

fail to decide rightly about Him, automatically affects one's ability to evaluate the evidence on all other significant questions. While it may be admitted that many wise and good men of earth have both studied the evidence about Jesus and have rejected Him as supreme Lord, still the Master Himself is here declaring that such men damn themselves, since the imperious nature of His double affirmation (10:32, 33) presumes that the evidence He has given to lead to a right decision has been both sufficient and clear. The problem lies then not in the nature of the evidence but in the moral makeup of the men whose intellectual bias did not permit them to evaluate properly the evidence or surrender their will to Him. The Judge here expresses His opinion on the "wisdom" and "goodness" of those men, who, whether ignorant, deceived or conceited, reject Him.

But does this confession of Jesus mean merely to acknowledge adherence to certain propositions regarding His identity, position and consequent authority? At least this, (Ro. 10:9, 10; Ac. 2:36; I Jn. 2:22, 23; 4:2, 3, 15; 2 Jn. 7, 9) But it is more, for how can one confess the absolute lordship of Jesus while at the same time ignoring the plain import of any command, declaration, promise or warning He gives? (Lk. 6:46) He is then to be confessed:

1. by our recognizing and responding to His position and function;
2. by our recognition of His authorized representatives (Mt. 10:40);
3. by our recognition of His message (Lk. 9:26; Jn. 12:47-50);
4. by our recognition of Him in His people (Mt. 25:40, 45; Ac. 9:4, 5);
5. by our joyful admission that we personally are committed to Him because we need, trust and love Him and try to serve Him as Lord of all lords;
6. by that obvious consistency between our profession of adherence to Him and our personal morality that truly and deeply affects all our attitudes and actions.

There may be other expressions of our confession, but these are sufficient to suggest that they all have importance because of what we think about Jesus. We will be willing to die before relenting on any proposition regarding Jesus' person. Witness the Virgin-birth controversy and the vigorous rejection of the modern Arianism of the Jehovah's Witnesses who, like Arius of Alexandria (c. 313 A.D.), deny the identity of Jesus with Jehovah God. We spend years of

Careful research, examining the authenticity, reliability and integrity of the documents of the Apostles, just because our confession of Christ depends for its content upon the dictates of those books. Witness the several hundred-years war that has raged in the field of biblical criticism. Further, our confession of Jesus drives us to "lay down our lives for the brethren," since, in confessing Him, we confess those who belong to Him.

But someone might object that, contextually, Jesus has in mind most probably a hostile situation in which the disciple is called upon to admit (or deny) his discipleship to Jesus on pain of death. But it is most significant that Jesus just ordered, "Confess me before men," without specifying which men, whether hostile, indifferent or friendly. Even otherwise friendly men (they might even be Christians!), who are themselves unwilling to pay the high costs of discipleship, can make it very difficult for the earnest disciple to confess his loyalty to Jesus in the little, but practical, business of everyday's living. They dampen his enthusiasm, lest his zeal expose their lack of it, when in reality their befouled conscience demands that they follow his good example. It may be even more difficult to remain morally alert and skillful in confessing Christ in some "Christian" environments than in those openly hostile. **Before men** only means "publicly" and reminds us of the earlier command to give Christ's message the widest possible coverage (10:26, 27, despite the ever-present menace of those who can kill the body. (10:28)) The only justification for the Church's existence is to "proclaim the wonderful deeds and moral excellence of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Pet. 2:9) This is the work of the Church, as Morgan put it (*Matthew*, 107):

The work to be done is not described in detail here, but it is inferentially seen. It is that of confessing Christ, before men. That is the Church's work. It is all-inclusive. When we have said that, we have said everything we can say about the Apostles, the evangelist, the prophet, the pastor and teacher, and the disciple and servant. Whatever our gift may be within the Church, or as a member of the Church, our work is to confess Christ before men. . . . By confession we are to reveal Him; to flash His glory, to make Him known. The Church of Jesus Christ is not constituted in order to discuss philosophies or indulge in speculations. It is created to confess Christ, and it never ought to rest for one moment until the last weary, sin-bound soul, in the

furthest region of the world, has heard His evangel, has beheld His glory.

This confession is not merely that initial commitment to Jesus made at the beginning of our discipleship nor merely that bold declaration stated at trials where life or death is riding with the answer. It is, rather, the normal way of life and work of every single disciple whereby he shows who his real Master is.

Before men is not to be construed as contrasting with "before the saints," as if Jesus meant, "before men of the world and not before the Church." Indeed, there is no command or consistent NT practice for a guide to confession exclusively before the assembly of the Church. It is, of course, reasonable and proper to declare oneself a believer in the presence of the rest of the Church, before expecting to be admitted to the group. And yet some Christians act as if only a confession before the church were here intended, and as if the public confession of faith they once made at a meeting of the Church exhausted all their responsibility in this regard. **Before men** means good men and bad, poor men and rich, ignorant and learned, Christians or not.

Before men, it is true, may well mean, and in the case of many Christians it has meant, to stand in formal trials as before councils, synagogues, governors and kings, and declare one's allegiance to the Son of God. (10:17, 18) In this sense, the Church has only one justification for getting into trouble with the law: for exalting Christ as King above Caesar and as Lawgiver above Moses or another religious tribunal or authority. But as the individual Christian stands alone before these earthly potentates, he must remember the wide disparity between the judges before whom he must give testimony. Feel the contrast: **before men . . . before my Father**; the temporary versus the eternal; the corruptible versus the gloriously incorruptible. It is a temptation to ask the obvious: who would exchange the approval of God for the applause of men? But lest we answer this too glibly, we need to see with greater clarity the difficulty of refusing *this* world that seems so much more real, because it is so much more immediate and tangible. As in verse 28, so here, Jesus reminds His people that, in reality, though they are physically standing before the judgment of infinitely feeble human judges whose ultimate jurisdiction halts at death, even though they may now have the relative ascendancy for the present, yet in such moments these same disciples are under the even more critical scrutiny of the unseen, living God, the Judge whose unlimited authority and power

execute a verdict of infinitely greater consequence! The Savior knows that this dilemma between life, peace and security with the approval of earth's enemies of the faith on the one hand, and life, peace and security in the judgment of God on the other, is capable of resolution only to the man who has already died to this world and all its relationships. (See on 10:34-39)

What is to be gained by confessing Christ? **Him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.** Since Jesus has made⁸¹ this clear beforehand, the disciple can have peace-bringing confidence throughout his life, since he need not fear the judgment. (Cf. I Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14; Ro. 10:9, 10; Heb. 3:6; 10:19-23, 35) While we actively confess Jesus Christ on earth, our prayers obtain a receptive hearing with God, for our Mediator through Whom we pray acknowledges that we are His, as our faithful confession testifies. (I Tim. 2:5, 6) There is the joy of sharing His suffering, since we see ourselves identified with the Lord Himself who has passed this moment of trial too. (Cf. I Pet. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; I Tim. 6:13) There is also that rejoicing that comes from an approving conscience that knows the gladness at having victoriously passed the critical moment of trial. (Cf. Ac. 4:23-31; 5:40-42) Sometimes during the days of fixing of the revelation, such bold confession was blessed with deliverance from danger. (Cf. Peter, Ac. 5:12-42; 12:1-17; Paul, 2 Tim. 4:16, 17) But not always, as the traditionally brutal deaths of these same Apostles testify. But the principle promise of Jesus here is that willing acknowledgement whereby Jesus endorses us as His disciples before the Father at the great accounting.

This is the fifth motive for enduring the dangers and hardships faced by disciples in this life. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a motivation higher than this: to accept all the pain and death in the service of Jesus Christ and know that the conclusion of life brings us, not judgment, but joy! To be personally introduced to God just because we did only what it was our duty to do is nothing short of incredible! (Cf. Lk. 17:10) How many of the little people of earth long for just a glimpse of the earth's great ones! How very few are permitted a private audience with the great, or are privileged to be their intimate friends. But not only to be presented to God but also permitted to live with Him for eternity: this is too good to be true! (Rev. 3:5; 20:11-15; 21:1-7) But how can God permit so great a reward for so insignificant a response on our part? Two reasons:

1. Confession of Christ, with all that this involves, is not insignificant, since this affects every facet of our lives and is the very life-direction of a disciple.
2. Our Father intends to save the saveable on the basis of His mercy. None can presume to earn His reward by putting Him in debt to them merely because they, sinners, confess Jesus. On the other hand, God's plan is to draw us to Him by exalting Jesus. So if we but confess Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father, He is more than willing to consider us as righteous even though we are not, because we are willing to trust Him. (Cf. Ro. 3:21-26; 4:1—5:1)

The question arises at this point whether Christians will actually have to stand trial on that great day. This hesitant doubt is suggested by passages as John 5:24, "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment (*krisin*), but has passed from death to life." (Cf. Jn. 5:29; 2 Pe. 2:9) But even these texts can be harmonized with the more numerous and more explicit passages which picture the believers as standing for judgment. (See passages below regarding the Judge.) They can be harmonized, since the believer accepts in Jesus Christ all the negative features of the final judgment: its revelation of the heinousness of sin, its condemnation and its sentence of punishment. These features were already accepted by him who understands the meaning of the cross, dies to himself in order to rise again to new life in the Beloved. (1 Pe. 2:24) From that moment on, all that the wicked may well fear at the hands of God, has become a matter of joyfully past history for the Christian. But it is this negative side of God's justice that is the import of the word "judgment" (*krisis*) in Jn. 5:24, 29 and 2 Pe. 2:9. The point is that every disciple will give account of himself before God and the criterion is settled by this text, since all other criteria mentioned elsewhere may be subsumed under these two words: **confess** (or *deny*) Christ before men.

