiny of all His sheep will be eternal life.

In contrast to the good works that will be manifested in the lives of His sheep, Jesus described the deeds of the wicked, whom He symbolized as goats. Works of love that are manifested in the lives of His sheep are absent from the lives of the wicked. Jesus said that just as they have refused to show love, mercy, and compassion toward the least of His brethren, they have also done the same to Him. Even though they may acknowledge Him as Lord and claim to be Christians (Matthew 25:44), by their works they demonstrate that the faith they claim to have is not genuine. Jesus proclaimed that their ultimate destiny will be eternal punishment and separation from God.

What we learn from Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats is that a genuine faith is going to manifest itself by actions; it is going to be evidenced by what one does – by his works. There is also another passage of Scripture that provides instruction for us along these same lines. This passage is in the letter of James, and perhaps James recalled Jesus' teaching on the sheep and the goats when he gave us this instruction. James taught that regardless of one's claim to have faith in Christ, if their claimed faith is not manifested by action taken that will meet the needs of a brother or sister in Christ who is lacking the necessities of life, when one has the means to meet the need, then their claimed faith is dead (James 2:14-17).

Jesus and James both taught the same truth: a genuine faith will always be accompanied by good works, which demonstrate love for other believers. As Jesus said elsewhere: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35). These good works are evidence that our faith is real.

In Matthew 7:15-23, we saw that Jesus gave another teaching that is consistent with His teaching in the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this passage Jesus symbolized genuine believers as good trees that bear good fruit. By

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contrast, He symbolized the wicked as bad trees that cannot bear good fruit. He concluded by saying that not everyone who calls Him Lord, or claims to be a Christian, will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father. Jesus taught that many of the wicked will acknowledge Him as Lord, and even claim to have done many miraculous deeds in His name, but in the end, He will tell them that He never knew them, and He will command them to depart from Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

Those however whose faith is proven to be genuine by the good works they do will one day hear the words of their Lord and Savior saying:

“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”... “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:34-36, 40).

7.

The Unmerciful Servant

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus gave the parable of the unmerciful servant, which is sometimes called the parable of the unforgiving servant. In verses 15-19 immediately preceding the parable, Jesus taught His disciples how to deal with a brother who has sinned against us. His teaching in these verses prompted a question by Peter, as we read beginning in verse 21:

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21-22)

With His answer, Jesus taught that there is to be no limit to the forgiveness that we extend to our brother for his sins against us. After all, this is the same kind of unlimited forgiveness that our Father extends to us as His children, as we can see from 1 John 1:9.

Jesus then continued teaching in this passage with His parable. He began in verse 23 by saying that the kingdom of Heaven could be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As the king began to settle, one man was brought before him who owed him ten thousand talents.

At this point we should understand that ten thousand talents was an enormous sum of money. Just one talent was the equivalent of about fifteen years of a laborer’s wages. Therefore, ten thousand talents was an amount that this servant could not possibly hope to repay.

Since he could not pay, his master ordered that the servant, his wife, his children, and all that he owned must be sold, and payment made. The servant then

fell to the ground and begged his master to have patience with him, saying that he would pay everything he owed. His master was then moved with pity for him; he forgave his debt and released him.

However, this same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He seized the man and began to choke him, and he demanded that he pay what he owed. To put this debt in perspective, a denarius was the equivalent of about one day's wages for a laborer. So, the debt owed to this servant was miniscule in comparison to the insurmountable debt that he had just been forgiven.

At this point his fellow servant fell to the ground and pleaded with him to have patience, saying that he would pay all he owed, but he refused and had the man put into prison until he could pay the debt. When his fellow servants heard about what had happened, they were very distressed and went back to their master to report everything that had taken place. At this point Jesus ended the parable, saying:

Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.'" (Matthew 18:32-35).

As we mentioned earlier, this unmerciful servant owed his master "ten thousand talents", which was a debt so large that he could not possibly hope to repay it, even in a thousand lifetimes. In much the same way, our sin debt in the sight of God is far greater than anything we can ever possibly pay. Therefore, He sent His own Son Jesus Christ to atone for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21) by shedding His blood on Calvary's cross. In doing so, He provided the payment for our sins, a payment which we could never possibly provide on our own.

Some would say that the unmerciful servant in Jesus' parable represented a believer who lost his salvation after committing an unpardonable sin of refusing to show mercy by forgiving his fellow servant. Such an interpretation would be contradicted by many other passages of Scripture – too many to list here. There is abundant evidence from the Scriptures that God *will never* cast out anyone who does in truth come to faith in Christ (John 6:37 and many others). All of God's

elect will be brought to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, in God's time, and none of these will be lost (Matthew 18:14, John 6:39).

In our efforts to interpret the parable of the unmerciful servant, let us recall as we have noted before, that many times Jesus' teachings were given to illustrate distinctions between those who are His and those who are not. The parable of the unmerciful servant is yet another one of His teachings that does exactly that.

Jesus said elsewhere: "***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.***" (John 13:34-35). However, there was no love shown by the unmerciful servant toward his fellow servant.

We demonstrate love by showing mercy to others. The one who does not love refuses to show mercy, and as the Bible also teaches: "***The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.***" (1 John 4:8). Therefore, with his persistent refusal to show mercy and forgive his fellow servant the debt he owed, the unmerciful servant showed no love toward his fellow servant, demonstrating that he did not know God. Even though he and others may have believed that he had been forgiven and did in fact know God, his works revealed that he did not.

As God's people our lives will be fundamentally characterized by obedience to God and His word. Therefore, our hearts will be inclined to obey Jesus' command to love another. We will demonstrate the love that comes from a genuine faith in Christ by showing mercy through forgiving the offenses of others, just as we have been forgiven our offenses by our heavenly Father. Love shows mercy, and mercy forgives.

This is not to say that we will never struggle with forgiveness, especially when the wrong done to us has caused us great harm in some way. We may struggle bitterly as we attempt to understand why God allowed undeserved suffering to come into our lives through the wrongdoing of others, and through no fault of our own. As we grapple with these things, we will begin to understand what it means to share in the sufferings of Christ, who Himself suffered through no fault or wrongdoing of His own. (Consider John 12:24-26 and Romans 8:17).

As genuine believers, we have the promise of Christ's grace, which will be given to us in a measure that is sufficient for our every weakness and need, (2 Corinthians 12:9), and this includes our need to obey God in forgiving others of

their offenses against us. We will, by Christ's grace, be brought to the place where we show mercy and forgive, even as we have been forgiven.

As we endeavor to interpret the parable of the unmerciful servant, let us also recall a similar teaching given in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. Immediately after He gave the example of the Model Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus said: "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:14-15)

We should first understand that forgiving others is not a work that we must do to obtain salvation for ourselves, or to maintain our salvation. We are not saved by our own good works, but by the grace of our sovereign God (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible also teaches that we are not kept in this state of grace by our own power and ability to obey God, but we are kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:3-5, others). Our works are not what saves us, but our works bear witness that our faith is genuine.

As we consider Matthew 6:14-15, and indeed all of Jesus' teachings as they are recorded in the Bible, we should understand that many times when Jesus was giving His teachings, He was speaking to a mixed crowd. Some in the crowd would be able to hear and understand what He said. These individuals, represented by the "good soil" in the parable of the sower, would receive the seed of His words, come to faith in Him, and bear fruit (Matthew 13:23). Others in the crowd would not be able to hear and understand His words (Matthew 13:11), and these individuals would bear no fruit. There was clearly no love, no mercy, and no good fruit manifested by the unmerciful servant.

Jesus also taught us in the Sermon on the Mount that we should watch out for false prophets. He said they would come to us "in sheep's clothing", claiming to be Christians, but in fact they were ravenous wolves. He also said of these false prophets: "***You will know them by their fruits.*** Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, ***you will know them by their fruits.***" (Matthew 7:16-20, emphasis added). Once again, there was clearly no love, no mercy, and no good fruit manifested by the unmerciful servant.

So, what is the lesson given to us in the parable of the unmerciful servant? The lesson is *not* that God revokes His forgiveness of sins in the same way that the king revoked his forgiveness of a financial debt. ***Rather, the lesson is that God, like the king, shows no mercy to those who themselves refuse to show mercy to others.***

James wrote: “***For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.***” (James 2:13, emphasis added). The unmerciful servant showed no mercy when he refused to forgive the debt of his fellow servant, and therefore he would receive no mercy or forgiveness but would receive the just punishment for his own debt.

In the verses immediately following, James wrote: ***What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?*** If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ***Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*** (James 2:14-17, emphasis added).

James is teaching that we demonstrate a genuine, living faith in Christ by the things we do, by our works. Our works are not what saves us (again, Ephesians 2:8-9), but our works give evidence that our faith is genuine.

The unmerciful servant manifested none of the good works that accompany and demonstrate a genuine faith in Christ (John 13:34-35, John 14:15, 21, 23-24, Galatians 5:22-23, others). With his harsh and persistent refusal to show mercy by forgiving his fellow servant, he demonstrated that the forgiveness and right standing in the sight of God that he presumed he had was in fact dead. ***By his refusal to show mercy he showed no love, demonstrating that in fact he did not know God (again, 1 John 4:8).***

Jesus also taught in another parable: “...for to the one who has, more will be given, ***and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.***” (Luke 8:18, emphasis added). In the end, the unmerciful servant lost only the forgiveness that he thought he had, but never really possessed.

By his refusal to show mercy in forgiving his fellow servant, the unmerciful servant demonstrated that he was in fact a false prophet, a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a pretender. He was a bad tree that bore only bad fruit, and for this reason he was

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cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:15-20). ***The unmerciful servant was not one whom Jesus once knew***, but because he sinned by refusing to forgive, he lost his salvation. Rather, by his refusal to forgive he demonstrated that ***he was in fact one whom Jesus never knew*** (Matthew 7:21-23).

8.

Obedience to God's Word

In the Gospel of John, we read:

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?”

Jesus answered and said to him, ***“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.”*** (John 14:21-24. Emphasis added.)

This passage is yet another example of Jesus’ teachings where He makes distinctions between those who are His and those who are not. Jesus taught in this passage that men will demonstrate a genuine faith in Him by the fact that they walk in obedience to His commands. Believers do sin at times (1 John 1:8 - 1 John 2:2), but the life of every believer will be fundamentally characterized by obedience to the word of God. By contrast, the lives of unbelievers will be characterized by disobedience to His word.

In John 15, Jesus said: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10). Although every believer is called upon to obey the word of God, and our obedience is evidence of our genuine faith in Christ, we should understand that we do not “abide” or remain in God’s love through any works or efforts of our own. We do not obtain our salvation, nor do we maintain our salvation, by our own efforts put forth to walk in obedience to the word of God. If that were the case,

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then we would be able to boast that our own works were good enough to get us saved and keep us saved.

The Scriptures teach us that our salvation is not a result of any works of our own, so no one can boast that their own actions and efforts had anything to do with their salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:16). Rather, our salvation is the gift of God given to us as His elect, as those whom He chose before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him. (Ephesians 1:4-5).

As genuine believers, we should understand that we abide in God's love, in union with Christ, because by God's grace we have been called to faith in Christ (John 6:44, 6:65, 10:1-3, 10:14-16, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Peter 1:1-2, others). We should also understand that it is by God's power, and not by our own power, that we abide or remain in Christ (John 6:37-39, John 10:27-30, Matthew 18:10-14, Romans 8:38-39, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 1 Peter 1:3-5, others).

Even though our salvation in no way depends upon our own efforts, either before or after we are saved, every believer should know that there are consequences for disobedience to the word of God, which is sin, and there are consequences for both believers and unbelievers. Jesus teaches us about these consequences in a parable that He gave in Luke 12:35-48, where He exhorted everyone present to watch, to be ready for service, and to keep their lamps burning.

As we begin our study of this parable, we should understand that all men are "servants" of God and will serve His purposes in some capacity, even those who do not acknowledge Him. (Consider Isaiah 45:1-6, Romans 9:17-18, others). We should also keep in mind that some will profess to be God's servants in that they profess to have faith in Christ, and they acknowledge Jesus as Lord, but their profession is in fact false. (Consider Matthew 7:15-23, 13:24-30, 36-43, 18:21-35, 25:1-13, 25:31-46). With these things in mind, we will consider the two categories of servants that Jesus mentioned in Luke 12:35-48.

In this parable, we see that Jesus admonished everyone present at that time to watch and be ready for service, like servants waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast. ***Believers will be the servants who obey Jesus' command to be ready for service (Luke 12:40).*** They will be the ones whom the master finds waiting and watching for His return, as we read in Luke 12:35-40.

Other servants do not obey Jesus' command. They engage in worldly, sinful indulgences, even beating their fellow servants, demonstrating a blatant lack

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of any love or concern for them. (Consider John 13:35, 1 John 4:8). Jesus spoke of these servants in Luke 12:45-46, saying that the master would ultimately cut them to pieces and assign them a place with the unbelievers.

We as believers, by the sovereign choice and grace of God are assured salvation, and we will escape the fate of those who are “cut to pieces” and assigned “a place with the unbelievers”. However, we should be very careful to heed Jesus’ warning in Luke 12:47-48.

In these verses Jesus taught that the servant who knows his master’s will but does not prepare himself or does not do what his master requires, will be beaten with many stripes. (Consider Hebrews 12:4-13). Jesus also taught that the servant who is not aware of his master’s will and does things deserving of punishment will be beaten with few stripes. Jesus concluded His teaching in this parable by saying that much will be required from the one who has been given much and entrusted with much.

The longer we walk with God, the more we will understand of His word and His will, and the more we know of God’s word and what He requires of us, the greater the responsibility we will have to be obedient to what He has revealed to us. Let us therefore be diligent not to be among those servants who know the Master’s will but do not prepare themselves or do not do what the Master wants, because there is a consequence for this, and as Jesus admonished us, we will be beaten with many stripes.

Such disobedience is not building upon the foundation of our faith in Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. Rather it is building with wood, hay, and straw, which will not stand the test of fire and will result in God’s chastening in our lives, as well as lost blessings and rewards.

9.

The Beatitudes

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew 5:1-7:29. Jesus begins His teaching in this passage with His what is known as “The Beatitudes”. Beginning in Matthew 5:3, we read:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:3-12).

In His declarations of blessedness given in the beatitudes, Jesus revealed that we as God’s children will know and experience what it is like to be poor in spirit, even though the kingdom of Heaven is ours. We will know what it is like to mourn and to be partakers with the Him, the Man of Sorrows (John 16:20-22, Isaiah 53:3), and yet we are assured that the time will come for us when we will be comforted. We will also be brought to a position of meekness or humility as God works in our lives to conform us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29, Hebrews 2:10-11), and yet the time will come for us when we will inherit the earth.

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As Jesus continued, He taught that we will hunger and thirst for righteousness as we find ourselves surrounded by unrighteousness in a wicked world (Psalm 42:2, 63:1, 143:6). However, we are assured that the time will come for us when we will be filled, and we will hunger and thirst no more (Revelation 7:16-17).

We will also be called upon to sacrifice something of what we have and could have kept for ourselves, in order to be merciful to someone else in need. The love of Christ will be manifested in the life of every believer, and this love will motivate us, and even compel us, to show mercy to others (Matthew 25:31-46, John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:11-20). Our faith in Christ will be shown to be a genuine faith by love manifesting itself through acts of mercy. Jesus taught that in return for the mercy that we show to others in their time of need, we will receive the mercy of God in our own times of trouble, and eternal reward and blessing in Heaven.