But who will judge the world, God or Christ? The figure of Himself that Jesus presents here seems to be in the function of an Advocate. (Cf. I Jn. 2:1, 2) In the NT both figures are used: God is the Judge of all men (Heb. 12:23; I Co. 4:5; 5:13; Ro. 2:2, 3; 3:4-6; 11:33; 14:10; 1 Pe. 1:17; 2:23), but we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Co. 5:10; Jn. 5:22, 27; 9:39; Ac. 10:42; 1 Co. 4:4, 5; 2 Ti. 4:1). The harmony is to be found in the synthetic statement of Paul: God will judge the world by Jesus (Ac. 17:31; Ro. 2:16). What God does in the Person of Jesus, He may

be said to do for Himself. The marvelous revelation that results from these Scriptures is what the Lord actually affirms in Mt. 10:40, that he who deals with Jesus is dealing with Almighty God, and vice versa, he who would deal with God must answer to Jesus. This is the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity: only those who are recognized by Jesus are saved. Those who would climb in any other way are thieves and robbers! (Jn. 10:1-5, 7-18, 27-30; cf. Mt. 11:27; Jn. 14:6; 1 Ti. 2:5)

B. THE SUPREME DISGRACE FOR DISLOYALTY OR COWARDICE (10:33)

10:33 **But whosoever shall deny me before men . . .**

These ominous words spell out the necessary antithesis to the glorious promise for loyalty just described. Just a glance at the sentence structure of the two declarations reveals how perfectly balanced is each element. Again the declaration is directed to any disciple, not merely the Apostles, who might be tempted to deny Christ. While this warning is specifically intended for the timorous person who, for fear of men, fails to acknowledge his allegiance to Jesus, nevertheless its practical impact will be felt by all whose lives and convictions reflect their rejection of all that He is and offers. So to **deny me before men** means to repudiate or disown Christ in any of the various expressions whereby one who is a loving disciple should have confessed Him. (Cf. Lk. 12:8, 9; Ac. 3:13, 14; Jude 4; 2 Pe. 2:1; Tit. 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:22; 1 Ti. 5:8; 2 Ti. 2:11-13; Rev. 2:13; 3:8)

To **deny me before men** has a more ominous side than most recognize. Even amateur philosophers can become quite adept at pointing out the fatal flaw in others' philosophies, or views of life. This fatal flaw is but that noticeable inconsistency between the official or stated conclusions of a theory, and the way that the philosopher himself lives or practices that theory. Many Christians speak loudly about the supreme lordship of Jesus of Nazareth, thinking thereby to do Him honor by so fine and public a confession. But in unguarded moments they damn themselves intellectually in the eyes of worldlings who really know something of the will of Christ, and they are probably damning themselves eternally in the eyes of Jesus, when they fail to produce in words or deeds or attitudes what their confession demands of them at those critical moments where their real religion may be tested most surely. Listen, for

example, to the comments, feelings or answers a given Christian expresses to the following questions:

1. Do you think some people are expendable if they refuse to support your church program?
2. In this modern world is it possible to practice the "other cheek policy," when the individual Christian is insulted?
3. Who do you think is really well off in this world?
4. Is the possession of wealth a necessary danger to a man's Christianity?
5. Should whites (or Negroes, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or any other racial group being discussed) be permitted to take an active part in your church?

These deliberately loaded questions are samples of some of the ways in which a Christian unwittingly damns himself and denies Christ by allowing himself the liberty of opinion after Jesus has already spoken. Certainly there is grace and forgiveness for this, but it is important that the saint recognize that he is doing it that he might confess it, repent and be forgiven. Perhaps the esteem of the worldling may be regained too by that intellectual honesty and genuine humility that knows how to say "I have sinned, I have imperfectly represented Christ. You may judge me by Christ, but do not judge Christ by me." It is painfully obvious that I am not yet made perfect, but I thank you for pointing out my inconsistency to me!" A Christian's confession is not a long string of pretences with regard to himself, but the consistent admission to allegiance to Jesus. Hence, when he is overtaken in any fault, in humility he can emphasize once again his deep need for and dependence upon Jesus. A confession of this sort, growing as it does out of a practical denial, can be the most beautiful and most vividly remembered.

But why would men who have known and loved Jesus, men who have even been saved from death by His power, ever be driven to the point where they would actually refuse to admit any connection with Him? Ask Peter. (Cf. Mt. 26:30-35, 69-75; Mk. 14:26-31, 66-72; Lk. 22:31-34, 54-62; Jn. 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27) In our hours of deeper reflection and honesty have we not had to weep bitterly with him, because we were not prepared for the crisis brought on by some of our own fears?

1. Our fear of being hated by men (Mt. 10:21, 22);
2. Our fear of being reviled (Mt. 10:25)

3. Our fear of being persecuted or murdered (Mt. 10:23; 5:10-12);
4. Our fear of merely losing the good-will of the people upon whom our business, our profit, our advantages and ultimately our success in life are based. (Lk. 6:22; Jn. 9:22; 16:2)

These fears and more are the precise reason why Jesus has pounded so steadily throughout this discourse on the theme: "Do not be anxious . . . Have no fear of them . . . Do not fear those who kill the body!" He knows that the fundamental instinct of self-preservation will be particularly strong in such crises. Yet even the most fundamental of human drives must never be permitted to loom larger than one's commitment to his God! Some disciples would certainly be tempted to prudence or compromise, when, in reality, this would mean a practical denial of their commitment to Him. All of the rationalizations that could be offered do not change the fact that those who make them are deceiving themselves. They but hide from themselves the real motive for their cowardice. The Master foresees and forestalls this by shouting the warning: "If to save your neck, save face, save your business, save your family, you deny your relation to me, you will lose your soul!"

Him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

The consequences of one's denial of Jesus, when properly evaluated, are, as Lenski exclaims, "terrible beyond all description!" And not all of the consequences are future:

1. The nagging awareness that the former disciple has failed under fire, that he has dishonored his Lord, is something not easily shaken off. The corrosive power of unrelieved guilt is incalculable. And Jesus' advance notice of how it will go with such a person at the judgment is deliberately calculated to produce this guilt, in the hope of hereby producing repentance. (2 Co. 7:8-11)
2. The result of a guilty conscience is a useless life, since the individual, who has once known Jesus Christ and faced the demands made upon his mind by the evidences of His Lordship, cannot find ultimate joy or contentment in lesser things. As a result he wanders from this to that, restlessly seeking some consuming passion to take the place of that Lord whom he has removed from the center of his existence. And, whether he admits, or even feels, the uselessness of his life thus lived, all the pseudo-gods he has

sought to serve prove worse than useless to help him when he stands before the living God.

3. For the man who dies in this condition, his last hours can be nothing but terrifying, since he must know that he is about to face the only Lawyer who could have pleaded his case (I Jn. 2:1, 2), but has now been raised to the bench to become his Judge (2 Co. 5:10). The sworn word of that Magistrate is: "*I will deny him!*" (Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26)

In short, from the moment of the denial, if unrepaired by repentance and vigorous confession, only a sinister future awaits this hopeless wretch. Oh my soul, can I grasp the horror, the pain and the regret of such a horrible eventuality? Can that proper fear of the Lord grip me so fast that all the menaces of men seem like the harmless barking of chained dogs?

Before my Father who is in heaven. All that has been said before about a holy God who wreaks vengeance upon impenitent sinners, and especially upon renegade disciples, is now felt in its full force. (See on 10:28) He who "falls into the hands of the living God" does so because of his failure to confess Jesus! Nothing is hidden that shall not be revealed!" (10:26) Denial of Jesus can be hidden for some time on earth, but it too will be unmercifully exposed with a finality that will last for eternity. Not only will Jesus deny the coward, the fearful and unbelieving **before the Father**, but also "before the angels of God." (Lk. 12:9) This suggests that, should even the slightest denial of Christ escape the notice of these ministering servants who labor continually on behalf of the saints, Jesus will expose even this. (Cf. Heb. 1:14; Mt. 18:11; Rev. 19:9, 10) Thus will God be fully vindicated in His judgment.

Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 403) indicated several practical ways men often deny Christ:

1. We may deny Him with our *words* . . . (Such a person) did not propose to allow his Christianity to interfere with the society he kept and the pleasures he loved. Sometimes we say to other people, practically in so many words, that we are Church members, but not to worry about it too much; that we have no intention of being different; that we are prepared to take our full share in all the pleasures of the world; and that we do not expect people to take any special trouble to respect any vague principles that we may have.
2. We can deny Him by our *silence* . . . (when there was) the opportunity to speak some word for Christ, to utter some

protest against evil, to take some stand, to show what side we are on. Again and again on such occasions it is easier to keep silence than to speak. But such silence is in itself a denial of Jesus Christ.

3. We can deny Him by our *actions*. We can live in such a way that our life is a continuous denial of the faith which in words we profess. He who has given his allegiance to the gospel of purity may be guilty of all kinds of petty dishonesties and breaches of strict honor. He who has undertaken to follow the Master who bade him take up a cross can live a life that is dominated by attention to his own ease and comfort. He who has entered the service of Him who Himself forgave and bade His followers to forgive can live a life of bitterness and resentment and variance with his fellow-men. He whose eyes are meant to be on that Christ who died for love of men can live a life in which the idea of Christian service and Christian charity and Christian generosity are conspicuous by their absence.

Our General Himself has come up through the ranks, has stood Himself precisely where He expects His troops to stand. (I Ti. 6:13; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-9) So He is not requiring of His men one thing more than what He Himself has done. The Christian, when standing trial for his faith and adherence to Jesus in a thousand ways across the years, can take courage and remain confident, since he knows, "My Lord has stood here before!"

C. THE INEVITABLE ENMITIES INVOLVED IN LOYALTY TO JESUS (10:34-36)

After having outlined the disciples' relationships to their task, to the opposition they must expect, and to the Lord whom they serve, Jesus now describes the inescapable decisions to be made by His workers about their relationship to outsiders among whom they will live and work and to whom they are sent.

10:34 Think not that I came to send peace on the earth. Due to their misunderstanding of certain messianic prophecies, many Jews would have been inclined to think this very thing. (Cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 9:6, 7; 66:12; Ps. 72:7; see notes on Rabbinic thought in Edersheim, *Life*, II, 710ff.) We can sense the sheer, severe honesty of Jesus better when we remember that it was a popular Jewish conviction that the Christ would usher in an epoch of great prosperity and universal peace. This concept of Jesus not only does not

echo the materialistic expectations popular among His own people, but it also demonstrates the abyss that separated His vision of the Messianic Kingdom from theirs. The war pictured by Jesus, symbolized by the **sword**, is of an entirely different character than that envisioned by those who hoped for a monolithic national army of "Hebrews only," who would march under the Messiah against the nations of the world over which they would triumph. Jesus is no "creature of His period," but a revolutionary Creator whose original message comes from God. But those wild-eyed revolutionaries of every age who have attempted to claim Jesus' good name for their cause, or who would uphold Him as their example for disrupting normal society, must beware lest they find themselves and their declared aims in open contradiction with **THIS** Revolutionary! It is absolutely essential therefore that Jesus' followers not expect a fool's paradise. The painful honesty of Jesus here stands out in striking contrast to those wild enthusiasts who attract followers with seductive but delusive promises. Later, Jesus can temper the harshness of this statement, but even then, not too much: "I have said this to you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33)

I came to . . . What the Master now describes expresses the stated purpose of His earthly mission. So what He unfolds in this and the following verses is neither extra, optional nor unnecessary, since the result of this His work, the decisions His followers must make and the inevitable enmities which result are all intimately involved in Jesus' intended mission.

I came not to send peace (on the earth), but a sword. But how can this obvious declaration of the Messiah Himself be harmonized with the general picture drawn of Him as the great "prince of Peace"? (Cf. Isa. 9:6, 7; Lk. 2:14) There are two possibilities:

1. This is a Hebraistic expression, emphatically stated to carry a point without intending to exclude absolutely what is negated. (See e.g. notes on 9:13) Accordingly, Jesus is saying, "I came not only to bring peace, but also a sword." As indicated above, due to the preconceptions of that day, it was entirely essential to the successful communication of His divine message that Jesus startle His hearers, so that this particularly unwelcome news not slip past, quite unnoticed by unwary listeners.

2. Then, in harmony with the foregoing, it is also unquestionably true that Jesus did not come to bring **peace on earth** to just any and every rebel against God's good government. Though He came to bring true harmony between God and man as well as true brotherhood among men, yet to accomplish this magnificent mission, Jesus could not leave men the way they were.

But why cannot men have peace the way they are? Plummer (*Matthew*, 156) is right to point out that "peace cannot be enforced. Open hostility can be put down by force; but good will can come only by voluntary consent. So long as men's wills are opposed to the Gospel, there can be no peace." In fact, war, division and fire must necessarily break out where the claims of Jesus are proclaimed in a hostile world. Feel the intense emotion of the Lord as He speaks about this revolution. (Lk. 12:49-51) Plummer (*Luke*, 334), commenting on that text, shows the vigor and depth of His language:

The history of Christ's ministry shows that (the fire) was kindled. . . . Christ came to set the world on fire, and the conflagration had already begun. Mal. 3:2. *baptisma dē échō baptisthēnai*. Having used the metaphor of fire, Christ now uses the metaphor of water. The one sets forth the result of His coming as it affects the world, the other as it affects Himself. The world is lit up with flames, and Christ is bathed in blood: Mk. 10:38.

So long as His disciples act in their true character, they are the very conscience of society. They are the very character of God walking daily among their sinful fellows, family and friends. The embarrassing contrast between righteousness and iniquity that results from this contact, must, in a thousand different ways, cause that painful condemning of the sinful practices and attitudes of those who are accustomed to that way of life. But this being the world's conscience is not easy business, because one must suffer all the excuses, evasions and harsh abuse that is the daily experience of every individual conscience.

Jesus Himself knows that He is Himself such a conscience. He too must disturb their self-complacency, awaken their deadened fear of the living God. His influence, then, cannot be peaceful in the sense that He leaves men tranquilly undisturbed. As Rix (*PHC*, 259) puts it:

(His influence) was a reforming, dividing, disturbing, dissolving, revolutionary influence. It was a pungent, painful, sacrificial influence. The history of Christianity is not a peaceful history. This fact is brought forward sometimes as a proof that Christianity has been a failure. But before we admit the validity of this objection, let us consider this prior question: is the assumption upon which it is based a valid one? Is peace the first aim of Christianity? Is it the main object of the Christian religion to give you an undisturbed and placid life? It is an ignoble view of life which regards its highest good as a placid and undisturbed existence. To live is to endure and overcome, to aspire and to attain. . . . It is not the best thing in the world for a man to have no doubts, to ask no questions, to be free from all speculation and all wonder. It is not the best thing for a man to receive his opinions ready-made and to reiterate them unthinkingly till he comes to look upon them as infallible.

But the disturbance Christ brings produces immediate war, since men perversely cling to their sins, combat Christ and His messengers and line up against those who accept His discipline. This automatically divides the world into two hostile camps. (Cf. Lk. 12:51) As Jesus will immediately point out, the lines will be drawn even in families, between those who follow Him and those who do not. But Jesus must provoke this kind of war; otherwise, men would go on to their doom perfectly satisfied with themselves, unaware of their fate.

While the figure of the **sword** may mean war, as explained above, it is also possible that the main emphasis of Jesus is on the use of a sword to split asunder what had before been of one piece or a unity. Commenting on this aspect, Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 405) says:

When some great cause emerges, it is bound to divide people; there are bound to be those who answer, and those who refuse, the challenge. To be confronted with Jesus is necessarily to be confronted with the choice whether to accept Him or to reject Him; and the world is always divided into those who have accepted Christ and those who have not.

Though He is the very bond of lasting peace and true union, Jesus Himself is the sharpest line of separation between men and the greatest disturber of easy consciences. He brought no peace to Herod or Jerusalem (Mt. 2:3). His very birth brought anguish and heart-

break to all parents in Bethlehem with boys under two. His birth brought a sword that pierced His mother's soul and signalled the rise and fall of many in Israel (Lk. 2:34, 35). The Babe's protection brought additional fears and frustrations to Joseph (Mt. 1:18, 19; 2:13, 14, 22). But the angels' song is still true for this Babe has brought "peace that passes understanding" to "men with whom (God) is well pleased." (Lk. 2:14; Eph. 2:14; Phil. 4:7) But to enjoy this peace, men have always had to decide about Jesus Christ, and this decision has involved many other choices of which the Lord now begins a short list:

10:35 **For** shows that Jesus intends to illustrate concretely what He means by a **sword**. These examples that follow are only typical and by no means propose to exhaust the divisions possible in human relationships, since other separations are obviously conceivable in families otherwise constituted. **I came to:** what follows this verb expresses the purpose and result of the Lord's earthly mission. What He lists here, then, is not avoidable, since the breakdown of some of these family ties partakes of the essential nature of the life to which the Master calls us. This crisis cannot be evaded without compromise of conscience.