Jesus also taught that we will know something of what it is like to be pure in heart. As those who have been called to faith in His Son, God has given us a heart to obey Him and keep His commandments. (John 14:23-24).

We will also know and experience something of what it is like to be peacemakers among those who are self-willed. As believers, God has ordained that the life of the Prince of Peace will be manifested through our lives lived here on the earth (Isaiah 9:6-7, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12).

Jesus concluded His teaching in this passage by saying that we as His people will also know in some measure what it is like to be persecuted. We will be excluded, insulted, and falsely accused because of who we are, believers in Christ (1 Timothy 3:12).

In His teaching in the Beatitudes, Jesus identified attributes or experiences that will be manifested in the lives of those who are indeed the children of God. Each of these experiences is a reflection of the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured, and each of these brings the promise of God's eternal blessing (John 12:24-26, Romans 8:17).

10.

The Fruitful Grain of Wheat

As the time of His crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus spoke to His disciples saying:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:24-26)

Jesus was at the point of fulfilling His Father’s will and purpose for His life by dying on Calvary’s cross to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37). It was at this time that He gave us one of the most profound revelations in the entire Bible.

Using a single grain of wheat as a metaphor, Jesus revealed the universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that has been ordained by His Father. He taught His disciples that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and “dies”, it will remain only a single grain of wheat, bearing no fruit at all, but if it dies, it will bear much fruit.

Jesus first applied this analogy of the fruitful grain of wheat to His life, in order to symbolize the fruit that would be born through the suffering that He would endure according to His Father’s plan and purpose for His life, whereby many would be brought to glory. Then He said: “If anyone serves Me, ***he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also...***” (John 12:26, emphasis added). ***With these words, Jesus revealed to His disciples that the same principle***

of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life, would also be at work in their lives as well.

Just as Jesus submitted Himself to His Father's will for His life, even to the point of death on a cross, all believers will follow Him in that we also will be called upon to submit to the plan and purpose of God for our lives, "dying" to our own will and what we would choose for ourselves, in order that God's will and purpose for our lives will be accomplished. It will be through this "death" that we will bear spiritual fruit to the glory of God, according to the principle that Jesus taught in John 12:24.

Nowhere is this death to one's own will and complete submission to the will of God more supremely demonstrated than in the life of Jesus Christ Himself. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father that the crucifixion He was about to endure in order to obtain salvation for His people might pass from Him. He knew that all things are possible with God, and He prayed that there might be some other way to do His Father's will without having to suffer the painful death He knew lied ahead for Him.

After praying three times for His Father to remove the cup of suffering that He was about to drink, Jesus received His answer. His Father would not remove His cup of suffering. It was His Father's will that He suffer and die on Calvary's cross to bring many sons to glory (Matthew 26:36-46, Hebrews 2:10).

Jesus suffered not because of any fault or wrongdoing of His own, but according to the sovereign will, plan, and purpose of God for His life. His sufferings were ordained by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), and through these sufferings He bore fruit to the glory of God.

In the same way, the suffering that bears fruit in our lives as believers is not suffering that comes about because of our own wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:12-19). Rather, it is suffering that comes about through events and circumstances that our sovereign God allows to touch our lives apart from any fault or wrongdoing of our own, according to His plan and purpose for each of us individually. Through these sufferings we will follow Jesus (John 12:26) and "suffer with Him", or share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His glory (Romans 8:17).

As we study John 12:24-26, we should not overlook what Jesus said in verse 25: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who *hates his life in this world* will keep it to life eternal." (Emphasis added). Such teachings are hard for all of us to

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understand. We might wonder why Jesus said these words, and what they could mean for us as His people.

As we consider the meaning of John 12:25, let us look again at John 12:24 where Jesus taught us that no fruit will be born apart from the “death” of the grain of wheat. That grain of wheat symbolizes our lives and all that we want for ourselves in this life. Dying to our own will and what we want for ourselves is suffering; it is to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

The things that we want may be completely honorable, with no sin in them at all. However, God may will other things for our lives, things that run contrary to what we want for ourselves but will result in fruit born to His glory, and He will work to bring these things to pass in our lives, as He has ordained them for each of us.

With John 12:24 in mind, we could understand Jesus’ words in John 12:25 as saying that the sufferings that bear fruit in the Christian life could at times make a believer even “hate” or despair of his life in this world. The Apostle Paul shared one such experience that he had in his own life, even as he was obeying God in doing the work that He had assigned for him. Paul wrote: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, *so that we despaired even of life*; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead....” (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, emphasis added).

This experience of Paul’s was for him a share in the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through this experience and others, Paul “followed” Jesus in the way and in the measure that God had ordained for his life, and through his suffering he bore the fruit that would come as God’s people take comfort and are edified by his words as they are recorded in the Scriptures. (Consider 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

As we further consider the meaning of Jesus’ words in John 12:25, we can note that the original Greek word that is translated as “hates” in this verse could also be translated as “loves less”. With this latter translation in mind, we could interpret this verse as teaching us that as followers of Christ, we will be called upon to “love less” our own life, and our own desires, hopes, and plans for our lives, when compared to our love for and submission to the will of God, and whatever His will for our lives may involve.

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As we read John 12:24-26, all believers are filled with thankfulness for the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus Christ endured on our behalf, according to His Father's will for His life. At the same time, one of the hardest teachings in the Bible for us to accept is given to us in these verses, where Jesus revealed that all of us who serve Him must follow Him in His death, dying to what we would choose for ourselves in this life, in order that God's will for our lives will be done, just as it was in His.

As God our Father determines for each of us, we will "follow" Jesus, and we will "be where He was" (again John 12:26), in that we also will experience our own "Gethsemanes" in some measure, however small when compared to His suffering in the Garden as He agonized over His Father's will for His life. Our "Gethsemanes" will be the times when we are faced with suffering in our lives. In these times we also, just as Jesus did, will bring our prayers to our sovereign God, knowing that all things are possible for Him and knowing that He could spare us from these painful things. In these times, we also will be called upon to submit to the will of God for our lives, whatever His will may be, just as Jesus was called upon to submit to His Father's will.

As God our Father determines for each of us, we will "follow" Jesus, and we will "be where He was", in that we also will experience our own "Calvaries" in some measure, however small when compared to the suffering that He endured at Calvary. Our "Calvaries" will be the "deaths" that we experience through the losses and sufferings that our Father allows to affect our lives, according to His sovereign will and plan for each of us.

Practically speaking in terms that we can more easily understand, as we walk in obedience to God, and the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives unfold, we will at times experience the "death", or the loss, of things that we wanted to have or keep or enjoy for ourselves, as God has ordained for each of us individually. As these things happen, we will suffer because of them, and God our Father calls upon each of us to accept these things as His sovereign will for our lives, just as Jesus did when He prayed: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will".

These "deaths" will come about in our lives in the ways and in the measure that God has determined for each of us. It will be through these "deaths" that we will follow Jesus, experiencing in some measure a share in His sufferings as we also are called upon to submit to our Father's will and plan for our lives. It will be

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through these “deaths” and our obedient submission to the sovereign will of God for our lives, that we will “take up our cross” and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23-24, Luke 14:27, 33), sharing in His sufferings, drinking from His cup, and being baptized with His baptism (Mark 10:35-40). The Bible teaches us that it will be through these deaths that we will produce fruit born to the glory of God, which will bring about for us a share in Christ’s eternal glory (Romans 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

In summary, Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26 that all believers must, and will, follow Him in His death, which is a death to our own will and what we would choose for ourselves, and the obedient acceptance of that which God chooses for us. Just as Jesus bore fruit through the suffering and sacrifice that God ordained for His life, so also in our lives, spiritual fruit will be born through the suffering and sacrifice that God has ordained for each of us.

This is one of the most difficult teachings in the Bible for many to accept, and it is a teaching that many will very much want to deny and explain away. Maybe we could explain it away, if only this same teaching did not appear in numerous places elsewhere in the Bible.

John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-45, Luke 9:23-24, Luke 14:27, Luke 14:33, and Romans 8:17-18 all teach us about the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that will be at work in the life of every believer. These Scriptures reveal that we must, and we will, as God will bring to pass in each of our lives, endure a share in the sufferings of Christ, becoming in some measure as He was, a man of sorrows who was familiar with suffering and grief (Isaiah 53:3). This share in Christ’s sufferings is the necessary path that God has ordained for His people whereby we will bear spiritual fruit, and thereby share in the glory of His Beloved Son for eternity.

All true wisdom is to be found in the teachings of the Holy Bible, and there is no greater wisdom or depth of insight than that which is given to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus’ teaching in John 12:24-26 revealed the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in His life, and this same principle has always been, and will always be, at work in the lives of every one of God’s people until the time of Jesus’ second coming.

All through the Bible we can see this principle of spiritual fruit bearing at work in the lives of God’s servants, even from the book of Genesis. Though we may not be able to see or understand how anything good at all could possibly come from the sufferings and losses that our sovereign God has allowed to touch our

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lives, the Scriptures reveal to us that through our sufferings we will indeed bear fruit, and we will one day realize a share in the eternal glory of His Beloved Son.

Jesus said: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31).

God is sovereign; He is intimately familiar with everything that happens on earth and with every detail of our lives. Nothing in His creation happens apart from His sovereign will, not even an event as small as the death of one sparrow. The things that happen to us happen as part of God’s will for our lives, and the Bible teaches us that through all these things God is working for our good and for our eternal glory together with His Son.

Consistent with His teaching in John 12:24-26 and Luke 6:20-26, Jesus taught us in John 16:20 that during this present time of our lives on earth, we as His people will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. This will be our experience as we share in His sufferings, but with these sufferings we have the promise that our Heavenly Father, the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort” will provide His comfort to us (2 Corinthians 1:3).

We can take comfort as believers, knowing that every wrong we have suffered, God will avenge, and every affliction, difficulty, hardship, or loss that God has allowed to touch our lives has eternal value. God is at work in our lives doing exactly what He said He would do in His Word: He is conforming each of us to the image of His Son Jesus Christ as He brings about in each of our lives a share in His sufferings (Romans 8:28-30). As we experience our share in Christ’s sufferings, we can be certain based on the authority of the Scriptures that these present sufferings will bring about for us eternal glory and reward.

Through our sufferings we have also been brought into the company of the saints whose lives and experiences are recorded in the Bible. Their lives and what God chose to accomplish through their sufferings demonstrate the timeless and universal principle of spiritual fruit bearing that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26. Just as God brought forth life and good through the “death” that their sufferings wrought in their lives, so will He also do the same through the sufferings that we endure in our lives.

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God did not spare His own Son from sufferings, and we can see from Hebrews 4:15 that our faithful High Priest endured every form of temptation that we would endure. Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are”. This means that Jesus also endured the temptation to become angry and disillusioned with God His Father over suffering that He could have prevented in His life, but did not, according to His will, plan, and purpose (Mark 14:33-36, Matthew 27:46).

God loves His people with an unfailing, unconditional, and everlasting love, and He will *never* let go of any of us, regardless of our failings during some time of great trial in our lives (John 6:37-39, Romans 8:38-39, many others). Only those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ will one day realize a share in His glory, and the necessary path to this glory for every believer, as God has ordained it to be so, is for us to experience a share in the sufferings of His Son, the Man of Sorrows, who was Himself familiar with grief. This is the lesson of John 12:24-26 and many other Scriptures as well.

Until that day comes for each of us, let us rely fully upon the promises of God’s help, comfort, deliverance, provision, and sustaining grace, as they are given to us in His word. Let us also do as the author of Hebrews exhorted us and “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16).

11.

Blessings and Woes

In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus pronounced blessings and woes in a teaching that many of us will find to be baffling. At the time that He gave this teaching, a large group of His disciples and many others had gathered to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. As we study this passage, we can begin to see that the ways of God are contrary to the ways of the world and the understanding of men. Beginning in Luke 6:20 we read:

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.” (Luke 6:20-26)

Curiously, Jesus pronounced woes upon those who are rich and well fed now, who laugh now, and who have their comfort and consolation during this present life. Many of us might reason that things appear to be backwards in this passage. Contrary to what Jesus taught, most of us will see no blessing at all in being poor, hungry, or in mourning. At the same time, we would consider that those who are blessed would obviously be those who are rich and well fed, and who enjoy their comforts and consolations in this life. However, in Jesus’ teaching here, we see that such is not the case.

So, at this point we must ask ourselves: Why would Jesus characterize blessings and woes in a way that is so contrary to the understanding of men? The answer is given in several of His teachings, and in several other Scripture passages as well.

In John 12:24-26, Jesus used a grain of wheat as an analogy to symbolize His life and the lives of all who serve Him. He taught that unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and “dies”, it remains only a single grain of wheat, but if it “dies”, it will bear much fruit. In this passage, Jesus taught He and all those who follow Him will experience, in some measure as God has ordained for each of us, the “death” of our own hopes, plans, aspirations, and desires for our life, in order that God’s will for our life will be accomplished (consider Mark 14:32-36). As these “deaths” occur, we will suffer because of them, and through these sufferings we will bear fruit to the glory of God, just as Jesus did in His life.

These are among the hardest things to consider in the Scriptures. However, as God’s people we should all understand that ***this process of fruit bearing through the “death” of the grain of wheat that Jesus revealed in John 12:24-26 will be at work in the life of every believer.***

This is exactly why Jesus, looking at His disciples, proclaimed that those who are poor now, who hunger now, and who weep now, during this present life, are those who are truly blessed by God. It is because these present sufferings will, according to John 12:24-26, bear fruit in our lives, which will bring about for us a share in Christ’s eternal glory.

This is the same message that Paul brought to us in Romans 8:17, where he taught that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we “suffer with Him”, or share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His glory. Paul then encouraged us in verse 18, where he taught that the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

In John 16:20-22 Jesus gave a teaching that is completely consistent with His teaching in Luke 6:20-23. Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been

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born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. (John 16:20-22)

In this passage, Jesus taught us that now, during this present life, we will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. This will be our experience as we share in His sufferings, becoming in some measure as He was, a man of sorrow who was acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:2-3).

Jesus then compared these sufferings to the pain of a woman in labor. In the process of childbirth, she has pain, but when she gives birth, she no longer remembers her anguish because of the joy that her child has been born. In the same way, we experience our grief as we share in the sufferings of Christ, now, during this present life, but the time will come when the fruit born through our sufferings will bring us joy that no one will take away from us.

Contrary to the way men understand and perceive what it is to be blessed by God, Jesus taught His disciples that even when they are poor in spirit or in material possessions, they are blessed by God. Even when they experience hunger for things that God their Father has withheld from them, they are in fact blessed. Even when they weep and mourn as they share in the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, they are blessed, and even when they are ostracized and ill-treated because of their faith in Him, they are blessed.

How can these things be? How can these things which bring sorrow and grief into our lives possibly have anything to do with the blessing of God? The answer begins to become clear as we begin to understand from the Scriptures that everyone who serves Jesus must follow Him, sharing in His sufferings in order to bear fruit according to the principle that He taught us in John 12:24-26. The fruit born through our sufferings will produce for us an eternal glory that far exceeds the weight and burden of our sufferings during this present time of our lives here on earth (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Romans 8:18).