**a man at variance against his father,
and the daughter against her mother,
and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.**

These words are quoted practically verbatim from Micah 7:6. Did Jesus mean for His disciples to understand Him as speaking within the framework set for them by Micah?

1. It might be that Jesus is merely appropriating the well-known expressions of the ancient prophet. Micah had used this language to describe the height of treachery rampant in an era of injustice at all levels of society. However, Jesus' context is not so much general injustice as the particular heartlessness of those who refuse to accept Jesus and the religious convictions of His disciples. It may be, then, that the Master intends only to take Micah's language proverbially, as aptly describing treachery in any age, not merely that of the prophet himself. In this case, the form, not the context, suits Jesus' purpose.
2. Keil (*Minor Prophets*, I, 507) suggests an alternate view: This verse is applied by Christ to the period of the *crisis* which will attend His coming, in His in-

struction to the apostles in Matthew 10:35, 36 (cf. Lk. 12:53) . . . in the sense, that at the outbreak of the judgment and of the visitation the faithlessness will reach the height of treachery to the nearest friends, yea, even of the dissolution of every family tie. (cf. Mt. 24:10, 12)

Apparently, Keil sees the Lord's use of this language as intending to point out a condition crying out for judgment. However, again the context here is not specifically eschatological, as Luke's seeming parallel might tend to suggest.

Since the Lord does not document His words as being those of Micah, and since His purpose differs somewhat from that of the prophet, it is probably better to see only a free use of appropriate language. Jesus' intention is to bring into sharp relief the bitterness of religious intolerance.

I came to set a man at variance against . . . Here is one of the first intimations of the individualistic and personal character of Jesus' religion. (Cf. Mt. 3:7-10) It makes a clear break with the patriarchal concept of religion whereby the whole family, including the children, by virtue of their birth into the family, become participants in all the religious privileges of the paternal head. There is no suggestion in the NT that baptism was intended as a substitute for circumcision, and thus to be applied to infants. Rather, Jesus insists here on the extremely personal character of our adherence to Him, by demanding the unhesitating severing of even the dearest relationships that become a hindrance to absolute fidelity to Him. This is not a concept, therefore, that can be applied in any sense to those without the faculty to make such a decision, i.e. infants. Yet it is a fundamental tenet in Jesus' system.

At variance against. A disciple might wishfully hope that, though he be rejected, misunderstood and reviled for his new-found faith by society, yet surely his own family would understand. But McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 94) correctly feels the psychological impact of Jesus' statement:

When a man abandons the religion of his ancestors his own kindred feel more keenly than others the shame which the world attaches to the act, and are exasperated against the supposed apostate in a degree proportionate to their nearness to him.

Jesus is not, however, promoting here a method of missions, whereby He would be seen as deliberately extracting the individual from his

people and home in order to become a disciple, ignoring, and thereby failing to retain the friendly relations whereby the family and eventually much of his former society could be won to the Lord. Even within the highly individualistic framework of Jesus' warning it may yet be possible to attain the intriguing ideals of a "People's Movement Christward," as urged and described by McGavran (*The Bridges of God*), wherein a chain-reaction of individual decisions to accept Christ makes it possible for larger segments of a given human community to move whole from paganism or Judaism into the new faith in Christ. Thus individuals are able to make decisions within this larger community change of faith. But while Jesus is not discussing a method of missions, yet He is talking about the necessary expectations that any given disciple of His must confront due to his own painfully individualistic allegiance to Him. While McGavran's thesis is ideally suited to making possible the wider and more rapid evangelization of a people, yet the major obstacle to such a movement is "ostracism, a people's defense against any new thing felt seriously to endanger the community life. . . . The most successful answer to ostracism is the conversion of chains of families. The lone convert is particularly susceptible to boycott." (*Bridges*, 20). But this is just Jesus' point. To this, McGavran answers (*Bridges*, 23):

Yet becoming a Christian also meant leaving relatives. Every such decision involved separation from those not yet convinced. . . . What produced this dividing force was not merely individual conviction. It was individual conviction heated hot in a glowing group movement in a human chain reaction. Very few individuals standing alone could renounce father and mother and kinsmen. But reinforced by the burning faith that *our people are following the new way*, such fathers and mothers and kinsmen as refused to follow the Messiah could be renounced. There were heartbreaks and tears, the parting was tremendously difficult, but to men borne forward on the way of group action it was possible.

This may be true where the wave of group action is already rolling high, but where it is not, where the evangelization has just begun, or where an apostate Church is the majority religion or the State Church, the disciple of Jesus is to expect social intercourse to be cut off so drastically that no one will give the new convert warmth, shelter or support. If he falls sick, he can expect his former associates to have nothing to do with him, since, for all

they care, he can die. It is very easy to overstate our evidence for the rapid, people-wide growth of the Church during the early days of its history. (Ac. 2:41-47; 4:4, 32ff.; 6:1, 7; 8:6, 12; 9:35, 42; 11:19-26; 21:20) Though it be true that the Christian Church was a movement of great numbers, so that a large enough segment of the Jewish people became Christian with the consequence that whole families and sometimes whole villages turned to the Lord (cf. Ac. 9:35), nevertheless the validity of Christ's words here in this text was demonstrated time and again as the ostracism rose right within the ranks of the Jewish people itself. The horrible persecution of the Church by the Jewish religious establishment was not the only frightening prospect confronted by early converts from Jewry. (Cf. Ac. 4; 5:17-42; 6:8—8:4) They lost family, possessions, connections, honors and opportunities. (Cf. Heb. 10:32-34; Mt. 19:29) The rapid people-movement was not at all trouble-free, so as to make Christ's warning here unnecessary. In fairness to McGavran, it must be said that he is not saying that had the Apostles used the techniques he outlines, the transfer from Judaism to Christianity would have been much smoother. Nor does he minimize the inevitable banishment of the Christian from intimate society of the unconverted relatives or associates, since his real antithesis is a method of missions too often used, which mistakes Jesus' warning in our text for the norm, hence ignores important relationships within a people that could be used advantageously to produce much more rapid evangelization of that people. Let it never be said that Jesus is urging *variance against* one's family for variance' sake, but rather *variance* for Jesus' sake. Jesus is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance. (Lk. 13:1-9; 2 Pe. 3:9) Any disciple who has learned this cannot deliberately seek to alienate his family merely by some indiscretion thought to be "showing faithfulness to Jesus."

On the other hand, there is the keen temptation, described by Barclay, (*Matthew*, I, 406):

The bitterest thing about this warfare was that a man's foes would be those of his own household. It can happen that a man loves his wife and his family so much that he may refuse some great adventure, some avenue of service, some call to sacrifice, either because he does not wish to leave them, or because to accept it would involve them in danger and in risk. . . . It has happened that a man has refused God's call to some adventurous bit of service, because he allowed personal attachments to immobilize him. . . . The

fact remains that it is possible for man's loved ones to become in effect his enemies, if the thought of them keeps him from doing what he knows God wishes and wants him to do.

10:36 **A man's foes shall be they of his own household.** McGarvey (*Fourfold*, 367) observes:

If the Jew and the pagan thus held *their* religions at a higher value than the ties of kindred (so as to persecute their Christian kin, HEF), much more should the Christian value his religion above these ties.

Even so, we must never forget that our real enemy is always and only Satan, even though he may make good use of an unknowing and unwilling tool in the person of one's own kin to do his work. (Sometimes he adopts an unsuspecting Christian to his purpose to destroy the Church from within. Is it not possible that Jesus has sometimes reflected: "What do I need enemies for, when I have disciples like that one?") But the disciple must ever recall that **they of one's own household** are never the ultimate enemy, but PEOPLE, even though they are blinded by bitter religious hate. These are people for whom Jesus came to die, just as much as are those who do accept Him. This is the reason why the disciples are never to respond with vitriolic invectives against the opposition. Perhaps the very meekness and consideration and constancy of Jesus' disciples will be the very means of opening the mind of the opponents to the truth. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:1, 2) Paradoxically, they are **foes** in one sense, but beloved in another. (Cf. Ro. 11:28)

D. THE SECRET OF SUCCESS THROUGH SACRIFICE AND SURRENDER TO THE SAVIOR (10:37-39)

Fully knowing that many are willing to endure almost anything "in death or life, in the realm of spirits or earthly monarchs, in the world of what happens today or in the world tomorrow, in the forces of the universe, of heaven or hell," the Lord now pictures that one influence that would be able to seduce them away from Him. He knows the danger to be found in the tender tension in families where natural affection would prove stronger than our chosen affection for Christ.