In contrast to the blessings that Jesus pronounced upon His disciples who will all share in His sufferings now, during this present life, He pronounced woes upon those who are rich and well fed now, who laugh now, and who have their comfort and consolation during this present life. Most of us would look at these people, and we would consider them to be blessed by God because of the many benefits they enjoy in life.

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As we try to understand why Jesus pronounced woes upon those who have so much of the gratification in life that we would all like to have, let us also consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Here Jesus gave us another very similar lesson about those who are eternally blessed by God and those who are not. In this parable, we see that the poor, miserable, and afflicted beggar Lazarus was known and accepted by God, despite the many hardships he endured in life. On the other hand, we see that the rich man, who fared sumptuously and lived in luxury every day, was ultimately rejected by God, despite the many comforts and benefits he enjoyed during his lifetime. (Consider also Psalm 73).

Jesus' pronouncement of blessings and woes as they are given in Luke 6:20-26 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus are both to be understood through the lesson that He gave to us in John 12:24-26, as we have discussed previously. Every one of us who serves Christ must follow Him, sharing in His sufferings (John 12:26, Romans 8:17), as God has ordained them for each of us individually. This share in His sufferings, sufferings that came about through no wrongdoing of His own, but nonetheless sufferings that came about according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), is the necessary path that God has ordained whereby we will bear spiritual fruit to His glory, and thereby share in the eternal glory of His Son.

On the other hand, unbelievers are not able to bear any good fruit at all (Matthew 7:15-23, John 15:1-8). They have been granted no share in the sufferings of God's Son, and no share in His eternal glory. Therefore, the sufferings that believers will endure according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26 will be absent in the lives of unbelievers, because this principle is not at work in their lives but only in the lives of God's people.

12.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

We may sometimes look around at the things we see happening in the world and wonder why God has ordered His creation the way He has. We see that there are those individuals to whom God has given great wealth, or those to whom God has given some exceptional talent, ability, or opportunities by which they are able to obtain some measure of wealth, prestige, or position for themselves. At the same time, we see others who struggle in life. For these the ability to obtain wealth and sometimes even the ability to make ends meet seems to be out of reach. Many of us as believers may look at those who have been given so much of what the world values and esteems highly, and we may find ourselves wondering why God does not give us more in the way of temporal, material blessings, so that our burdens might be eased, and we could enjoy more of the “good things in life”.

In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus gave a teaching characterizing the lives of His disciples, whom He proclaimed to be those who are truly blessed by God. He spoke of the troubles they would endure, and He contrasted their lives with others who experienced many good things in life. In this passage we can see that God’s view of blessing is one that is very much contrary to the views and understanding of men. In Luke 16, Jesus gave us another very similar teaching. In this passage we read:

“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his

bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'" (Luke 16:19-26)

How contrary this scenario is to the world's thinking and understanding. Most people would consider the rich man to be accepted and approved by God because of the many benefits he enjoyed in life. At the same time, they would consider Lazarus to be under some sort of curse because of the afflictions and poverty he endured.

The Scripture says that Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate, and so it is apparent that he was not even able to walk, or to otherwise get around on his own. He was dependent upon others to take him wherever he needed to go. Since he was laid at the rich man's gate to beg, "longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table", it is again apparent that the extent of his infirmities was so severe that he was not able to work at anything by which he could have earned money to provide for himself. So, he was forced by the circumstances in which he found himself to beg. Added to these infirmities he was also "covered with sores", which the dogs came and licked. One could imagine that he seemed repulsive to all who saw him.

The rich man by contrast lived a life filled with "good things" in that he lived in luxury every day, having received many advantages and benefits in life. By the world's way of thinking, many would consider the "good things" enjoyed by the rich man to be evidence of God's acceptance of him and His approval of the life he lived, but such was not the case.

When the rich man saw Lazarus laid there by his gate, he may have wondered what this poor beggar had done to deserve such a miserable fate. At the same time, he may have imagined that God must be pleased with him because of the material blessings he enjoyed. In the final analysis however, it was the poor, miserable, and afflicted beggar Lazarus who was accepted by God, and it was the rich man, whom most would have considered to be blessed by God, who was ultimately rejected by Him.

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As believers our portion is not in this life. Our portion is an inheritance in Heaven that will last forever. We may wonder why God has ordered and ordained things in His creation the way He has, and we may very much wish that He had done things differently. However, the ways and wisdom of God are beyond man's understanding, as the Bible teaches us in passages such as Romans 11:33, Ecclesiastes 8:16-17, and Ecclesiastes 11:5.

Since God in His wisdom has ordained that we must share in Christ's sufferings now during our lives here on earth in order that we may also share in His glory in Heaven (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-40, Romans 8:17), we as God's people may well find ourselves among those who are poor now, who hunger now, and who weep now (Luke 6:20-23). We will be hated, rejected, and excluded by those of the world who do not know God. We could also expect that our lives may be more characterized by having received our "bad things", rather than the many "good things" received by the rich man in Jesus' parable (Luke 16:25). When we consider the life of the rich man, let us also consider Psalm 17 where David prayed:

...Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword,
From men with Your hand, O Lord,
From men of the world, whose portion is in this life,
And whose belly You fill with Your treasure... (Psalm 17:13-14).

We as believers are not among those whose portion and reward are in this life. Rather, we are among those who will weep and mourn in this life, while those who belong to the world will rejoice (John 16:20-22). Now is our time of mourning as we share in the sufferings of Christ, but the day is coming for every believer when we will see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12), and then no one will ever take away our joy again. At that time, we will fully understand what God was accomplishing through all the sufferings we endured. Until that day, God requires of us that we walk by faith, and not by the sight of that which can be seen and fully understood (2 Corinthians 5:7).

In Jesus' account of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, we are presented with a stark contrast in two very different lives lived, and we have what will seem to be a complete contradiction in the understanding of those of this world. On the one hand we have the rich man, a winner in the eyes of the world, and one whom the world would consider to be blessed by God, enjoying many luxuries and all the benefits that material wealth can bring. On the other hand, we have the beggar Lazarus, a loser in the eyes of the world, and one whom the world might consider

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to be under some sort of curse by God. He suffered great affliction in his body, and we would surely consider him as one who was poor, hungry, and who wept during his life on earth (Luke 6:20-21).

In His teaching Jesus said: “Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.” (Luke 16:22). From these words we might assume that Lazarus was never healed of his affliction so that he would no longer have to beg, and that he remained a poor man until the day he died.

Ironically in the understanding of many, we see in this parable that the rich man was rejected by God, despite the many temporal blessings he enjoyed in life, and at the same time, we see that the poor, miserable, afflicted beggar Lazarus was known by God and accepted by Him. Let us all be mindful of these things when we encounter the afflicted during the course of our lives. When we come face to face with them, we may be looking at our brother or sister in the Lord. Let us also be mindful of these things when affliction comes into our own lives.

The Scriptures teach us that as believers we should not make valuations in our lives and assess the blessing of God in the same way that the world does. All of the valuations and ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God, as Jesus taught us when He said: “...that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15).

13.

To Take Up Our Cross and Follow Jesus

Jesus said: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he ***must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.***” For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24, emphasis added). We might wonder what Jesus meant by this teaching, and what His words could mean for us as His disciples today.

During Jesus’ lifetime on earth the cross was widely understood to be an instrument of death. With this understanding in mind, to deny ourselves and “take up our cross” to follow Jesus means two things. First, we must deny ourselves, or “die” to anything that is in violation of God’s word. Secondly, we will be called upon to deny ourselves, or “die” to the desire for anything that God may choose to take from us, or withhold from us, as part of His will and plan for each of us individually.

In Luke 14:27 Jesus said: “Whoever does not ***carry his own cross*** and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” A few verses later He also said: “So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not ***give up all*** his own possessions.” (Luke 14:33, emphasis added).

In these two verses from Luke 14, Jesus taught us that as His disciples we must give up, or “die” to, ***all*** that we had hoped to have in this life, and all that we had hoped to be, or experience, or enjoy, or accomplish in our lives, if God should require it of us. In place of what we would have chosen for ourselves, God our Father calls upon us to submit to the life, place of service, and purpose that He has ordained for us.

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This purpose of God's, this place of service that He has ordained for us, will be revealed through the circumstances of our lives that unfold as we walk in obedience to His word. All of the limitations, the difficulties, the hardships of all kinds, and all of the seemingly "good things" that are out of reach for us, are all part of our sovereign God's plan for our lives.

Jesus calls upon us to take up our cross daily, which is to "die" to, or give up, what we want to possess for ourselves and to embrace the life and place of service that God our Father has assigned for us. As we do so, we "lose our lives" for Jesus' sake (Luke 9:24), and we follow Him, becoming like Him in His death (Philippians 3:10).

David wrote of the limitations that God places in the lives of His people in order to bring each of us to the place of service that He has ordained for us. In Psalm 139 we read:

You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain. (Psalm 139:5-6)

And just a few verses later in Psalm 139, David wrote of the sovereignty of God in everything that comes to pass in our lives:

...all the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:16)

Our sovereign God has a particular plan and purpose for each of us as His people. The circumstances that He allows to affect our lives "hem us in" so to speak and limit us. They channel us or guide us into the life and place of service that He has ordained for us.

Dying to, or relinquishing, whatever God may choose to take or withhold from us, and accepting God's will and purpose for our lives, is the principle of spiritual fruit bearing that was at work in Jesus' life, and this same principle will also be at work in the lives of all of us who follow Him. This is the teaching given to us in John 12:24-26, and in several other passages of Scripture as well. There will be no fruit born without the dying of the "grain of wheat", that grain of wheat symbolizing our lives and all that we had hoped to have for ourselves in this life.

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Dying to what we want and obediently accepting God's assignments in life is what it means to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

We will all be called upon to submit ourselves to God's plan for our lives as we experience our share in the sufferings of His Beloved Son in the ways and in the measure that God Himself has ordained for each of us. All of the losses and limitations that we experience are a part of God's sovereign will for our lives. All of the things that we had hoped to have for ourselves in life, but we find that these things are simply out of reach in our case and unattainable for us – all of these things are a part of God's plan for our lives, and He has promised us that all of these things are working together for our good and for our eternal glory together with His Son (Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

If we are honest about Jesus' teaching in Luke 9:23-24, 14:27, and 14:33, then we must admit that the Gospel message is not one that will have broad appeal. Men do not want to hear that they must deny themselves and give up everything they have in order to be Jesus' disciples. They want to hear about how serving God will get them more of what they want out of life, and there are many who will gladly take their money in return for telling them such things. Paul warned us that these things would happen when he wrote: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Notwithstanding all of men's distortions, fabrications, and myths, the words in these passages of Luke 9 and 14 are Jesus' words, and men will either accept them as the truth, or they will deny them. Every Christian should understand that it has been granted to us not only to believe the Gospel message (John 6:65, Philippians 1:29), but we will all be called upon to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, in the ways and in the measure that God has ordained for each of us.

14.

To Drink from Jesus' Cup

In Mark 10, James and John came to Jesus asking a favor. Beginning in verse 35 we read:

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mark 10:35-40)

When James and John asked Jesus that one of them would sit at His right hand and the other at His left in His glory, they were in fact asking to have the places of highest honor in Heaven that any servant of Christ could have, being seated next to Jesus himself. Jesus answered them by saying that they did not know what they were asking. He then began to explain what is involved and what will be required of those who will be considered great in the kingdom of God by putting this question to them: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

The "cup" that Jesus drank, or the "baptism" with which He was baptized, are metaphors that Jesus used to symbolize the sufferings He would endure in order to fulfill His Father's will and purpose for His life. In Jesus' reply to the request of James and John, He was teaching them that those who would be great in

the kingdom of Heaven must follow Him (John 12:26), sharing in His sufferings in order to share in His eternal glory (Romans 8:17).

When James and John brought their request to Jesus, they had no idea that their future glory in the kingdom of Heaven could be realized only if they experienced a share in His sufferings. Even though they did not yet understand these things, Jesus told them that they would indeed drink from His cup and be baptized with His baptism, sharing in His sufferings in order that they would also receive a share in His glory, all according to God's particular plan and purpose for their lives.

Many times, especially as young believers, we pray that we might be used of God mightily for some great purpose of His. God answers these prayers according to His will for our lives, even though we may have no idea or understanding at the time that the fruit born as God grants our request to be used in His service will involve for us a share in the sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ, drinking from the cup and being baptized with the baptism of His sufferings. These sufferings will involve the "death", or relinquishment, of our own desires and plans for our lives, and possibly the relinquishment of many of the "good things" that we hoped God would bless us with in this life, if He should require it of us (John 12:24-26, Luke 9:23-24).

After Jesus asked James and John if they were able to drink from His cup, or be baptized with His baptism, they answered Him saying that they could. They did not yet understand what was involved and what would be required of them for their request to be granted, but they were willing. Even though Jesus knew that they did not yet understand these things, still He granted their request for a place of glory and honor in Heaven when He replied to them: "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mark 10:39-40).

In addition to granting their request for a place of honor and glory in Heaven through their sharing in His sufferings, Jesus at the same time taught them that the places of highest honor in Heaven belong to those "for whom it has been prepared". In other words, it is determined by the plan and purpose of our sovereign God who will occupy those places of highest honor.

A point to be made again is that even though Jesus told James and John that the places in Heaven at His right hand and His left were not for Him to grant, but

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for the Father, He did grant their request for a place of honor in the kingdom of God. The lesson here for all of us as believers is that when we bring such requests to God in prayer, it is the Spirit of God who motivates such prayers, and we should understand that our request for a place of honor in God's kingdom will be answered and granted as He has ordained for each of us individually. We should also understand that in granting our request, we will be required to drink from the cup and be baptized with the baptism of the Jesus' sufferings.

15.

The Greatest Among You

Beginning in Mark 10:35, Jesus taught His disciples about those who would be great in the kingdom of God and what would be required of them. He continued His teaching in Mark 10:42-45, where we read:

Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

Greatness in the kingdom of God will be evaluated in a completely different way than greatness in the world. By the world’s standards, servants are numbered among the least, because they must take orders from those who have authority over them. However, from Jesus’ teaching in this passage we learn that in the kingdom of God, those who serve will be numbered among the greatest.

Paul taught in Philippians 2 that our attitude should be the same as Jesus had during His life on earth. He took the very nature of a servant, being obedient to God to the point of death, even the humiliating death of crucifixion where He was stripped, beaten, and nailed to a cross all according to the will of God, in order to accomplish for His people what they could not accomplish for themselves: the forgiveness of their sins and salvation (Matthew 1:21).

Just as Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve others and “to give His life as a ransom for many”, and just as He took the form of a servant, humbling Himself by being obedient to the point of death, so we also, as His followers, are

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called upon to humble ourselves in submission and obedience to the word of God, and some of us will be called upon to do so even to the point of physical death. We will all experience reflections of the sufferings of Christ in our own lives, in some measure, according to God's plan and purpose for each of our lives individually.

When we strive to obey God regardless of what it may cost us, and regardless of what we may have to give up in temporal gratification in order to be obedient, then we also have humbled ourselves by being obedient to God's word, as we deny ourselves or "die to" (Luke 9:23) anything we may desire that would involve sin. Whatever hardship God allows to touch our lives, and whatever temptation to violate the principles in His word we may experience, when we determine to obey Him as we have received instruction through His word, then we also have taken the very nature of a servant, putting His will above our own.

Just as Jesus came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many, so we also, even if in some very small measure, will be called upon to give our lives as a "ransom", so to speak, for others. For example, we may give up some of the financial resources that God has given to us so that someone else may benefit from our sacrifice. We may also be called upon to give up some of our time in an endeavor that benefits others, when we could have spent that time doing something to benefit ourselves.

Giving of ourselves to serve others, even in some very small measure when compared to Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary, is for us a share in His sufferings and sacrifice, in that we too have given something of ourselves as a "ransom" for someone else so that they may benefit from our sacrifice. Such sacrifices are a manifestation of the love and mercy that will always accompany a genuine faith in Christ.

16.

The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

In Matthew 13 Jesus gave the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl. Beginning in verse 44 we read: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and *sells all that he has* and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and *sold all that he had* and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46, emphasis added).

The “hidden treasure” and the “one pearl of great value” of course refer to our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps the first thing we should say about this parable is that Jesus is not teaching that we must “purchase” our own salvation by giving up all that we have. He is the One who paid the price for our salvation when He died on Calvary’s cross, and with His blood He “purchased for God” men from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9). However, we should understand that *our calling to follow Jesus Christ will be costly for us*, as we learn from numerous teachings that Jesus gave to us.

In Luke 14:33, Jesus taught that no one can be His disciple unless they give up everything they have. Again, this is not to say that we must purchase our own salvation through a life of self-denial, but to say that following Jesus will be costly for us as God brings about the bearing of fruit in our life through the principle Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26.

In Luke 14:27, Jesus taught that anyone who does not “carry his own cross” and follow Him cannot be His disciple. The cross was widely understood in Jesus’ day to be an instrument of death. This “death” which Jesus spoke about is a death to what we would choose for ourselves in this life, and the obedient submission to

the life and place of service that God chooses for us. This place of service that God has assigned for us will be revealed as the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives unfold, and we find that many of the things we wanted for ourselves are out of reach and unattainable for us.

When we find ourselves facing the “death” of things that we wanted for ourselves in this life, things which may be completely honorable with no sin in them at all, but nonetheless things which God has withheld from us according to His plan and purpose for our lives, then we too have been called upon to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). When we are confronted with these things, then we suffer with Jesus, which is to say that we experience a share in the same kinds of sufferings that He endured as He submitted to the plan and purpose of God for His life (Romans 8:17, 1 Peter 4:12-13).

During these times we will experience our own “Gethsemane”, so to speak, and we too, as Jesus did, will pray to God our Father to take this cup from us, knowing that all things are possible for Him. In these times, we too, as Jesus was, will be called upon to accept God’s answer to our prayers as His sovereign will for our life.

In Matthew 10:29-30, Jesus taught us that not even one sparrow falls to the ground apart from God’s will. He also taught that God knows even the number of hairs on our head. This is to say that God is intimately familiar with every detail and circumstance of our lives. When our requests made in prayer are not granted, then we are called upon to accept God’s answer to our prayer as part of His sovereign will and plan for our lives, just as Jesus did when He prayed: “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” (Mark 14:36).

These are the hardest things to bear in the Christian life. Through these experiences of undeserved suffering with circumstances and conditions in our lives that God could change at any time, we “suffer with Jesus”, or share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His glory (Romans 8:17). His sufferings came about through no fault or wrongdoing of His own, but according to the predetermined plan and purpose of God for His life (Hebrews 2:10, Acts 2:23). We should all understand that this share in His sufferings is the one and only path to spiritual fruitfulness, as God has ordained it to be so for every one of His people (John 12:24-26).

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We have, by God's sovereign choice, by His mercy and grace, been brought to faith in His Son Jesus Christ. We have been given eyes to see and ears to hear (Matthew 13:11, 16). We have found "hidden treasure" (Matthew 13:44). We have found the "one Pearl of great value", Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 13:45-46). Though we have been chosen by God and blessed to share in the eternal glory of His Son, we should understand that everyone who is called to faith in Christ will be required to follow Him (John 12:26), sharing in His sufferings in order to bear the fruit that God has ordained for our lives (John 12:24), which will bring about for us a share in Christ's eternal glory.

17.

How to Give

In Luke 6 Jesus said: “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6:38). Jesus exhorted us to give, and He said that with the same measure we use to give to others, we will receive back in return. This is the promise of the Son of God, whose entire life was an example of giving of Himself for the benefit of others.

Jesus also taught us that our giving should be done in secret, and not publicly that we might receive praise and recognition for our generosity. In Matthew 6 we read:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

Jesus exhorted us to give quietly, not announcing it publicly to receive the praise of men, but in secret to please God our Father. God will see to it that we are rewarded when we obey Him by giving in this way.

There is also something else that we should consider in our giving. Just as Jesus promised that with the same measure we use to give to others we will receive back in return for ourselves, He also taught that the reward for our giving will not

always be realized during our lives here on earth. He gave us this teaching in the Gospel of Luke:

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for ***you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.***” (Luke 14:12-14, emphasis added).

When we give to the poor and the afflicted, they will likely never be able to repay us. Jesus taught us in this passage that we should not give with the expectation that we will always receive material recompense during our lifetime here on earth in return for our giving. There are times when our acts of kindness and sacrifice are building up for us treasure in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). There are times when our giving will not be paid back in this life, but as Jesus has promised, we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Many times, when the subject of Christian giving is discussed in church congregations, the subject of tithing is also discussed. While tithing was a command for Israel in the Old Testament, we should understand that Jesus never commanded or even encouraged His disciples to tithe their incomes.

Some would disagree that believers are no longer required to tithe. As justification they will reference a verse from the Gospel of Luke which reads: “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” (Luke 11:42).

As with interpreting any Scripture, we must consider who is being addressed in the passage under consideration, and we must also consider the context of the passage from which the Scripture is taken. In Luke 11:42, ***Jesus is addressing Pharisees***, who considered themselves to be justified in the sight of God by carefully observing certain provisions of the Law, but at the same time their lives were filled with hypocrisy and wickedness, and they neglected the weightier provisions of the Law such as justice and the love of God. (Consider Matthew 23:23, James 2:10).

It is important for us to understand that ***Jesus is not addressing His disciples in Luke 11:42***. In fact, in the context of this entire passage of Luke 11:37-54, Jesus

addressed the Pharisees and experts in the Law of His day. He sternly rebuked them for their hypocrisy on several points, including their belief that they would be justified before God by their strict observance of commands given in the Law such as tithing, while at the same time they disregarded justice and the love of God (1 John 4:8). However, it is clear from New Testament teaching that no one will be justified by observing the law (Romans 3:19-20, Galatians 2:16, 3:11). ***As we can see from the context of this passage, Luke 11:42 is not a command directed to New Testament believers that we are to tithe. Rather, it is one point in a rebuke that Jesus directed to hypocritical Pharisees.***

Nowhere in Jesus' teachings, nor anywhere else in the New Testament, are believers commanded to tithe. On the contrary, we are told that we are not to give "under compulsion", with the belief that we are compelled or obliged to give some certain amount, as can be seen from 2 Corinthians 9:7. Instead, we are told to give as we have decided in our own hearts that we should give.

In Jesus' teaching about giving, and elsewhere in the New Testament, we as God's people have been given new directives regarding our giving. We have also been given new promises of God's blessing in return for our giving.

There is nothing wrong with our local church asking us to tithe our income, and we are certainly free to do so if we want. However, with the New Testament directives that we have regarding our giving, let us resolve to let no one impose upon us a legalistic requirement that we must give a tithe, or a tenth, of what God has given to us in order to be obedient to Him.

Instead, let us give as we decide in our own hearts, with the understanding that if we give bountifully, then we will receive back for ourselves in the same measure, bountifully. However, if we give sparingly, then we will again receive back for ourselves in the same measure, sparingly. As believers in Christ, this is our instruction for giving as taught by Jesus in Luke 6:38, and by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6-9.

18.

How to Pray

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed His disciples about prayer. He began His teaching saying:

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5-8)

Jesus taught us that we are not to make showy public prayers to be seen by men. Such praying tends to exalt the one praying as one who is very “spiritual” and tends to shift the focus toward the one who is praying instead of where the focus of prayer should be, which is upon God. There may be times when we are called upon to lead a prayer among a group of people. At such times, let our prayers emphasize God’s power, love, and mercy, as well as our dependence upon Him for every need of our lives. This was the kind of prayer that Jehoshaphat brought before the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20:6-12, and his prayer was heard.

Jesus also taught us that we should not keep babbling repetitively in our prayers like pagans do, because God our Father knows what we need before we even ask it. Our Father is aware of the smallest details of our lives, even down to the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30). He knows what is best for us as He fulfills His purpose for our lives, and that purpose will be revealed to us

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through His answers to our prayers and through the circumstances and events of our lives, which unfold as He has ordained them.

After Jesus taught His disciples how not to pray, He then taught them how they should pray using an example or model prayer, which we all know as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. A line-by-line examination of the Lord's Prayer shows us what elements should be included in our prayers to God.

In the first line of the prayer, Jesus taught that we are to pray bringing our requests to God, "Our Father who is in heaven". In John 16, Jesus also taught us that we are to bring our requests to the Father, asking "in His name". Jesus said that we would receive whatever we asked in His name (John 16:23-24).

Praying in Jesus' name means that we are to pray in accordance with the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures, in complete obedience and submission to all that is taught in His word. We are to submit our own will to His will, as His sovereign will and plan for each of us is revealed through the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives (Luke 14:27, 33, Philippians 2:5-8, others).

Continuing in Jesus' model prayer, the words "Hallowed be Your name" show us that praise should be given to God the Father in our prayers. Praise is due Him, as is thanksgiving, for the gift that He gave to us when He called us to faith in His Son, whereby we have been given the privilege of praying to Him as "Our Father".

The following lines of Jesus' model prayer read: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.". These words again instruct us that our prayers should include an attitude of submission to, and acceptance of, God's will for our lives.

Jesus demonstrated His acceptance of God's will for His life, even when faced with the burden of overwhelming sorrow to the point of death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father knowing that everything was possible for Him, asking Him to take away the cup of suffering and death that He knew He was about to drink at Calvary. However, above all else, Jesus yielded Himself to His Father's will, even when His Father's will for Him was a painful and humiliating death on a cross (Mark 14:32-36).

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Continuing with Jesus' model prayer we read: "Give us this day our daily bread". These words teach us that we should ask God for the things that we need in life, the things that are necessary to sustain our lives such as food, clothing, a place to live, etc. Notice that Jesus taught we are to ask for our "daily bread". We are not to project far out into the future with what we think we might face at that time.

God does not want us to be burdened by the worry of what we imagine might come about in our tomorrows. Therefore, Jesus gave us this promise: if we will seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness as the priority of our lives, then God will give to us all the things that we need to sustain our lives. With this promise, we are told not to worry about our tomorrows or what troubles our tomorrows may bring (Matthew 6:33-34). When we make it our priority to obey God's word and submit ourselves to His plan for our lives and the place of service that He has ordained for us, then He promises to provide for the needs of all our tomorrows, as many tomorrows as He has allotted to us.

Continuing in the Lord's Prayer we read: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Forgiving others is required of us as believers. We have sinned against God, and by the wounds of His Son Jesus Christ we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5). Our sins made necessary in the sight of God our Father the painful and humiliating death that Jesus suffered in His crucifixion. His sacrifice was the propitiation for our sins. Just as God forgives our sins, He requires of us that we forgive the transgressions of those who sin against us.

In the last verse of Jesus' model prayer, we read: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." In this verse Jesus taught us that we are to ask God for His help in the ongoing struggle with temptation and sin that we will experience as long as we live on the earth.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by the example of this "Model Prayer", He taught them that they should pray to God their Father. He also taught that their prayers should include praise to God, and He taught that their prayers should include submission to the will of God. This submission means praying with an attitude and an understanding that the answers to our prayers, whether they are answered "yes" or "no", should be accepted as the answer given by our loving Father, who gives "what is good to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

If some burden is not lifted as we have asked, it is because God has willed that we should endure it, at least for a time, for our eternal good and glory

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(Romans 8:17-18, 28-30, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). In such times, we may be reminded again of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). He prayed to His Father three times that the cup of suffering He was about to endure at Calvary might be taken from Him, but His cup of suffering was not taken from Him; it was His Father's will that He would have to endure it. All of us who follow Jesus will be called upon to drink from His cup and be baptized with the baptism of His sufferings in some measure, as God has determined for each of us, and through these sufferings the Scriptures reveal that we will bear fruit to the glory of God (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-40).

Even though God will answer our prayers according to His sovereign plan for our lives, Jesus taught that we are to be persistent in our prayers. In Luke's account of the Gospel, right after Jesus instructed His disciples using the Lord's Prayer as an example, He then continued His teaching with the parable of a friend who comes at midnight, as we read in Luke 11:

Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

Jesus used this parable to teach His disciples another lesson about prayer, and that is the need to persist in our requests to God until we get an answer from Him. In the following verses Jesus said: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10).

It is interesting to note that in the original Greek text, the words translated as "ask", "seek", and "find" all have a continuing action to them. A more complete translation to the English language would be "ask and keep on asking", "seek and keep on seeking", and "knock and keep on knocking".

Jesus concluded His teaching by saying: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit is referred

to as the Comforter or Counselor in several passages of John's Gospel (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). In Matthew's account of this same teaching, we read: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11).

From these passages we learn that when we persevere in prayer to God our Father, we are promised the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter and Counselor. We are also promised "what is good" for us and planned for us according to God's sovereign purpose for each of our lives.

The need for persistence in prayer is also illustrated in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. Jesus told this parable to teach His disciples that they should always pray and not give up hope of receiving an answer from God.

Jesus began the parable saying that there was an unrighteous judge who did not fear God, and who had no regard for men. There was a widow who kept coming to this judge, asking for justice against an adversary of hers. The judge at first kept putting her off, but she kept returning to him, persisting with her request. Finally, the unrighteous judge said to himself that he would grant this widow the justice she sought, so that she would not keep troubling him with her continual returning and pleas.

Jesus ended the parable with a lesson for His disciples about persistence in prayer when He said: "...Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:6-8).

So again, in the parable of the persistent widow, as in the parable of a friend who comes at midnight, Jesus taught about the necessity of persevering in prayer as we bring our requests to God, and He assured us that we will receive God's answer to our prayers. Jesus' final words in the passage are: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" This question that Jesus put forward indicates that at times, some of God's answers to our prayers may challenge our faith.

When the answer to our prayer is "no", our faith may indeed be challenged. We may wonder why our God, who can do all things, and who said that He loves

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His children, will not grant us our request to be freed from some burden that we have brought to Him in prayer.

If God's answer to our prayer is "no", then He calls upon us to submit to His answer as part of His plan for our life, at least for the present time (again consider Matthew 26:36-46). If our burden is not lifted, and we find that we must continue to suffer with it for a while longer, then we can take comfort in seeing and understanding the troubles which God has allowed to touch our lives in the light of the teachings that we have seen from the Scriptures before.

These teachings reveal to us that a share in the sufferings of Christ will be experienced in the life of every believer. Just as Jesus bore fruit through the sufferings that the Father had ordained for His life, we must follow Him in that we will bear fruit through sharing in His sufferings, as God has ordained for each of us, and the fruit born through these sufferings will achieve for us a share in Christ's eternal glory (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:36-39, Romans 8:17).