10:37 **He that loveth** (*ho philôn*, not *ho agapôn*) Before beginning the exegesis of Jesus' meaning, it is imperative that we note which words He uses, lest we miss His emphasis, not having

listened to His choice of terms. He is talking about *philia*, not *agapē*. (See notes on 5:43-48, Vol. I, 308-322 for a study of this latter word.) The master has in mind, not that invincible good will that always does what is in the best interest of the object of one's love, even if the person thus loved remains disagreeable or becomes the enemy. Rather, He puts the emphasis on *philia* (= "friendship"; in this connection examine Jas. 4:4 where this noun appears the only time in the N.T.) *Philéo*, while having some of the same area of meaning as *agapāō*, is better understood to touch more deeply the sentiments or emotional attachment of the individual and should be translated "love, have affection for, like, . . . kiss." (Arndt-Gingrich, 866f.) The Lord, then, is talking about cherishing what is dear to us at the expense of our loyalty to Him

He that loveth father, mother, son or daughter more than me: this is no question of our relative affection for that individual, as if we must somehow diminish our affection for each individual, in order to have sufficient affection left over for Jesus. Rather, He means the *whole* of our affection for any individual, which conflicts with the *whole* of our affection for Jesus. This is psychologically sound, for every one of us is capable of indefinite affection for each person we know, should we feel inclined so to express ourselves. Jesus does not ask that we diminish any affection we have for any person, least of all for those of our own family. He is, rather, proscribing that conflict of loyalty that prefers our selfish, unbelieving family, to His claims on the life of His disciple caught at that crisis of choice between the two.

What makes this a hard saying of Jesus is its antithesis, stated on a later occasion (Lk. 14:26, 33):

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

This is not only difficult for most to accept, but seems to make "hate" the antithesis of "affection," as we have it in Matthew's text. But the incisive writing of C. S. Lewis (*Four Loves*, 17ff., 166ff.) puts these seemingly contradictory maxims of the Lord into their proper relationship. Loving anything or anyone above God Himself, is to make an idol of the object of our love. So when our loves claim or will or would hold us back from following Him, then

we must take them from the throne of our heart, even though our decision will seem to them sufficiently like hatred. Lewis is right, of course, but this is where the difficulty arises, since most people who become disciples of Jesus, do so full-grown with a rather completely developed circle of friends, relatives and loved ones, a relationship already very strong and of long duration. Jesus' seemingly harsh (and only apparently contradictory) demands require that we put our loves into their proper order, long in advance of crises, so that when the test comes, it will be no brutal surprise to anyone. Lewis goes on to point out that it is absolutely essential that all who know us should also know, from a thousand talks, exactly what we are and how we feel about God. This helps all our loved ones to set their lives in order psychologically in relation to us, to come to understand us on this matter of our commitment to Christ, long before the crucial test of loyalty. When the crisis arises it is too late to begin telling a loved one that our love had a secret reservation all along, i.e., our commitment to the Master. It is precisely at this point that Jesus' demands for the widest and most public confession of our adherence to Him, begin to make sense in a personal way. (See on 10:26, 27, 32, 33)

There is very keen refinement in this temptation to deny Christ because of some loved one! When we see that our attachment to Him will cause danger or death to some loved one, we hesitate to jeopardize their life or safety by taking that conscious step that would throw them into exactly that position. What should we do at that moment? We must have already learned that, with us or without us, they remain in God's care, just as much as they ever were before we came along. In that moment then, let us commit them to Him. Even if our confession or our taking a special stand for Christ brings them pain or death (because of what others do to them as a direct result of our own faithfulness), it must not deter us from taking that stand or making that confession. Every loyalty must give place to loyalty to God. Peter calls persecution a "refining fire" (1 Pet. 1:6-8), because it burns out of our attachment to Jesus all the impure motives. These trials make us examine every phase of our faith for which we are called upon to suffer. We will not willingly suffer for what we do not deem absolutely essential. Thus we examine even these closest, dearest relationships in the light of their eternal consequences. Sentiment and affection had, in better times, covered up these implications, not permitting us to evaluate them objectively. This is why Jesus unsparingly strips

off that protective covering of sentiment and rigorously bares the extreme danger that these loved ones can be to us.

He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter more than me . . . The Lord knows the extraordinary seduction that material possessions can be, and in no uncertain terms requires that a disciple be ready to relinquish his hold on ANY possession. (Cf. Mt. 19:16-30; Lk. 14:25-33; cf. Phil. 3:7) But here the Master decrees that those human relationships which we deem most truly real and valuable and would hold as most intrinsically our own, must be sacrificed, if they prove to be **more than me!** Any Christian who acknowledges a higher lordship than Jesus Christ, is not fit for the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Jn. 8:31-34; Ro. 6:16; Lk. 9:62) There can be no prior or unbreakable commitments to any other, if Jesus be Lord.

Worthy of me. But who could pretend to be actually **worthy of Jesus?** (Cf. 2 Co. 2:16) No one can stack up merits or earn credits with God, merely by accumulating any number of good deeds to be remembered in a ledger of merit. (Cf. Col. 1:12, 13; 2 Co. 3:5, 6; Jn. 15:5) Arndt-Gingrich (77) translate it: "He does not deserve to belong to me," or perhaps, "he is not suited to me." **Worthy of me**, however, is the disciple's goal, because it describes a manner of life that would be a credit to Jesus. Living **worthy of Him** means having that same intransigence before temptations, that same love of righteousness, that same mercifulness with sinners, that same patience under trial, that reflects so well what He would have done under similar circumstances. Bystanders could see in their mind's eye and remember Jesus, precisely because they would be able to see His attitudes and actions duplicated in His people.

10:38 **And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.** Whereas before, Jesus had presented influences that perhaps could have allured us away from Him, here He unmasks the one that would repel us from Him: the suffering of shame and death. Rather than speak of crowns and glory to these disciples who were expecting any day to participate in a glorious messianic procession that would signal the beginning of the messianic kingdom, Jesus flashes before the startled Apostles a vision of the real procession in which they will march, a vision as shocking as it is terrible. To appreciate the spectacle Jesus' words convey, imagine the Lord, with His own cross on His shoulders, waving His men on up Golgotha's height, shouting, "Come on, it's over the top we go—do you expect to live forever?"

How many times had these very men witnessed a straggling line of condemned Galileans shuffling along to their tortured death, bearing their crosses, hurried along by Roman guards? How often had these men watched the death agony of human beings nailed to those wooden trees while their pain, thirst and anger mingled with blood, sweat and flies in the hot, Palestinian sun? The Roman general, Quintilius Varus, quelled the uprisings Simon and Judas, and crucified 2000 Jews that had supported these insurrections in Galilee. He lined the roads of Galilee with these gruesome markers. To the Apostles, then, Jesus' challenge put in these words is no less than the demand that they pronounce and execute the death sentence upon themselves. Any astute political observer or sociologist who had listened to Jesus very long could have observed that anyone who took Jesus seriously enough to enlist in His movement would be committing political, religious and commercial suicide. And Jesus would agree. This is why the Master, at this point in their discipleship, requires that His men finish the funeral, so they can get on with more important things.

The genius of such a requirement is immediately obvious: no enemy can, through threats of death, stop a revolutionary movement made up of men and women who have already accepted their own death as an accomplished fact, a justified judgment and a willing surrender! (Cf. Ro. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14, 17) The disciple is to see that there are two ways of obeying the will of Christ:

1. Actively, by doing what He has bound us to say and do, whereinsofar we are free to do it, i.e. so long as others permit us to express our commitment to Christ.
2. Passively, by suffering the opposition, the persecution and martyrdom at the hands of those who do not permit us to do His bidding in any other way. (Phil. 1:29)

But already the literal cross has passed from a means of physical execution, into that figurative, spiritual reality that all Christian theology has come to recognize. Anyone who has signed his own death warrant by accepting the risk of losing all for Jesus, even his own life on a wooden stake along a public highway, has already begun to arrange his life spiritually in the very direction Jesus intends. (See on Mt. 16:24-28) The cross is painfully personal and must be willingly assumed, since no other can either shoulder it for us or even lay it on our shoulders. Each must **take his cross**, i.e. do what he must for Christ's sake, even at the price of the most heartbreaking

sacrifices or the most excruciating death. This is precisely what doing the will of God cost Jesus.

This willing self-crucifixion of our own will, emotions, ambitions and desires means, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 408) says:

The Christian many have to sacrifice his personal ambitions, the ease and comfort that he might have enjoyed, the career he might have achieved; he may have to lay aside his dreams, to realize that the shining things of which he caught a glimpse are not for him. He will certainly have to sacrifice his will, for no Christian can ever again do what he likes: he must do what Christ likes.

The impressive list Jesus had already given explained the various ramifications of the cross, as suffering:

1. being dragged before hostile religious and civil authorities (17)
2. receiving an inhospitable reception when trying to bring the Gospel of peace to others (v. 14)
3. being betrayed to death by relatives (v. 21)
4. being tempted to fear men more than God (v. 28)
5. facing the constant allurements of denying everything just to have a moment's peace (v. 33)
6. slander that tears at the heart (v. 25)

There is another reason for this drastic demand as part of this commission of the Twelve as Jesus sends them out on their first trial run. How badly they needed this special teaching regarding the cross in their own future, is seen in the fact that they have studied under Jesus many months now. They have just enough training to make them cocksure but not great rabbis. They have every temptation now to "out-pharisee the Pharisees," i.e. to be proud, sectarian, more argumentative than convincing, more self-seeking than useful to others. They will be tempted to defend themselves instead of preach the Gospel. To them these words may well mean:

- He who loves his own opinions, his own group more than me, is not worthy of me.
- No man is worthy of me who prides himself in his debating ability, forgetting that his opponents are people for whom I came to die, forgetting his great responsibility to make the truth known in love, forgetting that people can be changed if they are not battered into the ground.
- He who confuses opposition raised by honest doubters for bitter persecution is not worthy of me.

- He that confuses his own interests for mine, thinking that those who oppose him, for whatever reason, are thereby opposing me, is not worthy of me.
- He who knows he is right and remains uncompromising, but is unkind to those yet in the wrong, is unworthy of me.
- He who deceives himself into thinking he is standing for me, when actually he has never taken the trouble to study both sides of an issue so he will have responsible reasons for what he believes to be my meaning, or when he has made his conclusion out of selfish or deceptive motives, is not worthy of me.

**10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it;
and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.**

The key to this paradox is the definition and importance one puts upon **his life**. **Life** (*psychē*) is a many-sided word, a fact which may create problems for all who would understand and decide aright in which way they wish to preserve their life. Arndt-Gingrich (901, 902) define *psychē*:

1. literally—a. of life on earth in its external, physical aspects . . . (*breath of*) *life, life-principle, soul* . . . *earthly life* itself . . . b. *the soul* as seat and center of the inner life of man in its many and varied aspects . . . c. *the soul* as seat and center of life that transcends the earthly . . . d. Since the soul is the center of both the earthly (1a) and the supernatural (1c) life, a man can find himself facing the question in which character he wishes to preserve it for himself . . . Mk. 8:35. Cf. Mt. 10:39; 16:25; Lk. 9:24; 17:33; Jn. 12:25 . . .
2. by metonymy *that which possesses life or a soul* . . . *a living creature* . . . Pl. *persons*, lit. *souls* . . .

What is the real meaning, purpose and value of life? This question, the most practical search of the philosopher and the inevitable object of every thinking person, is here categorically answered by the Lord: "Life is losing oneself in the unselfish service of someone else." This simple declaration becomes, then, the acid test of our appreciation of, and submission to, Jesus' Lordship and wisdom. The disciple who disagrees with this fundamental principle of Jesus, either by what he thinks or by the way he runs his life, is in reality

no disciple, regardless of all his pretensions to the contrary! Feel the contrast:

What men call "Life:"

- The selfish struggle to satisfy self; self-glorification;
- The praise of other men is the most satisfying goal;
- A constantly growing supply of wealth and possessions;
- That eager grasping after more pleasures, adventures, excitement, comfort, ease, security;
- Fulfillment of ambitions;
- Hoarding life by denying one's commitment to Jesus.

What God calls "Life:"

- Doing what needs to be done, regardless of personal comfort or costs.
- Praise of God one's highest joy,
- Losing oneself in humble, self-effacing service to God and men.
- Surrendering one's selfish, self-seeking life.
- Spending, not hoarding, one's powers, interest, possessions.
- Honorable, unflinching confession of Jesus, though it brings certain suffering and death.

Note the judgment Jesus pronounces upon each way of *life*:

- He shall lose all that real life involves.
- He quit too early, satisfying himself too easily with that which is a mere substitute for life as it is meant to be lived.
- The man who makes this life the end-all of his existence, really fails the more he seems to succeed.
- He loses all that makes this life valuable to others and worth living for himself.
- He must face the second death!
- He gains all the real life that Christ's leading promises and produces.
- He gains a place in human history and human hearts accorded the truly great who humbly served others.
- The man who looks with unwavering confidence to the faithfulness of God, really succeeds the more he seems to fail (by worldly standards).
- He finds all that makes life valuable to others and makes it worth living for himself.
- He has passed out of death into *life*!

The tragedy of the self-seeking, self-saving life is already pronounced by Jesus who knows its certain outcome: such a person **shall lose his life**. There is no doubt or discussion: such a course is already doomed. He who tries to save his life, his marriage, his property,

his position or anything else that is important to him at the expense of his commitment to Christ, loses it all. (Cf. Jn. 12:42, 43) This principle is so far-reaching that even Jesus Himself could not escape it! (Jn. 12:24, 25) This is why He lays down the challenge of high adventure: He knows that the only way to true happiness and real life, here and hereafter, is to **SPEND** life, not sparing it, but serving others and so fulfilling God's purpose for us here. (See notes on 5:43-48; 7:12, Vol. I)

He that loseth his life for my sake is not necessarily, although he certainly could be, a Christian martyr. (Cf. Rev. 21:11) Obviously a person could not **take up his cross daily**, if this meant martyrdom the first time around! A violent death is not to be preferred to a humble, self-denying life of daily service so intent on ministering to others that one's own selfish ambitions dwindle and die from neglect. This is the real loss of one's life for Jesus' sake. Imagine the puzzlement of the solicitous and selfish: "But you don't have time for yourself any more!" To this the saint responds: "Really, I had not noticed, but, frankly, if you knew what a scoundrel I am, you would not have time for me either!"

Shall find it. There is no faith where there is no risk. In this exalted promise of a proven gentleman, Jesus turns up to their maximum the test fires that try men's faith. From this point on, every one of Jesus' listeners must decide personally whether He knows what He is talking about, whether HIS world is real. Jesus' promises test a man's faith just as really as do His most exacting commands.

For my sake: this is the secret of Christ's power over men, the key to His ability to transform men from the self-seeking, self-complacent, self-willed, ambitious rebels they are, into saints of God. Once a man comprehends clearly who Jesus is and what He has done for that one man, once that man desires to respond in gratitude for Jesus' self-humiliation on the cross, there is no end to what that man will do *for Jesus' sake*. (See notes on 5:11, Vol. I, 226) But the secret is our commitment, not to a system nor a doctrine nor even a way of looking at religion, but our sense of belonging to Him. (1 Pet. 2:20-25) Plummer (*Matthew*, 157) calls our attention to the audacity of Jesus' demands and claims:

Again we have a claim which is monstrous if He who makes it is not conscious of being Divine. Who is it that is going to own us or renounce us before God's judgment-seat (32, 33)? Who is it that promises with such confidence that the man who loses his life for His sake shall find it?

And these momentous utterances are spoken as if the Speaker had no shadow of doubt as to their truth, and as if He expected that His hearers would at once accept them. What is more, thousands of Christians, generation after generation, have shaped their lives by them and have proved their truth by repeated experience .

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List several instances in which disciples of Jesus actually denied Him before men.
2. List several instances in which disciples of Jesus actually confessed Him before men .
3. List several instances in which disciples actually felt the sword of Jesus in their own lives, as their loyalty to the Master cost them their family, friends, position, comfort, wealth or the like.
4. Illustrate from instances in Jesus' life how He personally underwent all the difficulties that He here pictures for His disciples. Leave out the trials of the last week of His life and the crucifixion. Search out other poignant illustrations of His personal suffering many, many times before that last week.
5. Explain the meaning of the terms: "peace on the earth" and "sword" as Jesus intended them in this text. Show how this use differs from some usual connotations of these words.
6. When and where will Jesus confess or deny men before His Father?
7. Show the deeper harmony between the ancient prophecy that describes a part of Jesus' mission to be the Prince of Peace, and the overt declaration of Jesus Himself that He did not intend to bring peace on earth.
8. Explain the remark Jesus made about "finding and losing one's life." What is this "life" to which He refers?
9. Explain the meaning of the expression "to take up one's cross." Show what this expression would have impressed on the minds of the Apostles who first heard it, and then state as well as you can the same meaning in modern English without any loss in significance or flavor that Jesus intended.
10. Explain how Jesus' disciples are to be "worthy of" Him.
11. What is the content of the confession that Jesus requires of His disciples to make before men? In other words, what are we to

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say about Jesus that makes all the difference between confessing Him and denying Him?