19.

The Remedy for Worry

Many of us will find that there will be times in our lives when we face circumstances that cause us to be concerned about how we will provide for ourselves and those who depend on us. Maybe a job loss, an injury or illness, or maybe our own lack of credentials or skills may cause us to worry about how we will make it in the days that lie ahead. We may anxiously question whether we will be able to obtain the things that we need to sustain ourselves and our loved ones.

Jesus knew that we would face times like these, and in Matthew 6 He spoke specifically to our concerns about such things. He prefaced His teaching by saying in verse 24 that we cannot serve two masters; we cannot serve both God and money. He then continued in the verses that follow with His teaching about worry, and about God's promise to provide for the needs of His people. Beginning in verse 25 we read:

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for *your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom*

and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:25-34, emphasis added).

Jesus told us not to worry about our tomorrows and about how we will provide for ourselves in the days ahead. He assured us that God will provide for our needs, pointing to the fact that He provides for even the birds of the air, which “do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns”. These creatures do not cultivate crops and store them for their future needs, but they gather daily what God provides for them. Jesus used the lilies of the field as another example, saying that they “do not toil nor do they spin”, and yet God clothes them in splendor. With these examples of God’s provision, Jesus taught us that if God takes care to provide sustenance for even the birds of the air and the grass of the field, then He will surely provide for us as His people.

Jesus then taught us not to anxiously preoccupy ourselves with chasing after material things as unbelievers do, making the pursuit of the money necessary to obtain these things the priority of our lives. He assured us that God our Father knows our needs and promises to provide for us, if we will seek His kingdom and His righteousness as our priority in life.

This means that above all else, we are to walk in obedience to God’s word as revealed to us in the Bible, and we are to put the pursuit of worldly endeavors and our own desires behind our pursuit of the things of God. If we will seek as the preeminent goal of our lives to obey God in all that we know He requires of us, then we can rest in His promise that He will provide for our material needs (Matthew 6:33-34).

The circumstances and conditions of our lives will reveal God’s plan for our lives. Sometimes these circumstances are only temporary. Other times certain circumstances and conditions will be something that we will live with for the rest of our lives. If an ability or talent or credential that the world deems valuable is out of reach for us, it is because our sovereign God, according to His plan and purpose for our life, has determined that it will be out of reach for us. We should then look to Him to provide for our needs and not to our own strengths and abilities.

The world esteems highly material wealth, prominence, power, prestige, and position. We as believers are told not to love the world or the things that are in world, and we are not to preoccupy ourselves with them (1 John 2:15-17). Instead, we are to seek the things of God as the priority of our lives. We are to make

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obedience to God's word in every situation and circumstance our primary focus in life. When we have done this, let us accept God's provision for our lives as He sees fit to give it, and let us rest in His promise that He will indeed provide it.

The Apostle Paul taught us much about the Christian life when he said: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7). We as believers have been called to walk and live our lives by faith in the trustworthiness of God and all that He has promised to us through His word. Most of us will find that living our lives by the sight of material wealth stored up for ourselves, or by our own strength and abilities, is something that will be out of reach for us. Our sovereign and loving God directs our paths, and He will demonstrate His faithfulness as He sustains us and carries us through the hardships of our lives. Through these experiences, the promises in His word will be shown to be completely true and trustworthy.

20.

Jesus Will Draw All Men to Himself

Jesus said: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). Some interpret this verse as meaning that God has offered salvation to every individual who has ever been born, and all they must do to take advantage of this offer is to make the decision to believe in Christ, but is this really what Jesus was teaching?

As always when we are interpreting Scripture, we must consider the context of the passage within which the verse or passage is found. We must also consider if our interpretation is contradicted by any other passage of Scripture. John 12:32 is found within a passage that begins in John 12:20. So we must consider the context of the entire passage (John 12:20-36) in our interpretation of what Jesus was teaching in John 12:32.

Beginning in John 12:20-22, we find that there were Greeks present who were interested in what Jesus had to say, and they came to Philip asking to see Jesus. Philip told Andrew of their request, and the two of them told Jesus.

Jesus then began speaking to all of those present with His teaching about the fruitful grain of wheat, starting in John 12:23. Later in this passage, He said that when He was “lifted up from the earth” (which everyone in those days understood to be a reference to crucifixion), He would draw “all men” to Himself.

Jesus, knowing that there were Greek Gentiles present who wanted to see Him, was communicating to the crowd that He would draw not only those from among the Jews to Himself, but also Gentiles as well. A Gentile is anyone who is not of the Jewish race. So when we consider those who are of the Jewish race, along with those who are not of the Jewish race (Gentiles), then we are considering

all races of men, which is to say that we are considering “all men” categorically. This is not to say that we are considering all men individually, or each and every individual who has ever been born.

It was widely understood by both Jews and Gentiles in Jesus’ day that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was the God of the Jews, and that all His promises applied only to the Jews, who were God’s chosen people. However, contrary to this widely held view at the time, Jesus was communicating to all who were in the crowd, both Jews and Gentiles, that the Gentiles were also included in God’s plan of redemption and salvation. This same message was also prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 49:6 and 65:1) and affirmed again in the Book of Revelation where we read: “...Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

When Jesus said in John 12:32 that when He was “lifted up from the earth” He would draw “all men” to Himself, He was saying that He would draw not only men from among the Jewish race, but also men from among the Gentile races as well. To interpret the phrase “all men” in this verse as meaning each and every individual who has ever been born would be an interpretation that is contradicted by the teaching in passages such as John 6:37-40, 6:44, 6:65, Romans 9:1-24, Ephesians 1:4-5, 2:1-10, 1 Peter 1:1-2, and others. These passages teach that God has chosen certain individuals to be brought to faith in His Son. Jesus referred to these chosen individuals as those whom the Father has “given” to Him (John 6:37, 39, John 17:6, 9, 24), and as God’s “elect” (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31, Luke 18:7).

Since the context of John 12:20-36 mentions that Jesus was aware there were Greek Gentiles present who wanted to see Him, we have more confirmation that the “all men” Jesus spoke about in this passage indeed refers to “all races of men”, which is to say both the Jewish race and the non-Jewish (or Gentile) races, or those “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). Jesus was not teaching in John 12:32 that an “offer of salvation” is available to every individual who has ever been born, as many would say. Rather, He was teaching that not only the Jewish race, but all races of men, would be included in God’s salvation, and Jesus accomplished this salvation at Calvary for all those whom the Father has given to Him.

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Consistent with Jesus' teaching in John 12:20-36, the Apostle Paul also taught that all races of men, not only the Jews but also the Gentiles, would be included in God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to Timothy:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-7).

The purpose of Paul's letter to Timothy was to instruct him on how to care for the church at Ephesus, a Gentile church located in what is today the nation of Turkey. ***One of the fundamental truths that Paul wanted to communicate to the Gentile churches was that they too were included in God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, and not only the Jews.*** This is emphasized in verse 7 of this passage of 1 Timothy 2, where Paul described himself as "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth". The message that the Gentiles races were also included in God's plan of salvation is the same truth that Jesus made clear as He spoke to the crowd as recorded in John 12:20-36, when it was known that Gentiles were present who were interested in His message.

Paul was saying in this passage of 1 Timothy 2:3-7 the same thing that Jesus said in John 12:32, which is that God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ includes not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles. A Gentile is anyone who is not directly descended from the twelve tribes of Israel. Once again, when we include Jews, and all of those who are not Jews, then we have "all men" categorically, or all races of men, or those "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation", as John wrote in Revelation 5:9.

To interpret the phrase "all men" found in either 1 Timothy 2:4-5 or John 12:32 as meaning each and every person who has ever lived would be to insist on an interpretation that is not born out in the context of the passages in which these verses are found. Such an interpretation would also be contradicted by many other passages of Scripture, which teach that God chooses some to receive His mercy and be saved, while others are hardened, being left in their sins (Romans 9:1-24, others).

Also consistent with Jesus' teaching in John 12:20-36, Peter taught in Acts 2 that the promise of salvation through faith in Christ is extended to all races of men.

Speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem, Peter called upon them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

Peter's exhortation to the crowd again illustrates the outward call of the proclamation of the Gospel message spoken in the hearing of men, calling upon them to put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation to God. Though many hear this outward call, only few are chosen by God, as Jesus taught in the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:14). These few who are chosen are those who are called to faith in Christ with the inward, effectual calling of God that Jesus spoke about in John 6:37,44, and 63-65.

Immediately after Peter called upon those in this crowd in Jerusalem to put their faith in Christ, he said to them: "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." (Acts 2:39). When Peter said that the promise is for "you and your children", he was speaking to the Jews. When he then said that the promise is also for "all who are far off", he was speaking of Gentiles. So we see that the promise of God's salvation through faith in Christ is for not only for the Jewish race, but for all races of men.

Peter then qualified his statement by saying that the promise is for "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself", not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles as well, just as Paul also taught in Romans 9:22-24. Therefore, we see that the promise of salvation through faith in Christ *is for all races of men, for as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself from among them all*. The determining factor mentioned here by Peter is God's calling, which is consistent with other passages of Scripture that we have discussed.

From an examination of the context of the broader passages within which John 12:32 and 1 Timothy 2:4-5 are found, *we see that the reference to "all men" in both of these passages refers to "all races of men", or all men categorically, and not to all men individually, as in the sense of each and every person who has ever been born*. To interpret these verses as saying that an "offer" of salvation is "available" to every person who has ever been born would be to violate the context of the passages in which these verses are found, and therefore such an interpretation would be invalid.

In conclusion, Jesus taught in John 12:32 that all races of men, not only the Jews but also the Gentile races as well, will be included in God's plan of salvation. This is the same lesson that Paul taught in 1 Timothy 2:4-5. God's elect will

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include individuals from all races of men (Revelation 5:9), and these elect individuals will all, in God's time, be drawn to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and they will all be raised up at the last day (John 6:44). God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ includes all races of men, as many individuals as the Lord our God will call from among them all (Acts 2:39).

21.

The Bread of Life

In the John 6, Jesus said:

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:48-58, emphasis added)

In verse 60 we see that many of Jesus’ disciples found this to be a hard teaching, and one that they could not accept. Jesus knew that they were grumbling among themselves about this teaching, and He responded by saying:

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, ***“For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”*** (John 6:63-65, emphasis added.)

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As the passage continues, we see in John 6:66 that as a result of His teaching in verses 48-58, many of Jesus' disciples turned back and followed Him no more. (Consider 1 John 2:19). Jesus then turned to the twelve and asked them if they also wanted to leave. Peter responded by saying: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69)

So within this passage of John 6:48-69, we see two very different responses to the word of God. Many could not understand or accept Jesus' teaching, as difficult as it was, but to Peter and the others (except for Judas, who would later betray Him), God the Father had revealed that Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Holy One of God, and there was no one else to whom they could go for the words of eternal life. (See also Matthew 16:17).

As we read this passage, we might wonder why Jesus chose to present His message using metaphors that would be so difficult for many to understand and accept. Why did He choose to use such symbolism when He said that unless we ate His flesh and drank His blood, we would have no life in us? Why did He not just use plain language that everyone could understand to communicate His message to the crowds? Did He not want everyone to be able to understand His message?

The answer to these questions is given to us in Matthew 13. After Jesus had given the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9, His disciples came to Him and asked why He spoke to the crowds in parables. Jesus answered them saying: "***To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.***" (Matthew 13:11).

So Jesus taught the same message in Matthew 13:11 that He taught in John 6:65. It has only been granted to God's elect, those whom Jesus calls His sheep, to be able to come to Him (John 6:37) and to hear and understand His words. To all the others it has not been granted. (Consider Matthew 13:9, 23, John 8:43, 47, 10:24-26).

As God's elect, it has been granted to us to come to Jesus and to understand His teachings. This understanding often does not come instantaneously as we first read a particular passage of the Bible, but many times it will come over the course of years and decades, as God reveals His truth to us in His time. (Consider John 16:12).

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Even as believers, we ourselves might struggle with Jesus' teaching in this passage of John 6. However, when any genuine believer is confronted with teaching in the Bible that is hard to understand or accept, they will not turn back from following Jesus as so many will, but they will respond along the same lines as Peter did when he said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69).

When we have questions about what we have read in the Bible, we should look to other passages of Scripture to provide light for us and help with our understanding. As we attempt to understand what Jesus meant in this passage when He said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life, we can go to John 1 for additional insight.

In John 1:1 we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In John 1:14 we read: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

With John 1:1 and 1:14 in mind, we can see that to feed on the Bread of Life, or to "eat the flesh" and "drink the blood" of Jesus Christ, is to feed on His word. Every genuine believer knows what it is like to read the word of God and to be comforted, encouraged, edified, and nourished in our spirit. We know what it is like to draw life from the Word of God, because it has been granted to us to come to Jesus (John 6:37, 65). It has been granted to us to understand His words (Matthew 13:9, 11, 23). It has been granted to us to feed on the bread of life, the Word of God.

22.

Not Able to Hear God's Word

So many will present the Gospel message as being one that every individual who has ever been born may hear and accept or reject as they decide for themselves. However, Jesus taught that many are in fact not able to hear His words.

In John 8, we see that Jesus was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem. Many heard His words and came to believe in Him, but others did not believe, and they questioned Him. Jesus answered them, saying: "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is *because you cannot hear My word.*" You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father..." (John 8:43-44, emphasis added.) A few verses later, Jesus said: "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." (John 8:47)

Jesus taught in these verses that there are basically two categories of people: those who belong to their Father God, and there those who belong to their father the devil. Those who belong to God are Jesus' sheep, and they hear God's words (again, John 8:47). These are God's elect; they are those whom the Father has given to His Son (John 6:37). These are the ones to whom it has been granted to hear and understand the Gospel message (John 6:65). They will hear Jesus' voice as He calls each of them out by name, and they will follow Him (John 10:3-4). However, all the others "cannot hear" His word (John 8:43); they are not able to hear and understand the words of the Gospel message.

Jesus again taught of the inability of unregenerate men to hear His words and come to Him, unless they are numbered among those whom He referred to as His sheep. In John 10:24-26, we read that some Jews had gathered around Jesus and asked Him not to keep them in suspense, but to tell them plainly if He was

indeed the Christ. Jesus replied to them saying that He had already told them, and that the miracles He had done in His Father's name among them bore witness to His claim that He was in truth the Christ, and then Jesus said to them: "But you do not believe ***because you are not of My sheep.***" (John 10:26, emphasis added). It has only been given to God's elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep, to believe in Him.

Notice that Jesus did not say to them they were not His sheep because they had decided for themselves not to believe, but conversely, He said that the reason they did not believe in Him was because they were not His sheep. Only those who belong to God, or those whom Jesus calls His sheep, will hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). ***All the rest will not be able to hear*** (John 8:43-47, 10:24-26).

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew that these individuals to whom He was talking were not numbered among His sheep. Only God's elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His "sheep", will hear His voice. These will be called to faith in Christ, and they will therefore believe in Him (John 6:37, 44). All the rest will not be able to hear and understand Jesus' words, and will therefore be left in their sins.

As we consider Jesus' teachings about those who are not able to hear His words, we might also call to mind His teaching in Matthew 13, where a large crowd had gathered to hear what He had to say. He began by giving them the parable of the sower in verses 3-9.