12. State the declarations in this section that emphasize Jesus' authority.

SERMON

ON SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS-BEARING:

"THE INFLUENCE OF THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER"

TEXT: MT. 10:38

Introduction: The very word "cross" immediately evokes the image of the instrument of torture on which Jesus died. However in the NT at least one fourth of the references to the cross (6 in 27) do not refer to His cross at all, but rather to the cross of every believer. (Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27; Gal. 6:14) But how does the cross involve the life of every Christian? To answer this question, we need to see:

I. The MEANING of the Cross in the Life of the Believer.

A. This is not simply, or only, martyrdom, a literal death on the cross.

1. This is obvious from the fact that Jesus Himself at the moment He uttered this challenge apparently did not expect any disciple to comply literally with the command.

a. Therefore, the "cross" is figurative.

b. But, though figurative, this cannot mean it is somehow less real.

c. In fact, it is something so very real that our whole discipleship and consequent salvation depends upon it! (Lk. 14:27)

2. Nor can it mean merely martyrdom, because Jesus expected all true disciples to comply immediately as if it were a matter of life and death.

a. This is true, even though some disciples, who were acceptable to the Lord, never tasted martyrdom and

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yet they may be presumed to have borne their "cross" worthily.

- b. Some disciples who were standing there immediately present did not suffer martyrdom for several years and yet may be presumed to have begun bearing their cross shortly after the Lord said this, and for some time until their death.
 - c. If the *cross* must be taken literally or legalistically, what do we do with those poor souls who died by decapitation, by being boiled alive or burned at the stake? Though these did not die on the cross, should it be deduced from this that they did not somehow "bear their cross" worthily?
- B. Nor is bearing one's cross simply the sum total of the pains and difficulties that assault the disciple throughout life.
1. The Lord does not take notice of the size of the callouses on our hands. He looks rather at how we earned them.
 2. There are large numbers of people who suffer greatly without intending for one minute to bear any kind of cross: as far as they are concerned, their suffering has nothing to do with Jesus, since they have no connection with Him.
 3. So the cross is not simply the normal suffering in life.
- C. The true meaning of the cross is our imitation of, and identification with, Jesus, i.e. our assuming the same attitudes He manifested throughout His life.
1. The cross probably has the same meaning in the life of the disciple as it had for the life of his Master. (Mt. 10:24, 25; Heb. 13:24, 25)
 2. Jesus had already felt the effects of the cross for the entire 33 years that preceded that mortal crisis that took place on Golgotha. (Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
 3. All of the temptations Jesus faced and defeated are evidences of His conquest of His ego, the victory over His selfish passions.
 4. So the meaning of cross-bearing and the nature of self-denial is putting to death in our lives all that:
 - a. hinders fellowship with our God;
 - b. harms relations with our fellowman;
 - c. holds self apart for self alone.
- D. Having understood the meaning of the cross, we are driven to look into . . .

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

II. The NECESSITY of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

- A. In order to solve society's deepest problem, man's own beastly selfishness, the cross is necessary.
 1. Self-denial is absolutely essential to the well-being of society in all its relationships, since it is the key to the removal of selfishness, the root of all of society's problems.
 2. It is the voluntary placing ourselves at the service of others AS IF we were their inferiors, even though in many cases we are their superiors (and too often we think we are when we are not!). Examples: parent/child; student/professor; employer/employee; government/citizens; merchant/customer; elders/younger.
- B. To be able to fulfil the very spirit of Jesus' ideals, the cross is necessary.
 1. The faith Jesus taught requires not only a belief in His doctrine or an intellectual adherence to His ideals.
 2. Rather, He demands that conquest of the ego, that total defeat of self.
 - a. This is something much more difficult, much more profound than a superficial assent to a new creed, however well-stated, convenient but innocuous.
 - b. This is, rather, the willing execution of that rebel who would kick God off His throne, and seat himself in His place, ruling his own little universe.
 - c. This self-renunciation is more basic than that external conformity to a new, however superficial, set of ideals.
 - d. This is literally starting over, because Jesus wants to change the man from within by making him a new creature!
 3. Jesus knows how impossible it is to require that the old man, in his present condition, reach those ideals which are absolutely necessary and obligatory to please God, and live lives worthy of sons of God.
 - a. Law, any law, could require a certain external conformity to certain norms, but it could not touch the heart, could not require that a man think or feel rightly.
 - b. For this result, it is necessary to begin again by creating the new man from within.
 - c. The result? In this way alone can we reach the spirit, not only the form, of the ideals of Jesus.

CHAPTER TEN

- C. To be ABLE to put Jesus' ideals into practice, the cross is necessary:
1. So long as that rebel remains alive, so long will Jesus' ideals be impracticable, unreachable.
 2. It is when man throws down his last line of defense that barricades him against his God, when he lays himself bare to the righteous sentence of death against him, without justifications or excuses, when he DIES, only then can that new man rise in him, created in the image of Jesus. Only then is he able to be the man that, in his dreams, he might have been.
- D. The cross is necessary in order to be able to ENJOY Christianity:
1. The cross rudely puts an end to that desperate clinging to two worlds, trying to grasp the best of both, but fails to win either, since he who tries it is unable, because unwilling, to pay the price and accept the discipline required to gain them. Consequently, the man who tries it remains in the middle, half-way between both worlds, deluded, frustrated, unable to reach either. So he loses the best of both.
 2. But the cross, having put to death, put to silence the selfish cries of the old mad fool, leaves the man with his heart whole, his mind sane, his life and desires united. With one heart, undivided by contradictory claims on his attention, the man can by the grace of God confidently reach for all the fullest joys to be had in Christ's service here on earth and all the best of heaven!
- E. The cross is necessary in order to be able to hold out to the end.
1. The man who has already accepted his own death as
 - a. a past fact;
 - a. a victory for true justice;
 - a. a justified execution of a notorious criminal;
 - a. and a voluntary surrender of himself to God,cannot have much sympathy with those temptations that would turn him back into the wretch he used to be.
 2. Such a man cannot count his earthly life as dear to him, whether his persecutors would make it miserable for him or his tormenters would take it from him.
- F. This helps us to appreciate . . .

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

III. The REASONABLENESS of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

A. In relationship to God's character:

1. The death of the rebel is in perfect harmony with the solemn holiness of a just God whose righteousness has been offended.
2. He who has known something of the holiness of God could not seriously object to the capital punishment of anyone who would dare shake his puny, grimy fist at the Almighty.
3. Above all, His permission to cancel that old rebel in us and start all over is an act of pure grace and generous love!

B. In relation to our social relations with one another.

1. When selfishness is dead, where love is alive, we have nothing short of heaven on earth! (Ro. 13:8-10)
2. This freely chosen renunciation of our own selfish desires in favor of the needs of another, automatically brings about that gentle courtesy, that thoughtfulness, that helpfulness that smoothes out all our associations with others. (Ro. 15:1-7)

C. In relation to our own final destiny:

1. The Lord is training us, disciplining us, for a position, an eternity of infinite value and dignity. (Heb. 12:1-11)
 - a. Every time, therefore, that we succeed in doing the unselfish deed, we create in this way our own character.
 - b. Every time we fall again into selfish ways of thinking or acting, the Lord can help us to rise again and try it once more.
2. Our character, acquired in this way, accompanies us in death and right on through the resurrection. Nothing is ever lost of this discipline of the cross.

CONCLUSION: Let us affirm with the Apostle Paul Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14.

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

- V. JESUS REWARDS THOSE WHO
- WELCOME HIS SERVANTS

TEXT: 10:40-42

A. THE AUTHORITY OF HIS MESSENGERS

40. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

B. THE REWARD TO THOSE WHO HELP
JESUS' MESSENGERS

41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.
42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. According to Jesus, of what importance to the Galileans were the apostles and the apostles' word? Is their word of the same degree of importance to us today as then?
- b. What principle do you see behind the expression: "He that receives you, receives me, etc."?
- c. Can you provide a reason why Jesus should put so much value upon even the smallest service rendered to the lowliest disciple of His?
- d. Do you see a descending order of importance in the persons mentioned by Jesus: Apostles ("you"), "prophet," "righteous man," "one of these little ones"? If so, what do you think is Jesus' intention for putting these persons in this descending scale? If you do not see these four persons as a whole group, but as individuals, then what is Jesus' intentions regarding the importance of each?
- e. I thought we were saved by grace without meriting or earning what is coming to us. How can Jesus here speak of "rewards" or "wages"?
- f. Are there messengers of God today, who although not Apostles themselves, yet bring the Apostles' doctrine and so deserve for their work's sake to be helped? Who are they? How should they be helped?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"But what about those people, those cities and villages, that welcome you and joyfully listen to your message? Those who receive you Apostles, in reality, are accepting me. Consequently, when they accept my message, mission and ministry, in reality they are accepting God's design and purpose. If you receive a prophet of God just because you see him as a man of God, you will receive the same reward a prophet gets. If you welcome and help a good man, because of your love for righteousness, you will receive a reward that goes to a good man. The most insignificant of my men is still my disciple, and whoever gives him just a drink of cool water on a hot day, just because they recognize that he is in my service, I Jesus, appreciate it! And I can tell you, that whoever does even a little thing like that for one of my disciples however lowly, he shall never—and I mean NEVER—lose the wage coming to him!"