Afterwards His disciples came to Him and asked Him why He spoke to the people in parables. Parables are stories that use figurative language to convey spiritual truths, and such figurative or symbolic language is often not easily understood. His disciples may have reasoned that surely Jesus must want everyone to understand His teachings, and they may have wondered why He did not communicate His message in plain language that could be more easily understood.

Jesus answered His disciples' question about why He spoke to the people in parables by saying: "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, ***but to them it has not been granted.***" (Matthew 13:11, emphasis added). It has been granted to every one of God's elect to know Jesus and to be able to hear and understand His words, which is "to know the mysteries of the kingdom heaven". However, to all the others it has not been granted.

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It has only been granted to God's elect, those who are symbolized by the "good soil" in the parable of the sower, to be able to hear and understand the word of God, the Gospel message. As a result, they will all come to faith in Christ and bear fruit (Matthew 13:8-9, 23).

Jesus taught that only God's elect, those whom God has chosen (Matthew 22:14), those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37), those whom the Father draws or calls to faith in Him (John 6:44, 10:3), those to whom it has been granted by the Father to come to Him (John 6:65), only these will be able to hear and understand the word of God, and through that hearing be saved. All the others will not be able to hear.

23.

No One Can Come to Jesus Unless

Jesus said: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44, emphasis added). In this verse Jesus taught that for anyone to be able to come to Him, they must be drawn by God the Father. Otherwise, they are unable to accept the Gospel of Christ; they are unable to believe in Him. Now let us look carefully at the second part of this verse. After Jesus said that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him, He then immediately said, “and I will raise him up at the last day”.

Notice the certainty in the statement where Jesus said, “I will”, which teaches us that those whom the Father draws to His Son *will* be raised up at the last day. Jesus did not say that those who are drawn must then make the decision to come to Him in order to be saved. However, Jesus did say clearly, and without any added conditions or any mention of man’s cooperation, that those whom the Father draws *will* be raised up at the last day.

John 6:44 is one of several Bible passages that teach us about the calling of an individual to faith in Christ. Jesus taught us that this calling of God, this drawing by God the Father, is an effectual calling, meaning that all of those who receive this inward calling *will* indeed come to Him, and they will all be raised up at the last day. Without this effectual calling of God, the mind of sinful man, which is hostile toward God, has no desire to come to Christ and has not even the ability to come to Him (Romans 8:7).

There is an outward calling whereby the Gospel of Christ is preached in the hearing of men, which is illustrated in the parable of the sower recorded in Matthew 13:1-23. Jesus taught us in this parable that the only place where the seed sown by the farmer produced a harvest of good fruit was where it fell upon “good

soil”. This is to say that when the seed of the Gospel of Christ is spoken in man’s hearing, the only place where a harvest of good fruit will be realized is where the message is heard by God’s elect. In contrast to others who hear the same Gospel message, God’s elect both hear *and understand* the message, and they will therefore be saved and bear fruit to the glory of God. (Consider Matthew 13:8-9, 23, and Acts 22:9).

As opposed to others who may receive the outward proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in their hearing, God’s elect not only hear this outward calling for men to put their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, but through the hearing of the message they also receive the inward calling of God, which always results in the regeneration of those who receive it. In His time, the Father draws His elect to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and they all do in fact come to Him.

This drawing, which Jesus spoke about in John 6:44, is the inward calling of God, and it always results in the one who is drawn being raised up at the last day, just as Jesus said. *With this inward, effectual calling of God regeneration occurs, and one is born into the kingdom of God, apart from their own personal decision or cooperation.* The one who has received this calling has no more chance of refusing it than Saul had of refusing God’s call when he was struck down on the Damascus Road, even while he was still intent on persecuting the church.

If anyone rejects the Gospel of Christ, it is only because they have never been drawn by the Father; they have never received this inward, effectual calling of God which Jesus spoke about in John 6:44. Believing in Christ is not something that sinful, unregenerate man has the ability or capacity to do, in and of himself, in order to obtain salvation for himself. He must be drawn by the Father.

When a man is drawn to Christ by the Father, he is regenerated. He is born into the kingdom of God, and evidence of this regeneration and conversion which God has wrought within him is that he does indeed believe in Christ. Man does not reject the inward calling of God. Rather, when the Father draws a man, Jesus *will* raise him up at the last day, just as He said He would.

There is one other thing that we should mention regarding the “drawing” by the Father that Jesus spoke about in John 6:44. The Greek word in the original text which is translated to English as “draws” in John 6:44 is the word “helko”, which means “to draw” or “to drag”. With this meaning in mind, we can easily see from the accounts of Saul’s conversion in the Book of Acts how he was forcefully “dragged” into the kingdom of God apart from any decision or cooperation of his

own, even as he was “still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9:1).

Later in John 6, Jesus once again emphasized man’s inability to come to Him, unless it has been granted to him by the Father. Speaking to a crowd, Jesus said that the words He had spoken to them are “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63), and yet there were some there who did not believe. Jesus then explained the reason that there were some who had heard His words but did not believe, when He said to them: “For this reason I have said to you, that ***no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.***” (John 6:65, emphasis added).

Jesus knew that some of those following Him at the time refused to accept Him and His words. Knowing His own sheep and knowing that there were also some there who did not believe, Jesus emphasized again in John 6:65 what He had already taught in John 6:44, when He said that no one ***could*** come to Him; no one was ***able*** to come to Him, “unless it has been granted him from the Father”.

In John chapters 8 and 10, Jesus again taught of the inability of unregenerate men to hear His words and come to Him, unless they are numbered among those whom He referred to as His sheep. In John 10:24-26, we read that some Jews had gathered around Jesus and asked Him not to keep them in suspense, but to tell them plainly if He was indeed the Christ.

Jesus replied to them saying that He had already told them, and that the miracles He had done in His Father’s name among them bore witness to His claim that He was in truth the Christ. Then Jesus said to them: “But you do not believe ***because you are not of My sheep.***” (John 10:26, emphasis added). ***It has only been granted to God’s elect, those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep, to believe in Him.***

Notice that Jesus did not say to them they were not His sheep because they had decided for themselves not to believe, but conversely, He said that the reason they did not believe in Him was because they were not His sheep. Only those who belong to God, or those whom Jesus calls His sheep, will hear His voice (John 10:3-4, 10:27). All the rest will not be able to hear (John 6:44, 6:65, 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

Jesus, being the Son of God, knew that these individuals to whom He was talking were not numbered among His sheep. Again, only God’s elect, or those whom Jesus referred to as His “sheep”, will hear His voice. These will all in God’s

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time be called to faith in Christ, and they will therefore believe in Him. All the rest will be left in their sins.

Jesus said: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” (John 6:63). The Spirit of God gives eternal life, and unregenerate man, or man who is “in the flesh” so to speak, is completely without the ability to accept the Gospel of Christ unless he is called to faith by God Himself. (John 6:44, 6:65, Romans 8:7, 1 Corinthians 2:14).

If and when this calling of God occurs in an individual’s life, they are regenerated; they have been born again. Their being born again does not come about as a result of their own decision made when they are still dead in their sins, or still in the flesh, because as Jesus said: “the flesh profits nothing”. Man’s salvation comes about by the sovereign choice and effectual calling of God.

All men will remain hostile toward God unless and until they are called by Him to faith in Christ, just as was the case with Saul right up until the moment of his conversion on the Damascus Road. The Scriptures teach us that man’s depravity is total. Since man in his unregenerate state is hostile toward God and unable to seek Him, then God must seek men and Himself bring them to faith, if any are to be saved.

In conclusion, no one can come to Christ unless they are numbered among those whom the Father has “given” to His Son (John 6:37, 39, John 17:6, 9, 24). These are God’s elect; they are Jesus’ sheep. To these it has been granted by the Father to come to Jesus (John 6:65).

These individuals are those whom God “foreknew”, and He predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). These will all, in God’s time, be drawn by the Father to faith in His Son, and they will all be raised up at the last day (John 6:44). These and only these will be able to hear Jesus’ voice calling them to faith in Him (John 10:3-4, 10:27), and all the rest will not be able to hear (John 8:43, 8:47, 10:25-26).

24.

The Wedding Feast

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus gave the parable of the wedding feast. He began by saying that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. The king in this parable symbolized God the Father, and the king's son symbolized Jesus Himself.

The king sent his servants to those who had been invited to the wedding feast, telling them to come, but they refused. Those who had been invited symbolized the Jews, at this point in the parable. Then the king sent other servants to those who had been invited, telling them that everything was ready and bidding them again to come to the wedding feast. However, they disregarded the invitation and went off to tend to their own personal pursuits. Others who were invited seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

When the king heard about this, he was enraged. He sent out his armies, destroyed those who murdered his servants and set their city on fire, as we see in verse 7. The king's wrath here could be an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army, which occurred in A.D. 70. (Consider Matthew 24:1-2).

As the parable continued, we see that the king told his servants that those who were invited did not deserve to come. He then commanded them to go out on the highways and invite as many as they found there to the wedding feast. The servants did as they were told and gathered everyone they could find, and the wedding hall was filled with guests, "both evil and good" (verse 10). So now we see in verses 9-10 that the invitation to the wedding feast includes others besides those who were first invited (the Jews), which is to say that the invitation is also extended to the Gentile races as well. (Consider Isaiah 49:6, Acts 13:47, 26:23 Revelation 5:9, and others).

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In verse 11 we see that the king, who had prepared the wedding feast for his son, noticed that there was a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. The wedding clothes in the parable symbolize the righteousness of Christ, without which no one will enter the kingdom of Heaven. The king told his servants to tie the man up and throw him outside into the darkness, where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, which signifies eternal separation from God.

Within this parable, we see three different responses to the invitation to the wedding feast that are manifested by those who will ultimately be excluded from the feast. The first reaction is one of indifference, as illustrated in verses 3-5. The second reaction is one of hostility, as we see from verse 6. The third reaction is illustrated by the man who did in fact accept the invitation, and he came to the feast, but he was found by the king not to be wearing wedding clothes.

The man who was not wearing wedding clothes heard the invitation to come to the wedding feast, which signifies the Gospel message, and he accepted the invitation, symbolizing an apparent conversion. He was found by the king among other guests at the feast who were attired in wedding clothes, and these other guests symbolize genuine believers. However, because he was found to be not wearing wedding clothes, and again the wedding clothes signify the righteousness of Christ, “the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 22:13).

The man who was not wearing wedding clothes is symbolic of those who will identify themselves as being a believer, but they are in fact they are unregenerate. They are the false prophets that Jesus warned us about in Matthew 7:15-23. Although they profess to be Christians, they are in fact ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing. Jesus said that we would recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16). They are bad trees that cannot bear good fruit (Matthew 7:17-20). Even though they will acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and they will claim to have done many good works in His name, they will ultimately hear from Him the words: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:21-23).

The man at the wedding feast who was not wearing clothes is like the tares mixed in among the wheat in Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The wheat, symbolizing genuine believers, bears a harvest of good fruit, but the tares, symbolizing the unregenerate, cannot bear fruit. Jesus taught that the

wheat will be gathered into the landowner's barn, but the tares will be gathered into bundles to be burned.

The man who was not wearing wedding clothes is also like a branch that bears no fruit in Jesus' parable of the vine and its branches (John 15:1-8). Jesus said that such branches will be cut off and thrown into the fire.

The man who was not wearing wedding clothes is also like the foolish virgins in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). The foolish virgins took their lamps to meet the bridegroom at the wedding feast, but they took no oil for their lamps. The lamps in this parable symbolize a profession of faith in Christ, and the oil symbolizes the righteousness of Christ, which is possessed only by genuine believers. Just as the foolish virgins were excluded from the wedding feast because they had no oil for their lamps, so also the man without wedding clothes was excluded, because neither the foolish virgins nor the man without wedding clothes possessed the righteousness of Christ.

Jesus concluded the parable of the wedding feast with a summary of the lesson to be drawn from this parable, when He said: "***For many are called, but few are chosen.***" (Matthew 22:14, emphasis added).

When Jesus said that many are called, He was teaching that many are called outwardly, or invited to the wedding feast, when they hear or read the proclamation of the Gospel message. Many are called outwardly to repent of their sins and come to Him, but even though "many" are called in this way, only "few" are chosen. These few who are chosen are God's elect, who hear not only the outward call for men to repent of their sins and believe in Christ, but through the hearing of the word of God they are also called with the inward, effectual calling of God which always results in the regeneration of those who receive it. (Consider John 6:44, 6:65, 10:3, 10:27, Romans 8:29-30).

Many may hear the outward call of the proclamation of the Gospel message, but as Paul wrote to Thessalonian believers, he knew that God had chosen them because "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Those who receive God's calling hear the outward proclamation of the Gospel, and it comes to them not in word only, "but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Here is the evidence manifested by those whom God has chosen, those who have received God's calling to faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

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Even though many are called outwardly, as Jesus taught in Matthew 22:14, only few are chosen by God to come to faith in Christ. All of these chosen, or God's elect, will, through the hearing of the Gospel message, be called with His effectual calling to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and they will all indeed come to faith in Him. This effectual calling of God's elect is what Jesus spoke about when He said: "All that the Father gives Me *will* come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (John 6:37, emphasis added). This effectual calling is the "drawing" of an individual by God the Father to faith in His Son, as Jesus taught in John 6:44.

25.

The Workers in the Vineyard

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus gave the parable of the workers in the vineyard. As the parable begins, a landowner goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them each a denarius and sent them into his vineyard. A denarius was the usual wage at that time for one day's service from a laborer or a soldier.

At about nine in the morning, the landowner went out and found others standing around in the marketplace, doing nothing. He told them also to go and work in his vineyard, and he would pay them whatever was right. These also went. He went out again at about noon and then again at about three in the afternoon and did the same.

He went out yet again at about five in the afternoon and found others standing around, and he asked them why they had been standing idle all day long. They replied, saying that no one had hired them. He told them also to go and work in his vineyard.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman to call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on to the first. The workers who were hired at five in the afternoon each received a denarius. When those who were hired first came to be paid, they expected to be paid more, but each of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they complained against the landowner, saying that he had made those who worked only one hour equal to them, when they were the ones who had borne the heat and burden of the day.

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The landowner replied to them saying: "... 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' So the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:13-16)

This parable is an example of a Scriptural teaching that can have meaning on different levels. It is fine to interpret scriptural teachings on different levels, so long as our interpretation is not contradicted by any other teachings in the Scriptures.

On one level, the laborers hired first can represent the Jews, who were angered to think that the Gentiles would be made equal to them (Matthew 20:12) by being included in God's salvation. We can see a teaching with a very similar message that Jesus gave to us in the parable of the prodigal son, where the older son (symbolic of the Jews) was angered at the forgiveness that his father extended to the younger son (symbolic of the Gentiles) who had squandered his inheritance through riotous living.

On another level, we can interpret the marketplace in this parable as the world, and we can interpret the "hiring" or appointing of certain individuals in the marketplace to go and work in the landowner's vineyard as symbolic of the effectual calling of God of an individual to faith in Christ (John 6:44). There can be no fruitful labor in the kingdom of God by those who are not believers (Matthew 7:15-20, John 15:1-8, others).

Another lesson that can be gleaned from this parable is that the calling of an individual to faith in Christ can occur at any time in their life, even very late in life, at the "eleventh hour" (Matthew 20:6). God calls individuals to faith in His Son in His time and according to His plan and purpose for their lives, and they will all provide fruitful labor in His vineyard, as He assigns for each of them.

26.

Certainly Not Cast Out

Jesus taught about the eternal certainty and security of our salvation in several passages. Beginning in John 6, He said:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and *the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out*. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. *This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day. *For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*” (John 6:37-40, emphasis added).

This passage speaks very clearly to the issue of the eternal security of the believer. Jesus said that *all* of those who have been given to Him by the Father, or God’s elect, *will* in fact come to Him. Then Jesus said in this same verse that those who do come to Him will *certainly not be cast out*, and He said this with no mention of any added conditions whatsoever or any mention of their performance after they are saved.

Jesus emphasized the same point again in the following two verses when He said that He had come down from Heaven not to do His own will, but the will of His Father who had sent Him. Jesus then revealed that it is the will of His Father that He should lose *none* of those who had been given to Him, but He would raise them up at the last day. So here is the same teaching of the eternal security of the believer, given again in this same passage, in clear language.

In the final verse of this passage Jesus reiterates this same message of the eternal security of the believer yet a third time, when He said that *everyone* who

looks to Him and believes in Him *will* have eternal life together with Him in Heaven. Jesus did not say that some of those who look to Him and believe in Him will have eternal life, depending on what they may do after they are saved. However He did say clearly, and with no added conditions or any mention of a believer's performance after they are saved, that *everyone* who looks to Him and believes in Him *will* have eternal life; He *will* raise them up at the last day. So we see that *three times* in this passage of John 6:37-40, Jesus emphasized that our salvation in Him is an eternal certainty.

Going just a few verses further in John 6, Jesus said: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44). In the first part of this verse, Jesus taught that no one is able to come to Him unless the Father draws them, and then in the second part of the verse, Jesus taught that those individuals whom God does draw *will* be raised up at the last day. Again, in John 6:44, we see no mention of an individual's actions or performance being necessary in order to obtain their salvation or maintain their salvation.

Jesus stated clearly in John 6:44 that those whom God draws, or calls, will be raised up at the last day, meaning that all who receive God's calling to faith in His Son will be saved, and none will be lost. So we have in John 6:44 the same message of the eternal certainty and security of our salvation that Jesus communicated in John 6:39.

In John 10, Jesus again spoke of the eternal certainty and security of our salvation when He said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and *they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand*. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and *no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*. I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30, emphasis added).

Those whom Jesus referred to as His sheep are those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37). These are the elect, whom God foreknew from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5) and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). God's elect have, or will at some point in time, be called by Him to faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and they will all manifest this calling by their belief in Christ and their love for other believers.

Jesus said clearly that He has given His sheep eternal life, and they will *never* perish. Jesus did not say that they will never perish unless they disobey to

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some degree after they are saved, but He did say succinctly, and without any added conditions whatsoever, that they will *never* perish.

Jesus concluded His teaching in John 10:27-30 by saying that *no one* is able to snatch one of His sheep out of His hand, or His Father's hand. *Neither we ourselves, by our own actions or failings, nor any other created being, is able to snatch any believer out of God's hand.* Jesus is coming for His sheep, every one of them, and none of them will be lost (Matthew 18:10-14).

27.

The Trial and Restoration of the Apostle Peter

The biblical account of the trial and restoration of the Apostle Peter is a prime example of Jesus' teaching about the eternal certainty and security of the salvation of all those whom the Father has given to Him (John 6:37-40). God allowed Peter's trial and failure, and He saw to it that they were recorded in the Scriptures so that all believers who read of these events would be comforted and encouraged by knowing that He will never abandon us.

Just as Satan was given power to wreak havoc in Job's life for a time, so also Satan wanted to try Peter to see if he could make him deny the Lord. Jesus said to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus knew that such trials are a part of God's will for the lives of His people. Therefore, He encouraged Peter by telling him that He had already prayed for him, that his faith would not fail. Peter replied to Jesus saying that he was ready to go to prison and even to death with Him. Jesus then answered Peter: "...I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:34).

At this point in the Gospel account, Jesus knew that He would soon face death by crucifixion, and He went up to the Mount of Olives where He prayed to His Father. He knew that all things were possible for God, and He asked that the cup He was about to drink might be taken away from Him. Nevertheless, He prayed that His Father's will would be done and not His own.

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Soon afterward, Judas appeared with a crowd that included the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, and he betrayed Jesus to the soldiers with a kiss. Knowing now which one was Jesus, the guards proceeded to arrest Him.

Peter then drew his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus put a stop to this violent response, and then He touched the servant's ear and healed him. Jesus responded to the crowd saying that every day He was with them in the temple courts, and no one laid a hand on him, and then He told them that this was their hour, the hour when darkness would reign.

The answer to Jesus' prayer that His cup of suffering might be taken away from Him was now moving forward rapidly with events. It was indeed God's will that He die on Calvary's cross to become the propitiation for the sins of men, obtaining forgiveness and reconciliation to God for all of those whom the Father has given to Him.

One account of Peter's denial of Jesus is given in Luke 22:54-62. After the guards arrested Jesus, they took Him to the house of the high priest. Peter followed them at a distance. Those in the crowd who were there when Jesus was arrested sat down in front of a fire in the courtyard to warm themselves, and Peter also sat down with them. A servant girl noticed Peter by the light of the fire, and she said that he was with Jesus at the time of His arrest. Peter denied this charge and claimed that he did not know Jesus.

A short time later someone else recognized Peter and said that he was one of Jesus' disciples, and again Peter denied it. Then an hour or so later another man also noticed Peter and said that surely he was with Jesus, because he was recognized by his speech as being a Galilean. Peter emphatically denied this charge also, and as he was voicing his third denial of Jesus, he heard the rooster crow. At this point Peter remembered that Jesus had told him before the rooster crowed that day, he would deny Him three times. Realizing what he had done, Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

It comes as no surprise that Peter's denial happened exactly as Jesus had predicted. Peter wept bitterly over his denial and abandonment of his Lord and Savior. This failure must have shaken his faith severely, because he was with Jesus when He said: "... everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will

confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8-9).

Peter had his chance to stand with Jesus in His time of trial, and to do exactly as he said he would do, which was to go with Jesus to prison and to death if need be (Luke 22:33). But when his testing came, and it was time for him to do just that, he failed miserably. Not only did he flee when the guards arrested Jesus (Mark 14:50), but he later denied that he even knew Jesus at all. Not only did he deny that he knew Jesus once, but he denied Him three times. Any illusions that Peter had of his own great love, loyalty, and devotion to the Lord, which he had so confidently expressed just a short time earlier, had now been completely shattered.

Soon after Peter abandoned Jesus and denied that he knew Him, Jesus was crucified according to the sovereign plan and purpose of God, by which He became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21). Afterwards, His disciples went into hiding for fear that the Jews would come after them as well.

Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after He was crucified. Soon after His resurrection He appeared to Mary Magdalene, and later He also appeared to the disciples as they were meeting inside a locked room.

After these events, Jesus again appeared to several of His disciples by the sea. Peter and some of the others had decided to go fishing. They fished all night but had caught nothing. It was early in the morning when Jesus appeared to them standing on the shore, but the disciples did not at first realize that it was Jesus. This event is recorded in John 21:5-9.

Jesus called out to them, asking them if they had caught any fish. They answered, saying that they had not. Then Jesus told them to throw their net over the right side of the boat, and they would find a catch there. They did as they were told and caught so many fish that they were not able to haul in the net.

At this point, John recognized that it was Jesus who had called to them, and he told Peter. Peter then immediately wrapped an outer garment around himself, and he jumped into the water to swim to Jesus ahead of the others, who followed in the boat towing the net full of fish. When they all got to shore, they saw a fire of glowing coals with fish cooking over it, and bread also.

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We can imagine that Peter's awareness of his abandonment and denial of Jesus was still painfully present in his mind at the time they were eating breakfast together on the shore. After they had eaten, Jesus reaffirmed His love for Peter in the presence of them all. Jesus knew that Peter needed to be reassured, and He came back for him and made sure Peter knew, that despite his failings, he was still loved and accepted by Him. The account of Jesus' reaffirmation of Peter is given a few verses later in the Gospel of John:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. (John 21:15-17).

It is interesting to note the two Greek words from the original text that are translated as the English word "love" in this passage of John 21. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. The first two times Jesus asked Peter if he truly loved Him (verses 15 and 16). The Greek word that was used in Jesus' first two questions to Peter was the word "agapao", which is a supreme, unconditional type of love.

Peter answered Jesus these two times saying, "Yes, Lord...you know that I love you." However, the Greek word for "love" that was used in Peter's answer to Jesus was not "agapao", but it was "phileo", which is a lesser type of love, not an unconditional, supreme love, but only a type of brotherly love or fondness. Peter knew that his earlier failure had plainly demonstrated that the love he had for Jesus did not rise to the level of a supreme, unconditional love, and he had to admit this in his answer to the Lord.

The third time that Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him (verse 17), the word "phileo" is now used in His question to Peter, according to the original Greek text, and again, "phileo" means a brotherly love or fondness for someone. Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him this third time, as if Jesus were asking if he even loved Him as a brother.

Peter replied to Jesus again saying that he did love Him, and that He as Lord knew all things. Peter knew that the love he had shown for Jesus in his recent

abandonment and denial of Him made it clear that his love for Him did not rise to the standard of an unconditional love, but something less, a love which was only a brotherly love or fondness.

It is also interesting to note Jesus' words to Peter in John 21:18-19. Before Peter abandoned Jesus and then denied that he even knew Him, he boasted that he was ready to lay down his life for Him (John 13:37). As we know, just a short time later Peter had his chance to do that, but he forsook Jesus and fled along with the other disciples. However, as Jesus came back to reaffirm His love for Peter, He told him that indeed the time was coming when he *would* lay down his life for Him.

The devotion unto death that Peter had failed to demonstrate in his own strength, his God would work to bring about in his life, in His time. Jesus said to Peter: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:18-19). These words were understood to mean that Peter also would be crucified, laying down his life for the cause of Christ.

Even though when tested, Peter had failed in his devotion to Jesus so miserably, his failure demonstrates the supreme and unconditional love that our Lord has for all who come to Him, a love that never lets us go of us regardless of our failings. Peter was not banished from the Lord because of his failings, as grievous as they were; rather Jesus came back to reassure Peter of His love for him. Despite his failings, Jesus commanded Peter three times to feed His sheep. Just as He had done at the Sea of Galilee when He first called Peter and his brother Andrew to follow Him (Matthew 4:19), so also at this time as He came back to reaffirm His love for Peter, Jesus once again commanded him, this time with emphasis, saying: "Follow me!" (John 21:19).

This supreme and unconditional love that Jesus showed for Peter demonstrates the love that God has for all of us who come to faith in Christ. It is a love by which God, through no merit or worthiness of our own, chose us before the creation of the world to believe on His Son Jesus Christ and to obtain salvation and reconciliation, the forgiveness of our sins, through Jesus' blood shed on Calvary's cross (Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 Peter 1:1-2).

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When Jesus predicted Peter's denial of Him, He told Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, **when** once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32, emphasis added).

Notice that Jesus did not say to Peter "if" you return to Me, or "if" you persevere in your faith, but He said to Peter: "**when** once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (emphasis added). Peter's perseverance in his faith and ultimate victory were assured, just as ours is also as believers when we face our times of trial. It is God who saves us, and it is God who preserves us (John 6:37-40, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Romans 8:38, 1 Peter 1:4-5).

Jesus faced his time of testing in the desert, and He did not fail (Matthew 4:1-11). Peter faced his time of testing, and almost immediately he failed, and he failed abysmally. Let us think about whom this is who failed so quickly and so miserably. This is one of only twelve apostles, one who was privileged to author two books in the Bible, and one who was martyred for the cause of Christ. Surely the Apostle Peter is one of the greatest saints in all of history.

Peter's trial, failure, and restoration is recorded in the Bible to encourage us and to demonstrate the unconditional love that God has for us as believers. God's love for His people never fails and never changes. Just as Jesus restored Peter, and with that restoration He bestowed upon Peter the privilege of serving Him in such a great way, so also will our loving God continue the good work that He has begun in us, regardless of our failures. The Apostle Paul assured us when he wrote: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6).

Jesus is not only the "Author" of our faith, but He also "perfects" or "finishes" our faith, carrying it through to its completion (Hebrews 12:2). Our salvation depends upon Him from beginning to end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Revelation 1:8, 17). Though our love and devotion for Him are found lacking, and though we fail Him miserably during some time of trial in our lives, He will not fail. ***Jesus is coming for His sheep, every one of them, and none of them will be lost.*** (Matthew 18:10-14, John 6:39).

If we should find ourselves in the company of the Apostle Peter, who failed the Lord so miserably during a time of trial and testing in his life, then let us take comfort in knowing that our Lord and Savior is coming back for us as well, just as He came back for Peter. We also will be restored to fellowship with Him and

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service for Him. This is the heritage and the blessing that we have been given through the incomprehensible grace, forgiveness, and love that our God has for all of us who believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.

28.

The End Times (The Olivet Discourse)

In Matthew 24-25, Jesus teaches on the end times in what is known as the Olivet Discourse. Mark records his version of the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13. Luke records his version in Luke 21.

Matthew 24 begins with Jesus walking away from the temple in Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. He had just issued a scathing rebuke to the teachers of the law (scribes) and the Pharisees, as we can see from Matthew 23. At this point His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to the temple and its buildings.

Jesus responded to them saying: “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” (Matthew 24:2). Jesus here prophesied about the destruction of the temple, which did in fact occur around 40 years later in 70 A.D when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple buildings.

In response to His prediction, some of His disciples came to him privately a short time later as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives with basically two questions: “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Apparently, the disciples believed that an event as dramatic as the destruction of the temple must surely mean that Jesus’ coming and the end of all things would follow shortly thereafter. Jesus knew that His disciples were associating both events as occurring at around the same time, and He corrected their misconception in His answer to their questions, which began in verse 4 with the words, “See to it that no one misleads you.”

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In the narrative that follows, Jesus gives His answer to the disciples' questions. However, His answer to what is essentially two questions is not clearly delineated but interwoven together in one narrative.

In verses 5-14 Jesus discusses the events that must take place before the end comes. These events are the signs of His coming about which the disciples asked in verse 3. These signs included: many who would come in His name claiming to be Christ, wars and rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes. Jesus also said that His people would be persecuted and put to death, and that many who claimed to be Christians would turn away from the faith. False prophets would also appear and deceive many people. He also said that because of the increase of wickedness at that time, the love of many would grow cold, but those who stood firm in their faith to the end would be saved. In verse 14, He said that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end would come.

In verses 15-22, Jesus addresses the destruction of the temple about which His disciples asked, but He does not answer their question as to when this would occur. Beginning in verse 15, we read: "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15-16).

The reference to the "abomination of desolation...standing in the holy place" which Jesus spoke about can be found in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. Some say that the first fulfillment of this prophecy was in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes erected an altar to the pagan god Zeus on the sacred altar in the temple of Jerusalem. Jesus' reference to a similar event occurring again as a sign of the imminent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem indicates that there was to be yet another fulfillment of Daniel's prophesy. From reading Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, we can assume that there will also be a third fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy which will occur in the end times before Jesus' second coming.

In verse 21, Jesus spoke of the "great tribulation" that would occur around the time the temple was destroyed, and then the narrative turns again to discussion of the signs of the end times. From this apparently seamless integration of these two events (the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus coming and the end of the age), we could interpret the destruction of Jerusalem and the great tribulation of that time as being a symbolic figure and type of the destruction of the

world which will occur at Jesus' coming and the great tribulation that will occur in those times.

Beginning in verse 23, Jesus' reveals more of the signs that will precede His coming. He warns of false Christs and false prophets that will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. Then beginning in verse 29 we read:

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” (Matthew 24:29-31).

Regarding the signs that will precede His coming and the end of the age, Jesus told His disciples to learn a lesson from the fig tree: when its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, then summer is near. In the same way, when all these signs manifest themselves, then His coming is near. (Verses 32-33).

Beginning in verse 34 we read: “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (Matthew 24:34-35).

There has been much discussion over the centuries about the meaning of the Greek word that is translated as “generation” in verse 34. The word from the original Greek text is the word “genea”, which can refer to a generation, or the group of people alive during a certain span of time of about 30-40 years. It can also refer to the successive members of a particular genealogy or race. It could also refer to a group of people who are very much like each other in their character and manner of living. From the context of Matthew 24, we can assume that the word that is translated as “generation” in verse 34 refers either to the Jewish race or to all believers collectively, those who are the “chosen race”. (Consider 1 Peter 2:9).

As the narrative continues in verse 36, Jesus said that no one knows the day or the hour of His coming. The angels in Heaven did not know, nor did He know, but only the Father knows. Some things in the Bible are difficult to understand, if not out of reach for men. God revealing Himself to men in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is one example. When we consider the fact the Jesus Himself

is God (John 1:1, 14) manifested to man in human form, we may struggle with the fact that being God, He did not know when He would return.

What we can know from the Scriptures is that Jesus “had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17). Being like His brethren in every way during His time on the earth, He too had to walk by faith, not knowing all things as His Father knew, but walking in obedience and trusting God, as we also are called to do as believers, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

We previously mentioned the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as being a type or figure of the destruction of the world that would occur at Jesus’ second coming. Jesus uses another type and figure of things that will happen at His coming when He referenced the destruction of the world in Noah’s time, as we read beginning in verse 37:

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Matthew 24:37-39).

As the narrative continues in verse 40, Jesus again spoke of the time when the angels would gather His elect from the four winds (verse 31), when He said:

“Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ***Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*** But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ***For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.***” (Matthew 24:40-44, emphasis added).

As Jesus is nearing the end of His teaching in Matthew 24, He emphasizes that the day of His coming will be at a time when we are not expecting it, like a thief who comes unexpectedly in the night. Therefore, He exhorted us to “be on the alert”, to watch and “be ready”.

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Peter also taught about the day of the Lord coming unexpectedly, like a thief. Peter wrote: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10). Knowing that this day is coming, Peter exhorted us to live holy and godly lives as we wait for Jesus’ return (2 Peter 3:11-14).

As He concludes His teaching in Matthew 24, Jesus contrasts two different groups of people who are symbolized by two different servants, as we see from verses 45-51. The faithful and wise servant will heed the words of his Master. This servant symbolizes all those who have been called to faith in Christ and look for His appearing. These will be found watching for their Master’s return, obediently going about the tasks that have been assigned for them.

In contrast to the faithful and wise servant, the wicked servant will not heed the Master’s words. This servant symbolizes all those who are unregenerate. These will not be found to be faithfully watching for their Master’s return, but when He comes unexpectedly, as He will, they will be found to be living a life characterized by sinful behavior.

In conclusion, as we consider Jesus’ teaching on the end times given to us in the Olivet Discourse, our focus should be on what we are to do in response to the fact that He will, at some point in time unknown to any of us, come back to gather His elect from the four winds and from one end of the heavens to the other. As we watch and wait for Jesus’ return, we should all diligently obey everything that He has revealed to us through His Word, and we should obediently be about the particular tasks that God assigned for each of us when He called us to faith in His Son.

29.

The Ten Virgins

In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus gave the parable of the ten virgins. The parable follows immediately after Jesus' teaching on the end times in Matthew 24, and it is a continuation of His teaching of what it will be like when He returns.

The parable begins with the words: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent." (Matthew 25:1-2). In Jewish customs of that time, the virgins, or bridesmaids, were responsible for preparing the bride to meet the bridegroom. The bridegroom in this parable signifies Jesus Himself.

As the parable continues, we see that the five foolish virgins took their lamps with them, but they took no oil for their lamps. The prudent (or wise) virgins, on the other hand, took not only their lamps, but they also took oil in jars. Here the lamps signify a profession of faith in Christ. The oil signifies a genuine faith in Christ, which all true believers possess as a result of God's sovereign choice and His calling of His elect to faith in His Son.

While the ten virgins with their lamps signify "professing" believers, we should keep in mind that not all who profess faith in Christ are genuine believers; some are in fact unregenerate. In the parable of the sower, these professing but unregenerate individuals are characterized as rocky soil. The seed of the word of God fell on this rocky "soil", and immediately it sprang up, signifying an apparent conversion, but when the sun came up, these plants withered, "because they had no root", as Jesus said. (Matthew 13:6, 20-21).

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As Jesus continues His teaching in verse 5, we see that the bridegroom was a long time in coming, and both the wise and the foolish virgins got drowsy and fell asleep. This drowsiness and falling asleep signifies weariness or complacency, which can come upon even genuine believers at times. (Consider Matthew 26:40-41).

Then we read: “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’” (Matthew 25:6). The shout announcing the coming of the bridegroom can signify the second coming of Christ for those who are alive on the earth at His coming, or it could signify the day of our physical death.

With the shout announcing the coming of the bridegroom, all the virgins awoke and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones then said to the wise: “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” (Matthew 25:8). The wise then answered them saying no, because there might not be enough for both of them. Instead, the wise virgins told the foolish to go to those who sell oil and buy some for themselves.

Salvation, which comes about only by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), cannot be imparted from a believer to an unbeliever. It comes about only as result of God’s calling to faith of His elect (John 6:37, 44, 65), whom He chose before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Although the wise could not give the foolish some of the grace that God had given to them when He called them to faith in His Son, they could advise them on how this “oil” could be obtained, and all of us as believers can do the same when we share our faith with others. The results, however, are entirely up to God, as we learned in the parable of the sower. He is the one who makes the “good soil” differ from the other soils (1 Corinthians 4:7), and the seed of the word of God bears fruit only when it falls on the good soil (Matthew 13:8, 23).

While the foolish virgins were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with the Him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Later, the other virgins came imploring the bridegroom, saying: “Lord, lord, open up for us”. However, He answered them saying: “Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” At this point Jesus concludes the parable with the main lesson He was communicating: “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:11-13).

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Jesus' admonition to keep watch and be on the alert in this parable was the same message He communicated earlier in the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24:42-44. It is also the same message that He communicated when He contrasted the faithful and wise servant with the wicked servant in Matthew 24:45-51.

Those who do not possess a genuine faith in Christ will not be ready when the bridegroom comes. Though they profess faith in Christ, and their lamps may seem to shine before men, their lamps will go out when the time comes to meet the bridegroom, and they will not be allowed into the wedding feast.

Jesus' use of the analogy of a wedding feast here in the parable of the ten virgins may bring to mind His teaching in the parable of the wedding feast recorded in Matthew 22:1-14. In this parable, the king gave a wedding feast for his son. However, when the king came to see the wedding guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He commanded that this man be bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness, where there would be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13).

The foolish virgins, who had no oil to keep their lamps burning, and the man who had no wedding clothes, were both excluded from the wedding feast. Both the oil and the wedding clothes signify a genuine faith in Christ, without which no one may enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus' teaching here in the parable of the ten virgins may also call to mind His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, where He warned us to watch out for false prophets (Matthew 7:15-23). These false prophets came "in sheep's clothing", claiming to be Christians, but Jesus said that inwardly they were ravenous wolves. He also characterized them as bad trees that could bear only bad fruit. In the end, although they acknowledged Him as Lord and claimed to have done many good works in His name, Jesus would tell them that He never knew them, and He would command them to depart from Him. (Matthew 7:21-23, 25:11-12).

The main point that Jesus communicated in the parable of the ten virgins is the same point that He communicated earlier in the Olivet Discourse, which is emphasized as He concludes the parable: "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:13, 24:42-44).

Jesus emphasized to everyone who heard His words to be on the alert and to keep watching for His return (Mark 13:37). Those of us who have been brought to

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faith in Christ will be ready when the bridegroom comes for us (Matthew 25:6). By God's sovereign choice, by His grace, and not because of any works of our own, we were called to faith in His Son. We are those who represent the "good soil" in the parable of the sower. The seed of the word of God fell in our hearing and bore fruit. We are those who have been given eyes to see, and ears to hear and understand (Matthew 13:8-9, 16, 23), whereas all the others have not (Matthew 13:11).

For those of us who possess a genuine faith in Christ, to watch and be on the alert means that we are to obediently be about the tasks that God has assigned for each of us when He called us to faith in His Son. Using the spiritual gifts and resources that God gave to us, we are to minister to the body of Christ (Matthew 24:45-46), and we are also to work to bring in His harvest, as He provides the opportunities for each of us (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to always be laboring to build upon the foundation of our faith with the gold, silver, and precious stones of works done in obedience to the word of God (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

30.

The Great Commission

In Matthew 28 we find what is known as the Great Commission, where Jesus commanded His disciples to go into the all the world and make disciples of all nations. Beginning in verse 16, we read:

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

Jesus commanded the eleven apostles to preach the Gospel, making disciples of all nations, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentile races as well. This Gospel is the Good News of God’s provision for the forgiveness of man’s sins, which comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. His blood shed on Calvary’s cross was the atoning sacrifice that purchased reconciliation to God for everyone who believes in Him (Revelation 5:9). Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations applied not only to the eleven apostles whom He addressed at that time; it applies to all believers.

As we are considering sharing our faith with others, we should also consider another teaching that Jesus gave to us in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6).

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To be obedient to our Lord's command here, we are going to have to make some assessments as to where the "dogs" and "swine" are, and where they are not. This means that we should not approach just anyone to share our faith, because if we do, we may be approaching one of those whom Jesus referred to as dogs or swine, and they may indeed "turn and tear us to pieces". Instead, let us look for an open door of opportunity to share our faith as God provides such opportunities.

We should also understand when sharing our faith that the Bible teaches us that God has mercy on some, and the rest He hardens (Romans 9:18). Unregenerate man does not have the capacity or ability to receive the Gospel message unless it has been granted to Him by God to do so (John 6:65). The ones to whom God shows mercy are effectually called to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, through the hearing of the Gospel message (John 6:44). As a result of God's sovereign choice and His calling, these will all come to Christ (John 6:37). The others, whom the Scripture says that God hardens, are left in their sins and have no hope of understanding or receiving the Gospel message (Matthew 13:11, John 8:42-47, 10:22-26).

We should not volunteer to share our faith with anyone who is a member of a pagan faith, unless they show a sincere interest in the Gospel message, and because they are aware that we are Christians, they approach us with questions about our faith. Those who display an open hostility toward the Gospel we should avoid, and not give them what is sacred or cast our pearls to them, while at the same time understanding that they may not always remain hostile to the Gospel of Christ. We should also avoid sharing our faith with those who are atheistic and display a callous indifference to the Gospel message.

This is not to say that someone who is indifferent or even overtly hostile toward the Gospel will not at some point in the future come to faith in Christ. A prime example of such a person is Saul of Tarsus, who would later become the Apostle Paul. Saul was travelling on the Damascus Road, on his way to continue his efforts to persecute the Church, when he was struck down off his horse and called to faith in Christ apart from any decision of his own, even while he was still intent on opposing the Gospel (Acts 9:1-9, Acts 22:1-10). Sometimes those who are openly hostile toward the Gospel message are indeed numbered among God's elect. In His time, God will call these individuals to faith in His Son, just as was the case with the Saul.

Peter exhorted each of us as believers when he wrote: "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks

you to give an account for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15). While we should always be ready to share our faith, giving an answer to those who see the hope that we have, we should never worry about our presentation or about how awkward we may be in sharing with them. Our own eloquence, presentation skills, knowledge of the Scriptures, or persuasiveness has nothing at all to do with whether someone will be saved.

If those with whom we are sharing our faith are numbered among God’s elect, they will be brought to faith in Christ in God’s time. If we have shared our faith with them, then we have been given the privilege of being used by God to help bring the Gospel message to them, and we will have helped to fulfill the Great Commission.

Whether those with whom we share our faith ever come to believe in Christ or not, the sharing of our faith brings the outward call of the Gospel message to those who hear it. The results, however, are entirely up to God, and His word, as it has gone out through us as we share our faith, will not return to Him void but will accomplish the purpose which He intends (Isaiah 55:10-11). In sharing our faith, not giving what is sacred to dogs or casting our pearls before swine as Jesus said in Matthew 7:6, but as God opens doors of opportunity, we are obedient to the Great Commission.

Therefore, when we share our faith with others, the “seed” of the Gospel message that we share with them will fall upon different types of “soil”, so to speak, as we learned in the parable of the sower. However, the only place where individuals will in God’s time be brought to faith in Christ is where the seed falls upon the “good soil”, which is to say where the seed of the Gospel message is proclaimed in the hearing of God’s elect.

Jesus said to His disciples: “...The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38). With the Great Commission, Jesus commanded all of us who are brought to faith in Him to be involved as workers in His harvest field, sharing our faith. We can share our faith in different ways, and at times we may not even be aware that through our actions which others observe, we are bearing witness to our faith in Christ.

We can share our faith one-on-one with someone who shows an interest, someone who may perceive something different and good in us. These, knowing that we are Christians, may want to know more about our faith in Christ.

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We can share our faith with others when they see us “taking the high road” so to speak. When unbelievers who know us to be Christians see this, they may wonder if it is not our faith in Christ that causes us to act differently, doing what many would consider to be “the right thing to do”, when doing something else would be much more expedient and personally profitable.

We can also be obedient to the Great Commission by financially supporting those who preach and teach the Gospel message of the forgiveness of sins and salvation through Jesus Christ and through Him alone. As Jesus also said elsewhere: “...the worker deserves his wages.” (Luke 10:7)

Even though the Gospel is proclaimed widely in the world today, and many hear the message outwardly, only God’s elect will be effectually drawn to faith in Christ (John 6:37, 44, Romans 8:29-30, others). These elect, these chosen by God, are symbolized by the “good soil” in Jesus’ parable of the sower. When the seed of the word of God is sown in their hearts, these and only these are the ones who are able to hear the word and understand it (Matthew 13:8, 23). Having received God’s call to faith in Christ, we will always manifest our genuine faith by good works done in obedience to the word of God, and these good works are themselves fruit born to His glory (John 15:8).

God is going to save those whom He has foreknown from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11), and there is nothing anyone can do to change that (Romans 8:29-30). Jesus has, with His command to go and make disciples of all nations, given to us as His people the privilege of working in His harvest field to bring the Gospel message to His elect, who will themselves as we have done before them, hear the word, understand it, and yield a harvest, bearing spiritual fruit to the glory of God our Father.

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