SUMMARY

Jesus promised God's unfailing rewards for all who honor God by accepting and helping His servants, whether that servant be an Apostle, a Prophet, a good man or even the most insignificant of Jesus' followers.

NOTES

If it be true that Jesus has addressed Himself first to the immediate needs of the Apostles during their early Galilean ministry (10:5-15), then to their ministry before the unbelieving Jewish nation and some before the Gentiles (10:16-23), then to the disciples' program and problems of all times, as suggested in the introduction to the chapter, then we should ask the following questions about this section, before proceeding to interpret it:

1. Is this concluding section intended as a summary conclusion to the last section only, i.e. to that section which immediately precedes it?
2. Or is this conclusion intended to summarize this whole ordination sermon, hence applicable only to those Apostles thus ordained?
3. Or is this conclusion a fitting end to the entire discourse, encompassing in its scope both the special, authoritative ministry of the Apostles, as well as the general, day-to-day

service for Jesus performed by the most insignificant of His disciples?

This latter view seems most in harmony with the passage itself (10:40-42) which pictures three different expressions of Jesus in the world: His Apostles ("you," v. 40), His "prophets and righteous men," (v. 41), and His "little ones, disciples" (v. 42). Even if we eliminate the second group for reasons mentioned below, we still retain the two fundamentally separate groups, the divinely-inspired spokesmen and the rest of the Church.

A. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE (10:40)

10:40 He that receiveth you. This is a ray of sunshine after the many stormy warnings of persecution, death and judgment. Jesus ends His discourse on a positive note, not only because it is psychologically sound to do so, but because He knew, and expected the Apostles to know, that there WOULD be people everywhere who DO respond to God's love and accept His messengers. (Cf. 1 Th. 1:5-10; 2:15) What assurance this brings to Apostles and other Christian workers embarking upon world revolution, barely aware of the giant forces that they must meet and defeat! Who would NOT go forth into Galilee, nay, into the whole world, to serve such a far-seeing, thoughtful Master on terms like these?

Receive has a special, triple impact here:

1. Normal hospitality. (Ro. 16:23; Heb. 13:1-3; Tit. 3:12-14; Philemon 22) But this meaning rapidly fades into the next for reasons obviously related to our text:
2. Reception, aid and hospitality because the guest, the person helped, is in the special service of Christ. (Ac. 16:15; Ro. 16:2; 1 Co. 16:10, 11, 15-18; 3 Jn. 5-8. Note the antithesis of this reception: Ro. 16:17, 18; 2 Jn. 7:11.)
3. Giving heed to the messenger, welcoming him and his message, as it were, God Himself. (Gal. 4:14; 1 Th. 2:13)

Considering the progressive degree of openness required by each of the above expressions of hospitality, it would seem that something is here revealed about the wisdom of requiring that the Twelve seek out the most hospitable people in a city as they start to evangelize that area. (See on 10:11-14) But though the superior psychological preparation in the hearts of generous men is obvious, still how many ungenerous men can also be won, can also be convinced that the Twelve carry God's message and are to be received as God Himself? How long otherwise does it take before such ungenerousness is converted,

so that it too opens its heart to anyone who comes truly representing Jesus Christ?

But Jesus' emphasis here is not so much on the fact that there would be people who accepted the message, as on the high authority invested in His workers:

He that receiveth you, receiveth me.

and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.

There is no escaping the exact antithesis of these words: "He who rejects you, rejects me; he who rejects me, rejects God! (vv. 14, 15) He who persecutes you, persecutes me!" (Ac. 22:8) In order better to appreciate this close identification of the workers with their God and King, compare Mk. 9:37; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 12:44; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21. The principle is this: a man may be a Judas or a Pharisee, but if he speaks the Word of God, we must listen. (Cf. Mt. 23:2, 3) We do not refuse the telegram just because the messenger who delivers it has some disgusting habit. God holds men responsible for their attitude toward Him and His Word. He does not ask us what we think of the preachers who bring it. This means that anyone who heard Judas the traitor preach—or Peter the denier or Thomas the empiricist or Simon the Nationalist guerilla or Matthew the collaborator with the enemy or John the fisherman—any who heard them preach, heard God! (Cf. 1 Th. 2:13; Gal. 1:12) Either the Apostles have the authority claimed here for them, or they are imposters and Jesus is a liar! There is no middle ground, not even an allowance for "innocent error." It is, of course, assumed here as proved, that the documents bearing us this information are by the hand of the Apostles themselves and that it is with their affirmations that we have to do.

The very general nature of this declaration, as well as the statements of a similar nature spoken of others than the Apostles (Cf. Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48), and the previously-noticed general character of the third portion of this discourse, lead us to ask whether this verse even intends to speak of the unique authority of the Twelve. It seems rather to refer to the identification of Jesus' disciples in general with their Lord. If so, the most common disciple who represents Jesus by preaching the Word reported to us by the Apostles, represents God Almighty! Whereas these latter disciples would not, of course, have the direct inspiration of the Spirit to protect their words or presentation from error, as did the Twelve when they originally revealed the Message, yet the man, who stands up in human society and addresses his fellows in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as he presents God's message, is to be heeded as if he were

God Himself in human dress! (See on 10:42) This view harmonizes perfectly with the realization that Jesus is not satisfied until He has turned every one of us into another Jesus Christ ministering in His absence in the very place where we live and work and are best known and can bring the claims of God to bear most personally on the lives of OUR contemporaries. He must not accept a kind of conversion that makes a man somehow as morally perfect as Jesus Himself, but good for nothing! This means that our identification with the Lord must produce in us the same sense of mission that urges us to confess Him openly, declare His rule and demand submission to His wise government.

But, someone will object, does not this latter consideration controvert the supposed apostolic authority defended in the paragraph just preceding it? Not at all, since no early disciple or modern Christian would dare claim that authority belonging only to the Apostles, except insofar as the former's life and message perfectly harmonized with that required by the latter, in which case the real norm is the apostolic doctrine and practice that forms the basis of judgment, not any modern application or interpretation of it. Of importance, by contrast, certainly, are the false claims to apostolic authority made by the so-called "successors of St. Peter" in the Roman papacy or semi-popes in protestant circles or the "apostles" among the sects, such as the Mormons. Their claims may best be tested against the standard established by the Lord's Apostles in their recorded works collected in the NT. At this point the declaration of the Lord is at its strongest: **He that receives you, receives me!** This is not merely comforting encouragement to wavering followers, but an iron-fisted challenge of the orthodoxy of anyone who does not recognize the Apostles and all who bring their message!

We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:6)

Thus, if we have read this chapter correctly in its larger context of Matthew's book from chapter 4:23 forward, we see that Matthew is endeavoring to say that Jesus of Nazareth is but the extension of God into human affairs (cf. *God with us*, 1:23), the Apostles are but the multiplication of the effectiveness of Jesus as He reaches out into the wider world of men (see on 9:36; 10:1), and the humblest Christian is but the resultant outreach of the ministry of the Apostles themselves. (Cf. Eph. 3:7-10) Thus it is that the Church, even down to her smallest member, is the likeness of God Himself re-

flected among men! Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 410) organizes these relationships as four distinct links in the chain of salvation reaching from God down to needy mankind:

1. God out of whose love the whole process of salvation began.
2. There is Jesus who brought that message to men.
3. There is the human messenger, the prophet who speaks, the good man who is an example, the disciple who learns, who in turn all pass on to others the good news which they themselves have received.
4. There is the believer who welcomes God's men and God's message and who thus finds life to his soul.

B. TWO GENERALLY ADMITTED ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLE (10:41)

10:41 **He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.** These are two generally recognized axioms from Jewish life. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 651. Could the reason for this be good examples in Jewish history? cf. 1 Kgs. 17:9-24; 18:4; 2 Kgs. 4:8-10) The Master used them to reinforce His foregoing declaration that any man who opens his life to the Apostles, by that very act is opening his life to God. As before, so here, the emphasis is not so much on the Apostles or the prophets or the righteous men as on *those who receive* them in that character.

Receive, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 410) see it, involves providing any kind of help, from even the simplest glass of cold water to a thirsty disciple, to respecting the messenger of his mission from God, as well as everything in between. Jesus is just as much concerned about His "support group" as He is about His "front-line troops." His interest is not only concerned with those non-Christians who sympathize with His people by lending them aid and assistance. He is much more concerned with those unknown disciples of His, who, though not themselves Apostles, prophets or famous righteous men, yet stand solidly behind these great figures in the forefront of the Kingdom. These are people behind the scenes who do everything in their power to make the prophet or righteous man what they are. In the case of each, it may be someone who is never in the public eye at all, but upon whom the prophet is entirely dependent for everyday love, care, sympathy, and

help. The righteous man may be what he is, because there is an otherwise unknown person who is daily encouraging him to be good, building up his life. Jesus affirms that these little-known people are figures well-known to God and will share His heavenly acclaim, that approval usually thought reserved only for those better-known public figures, the "great saints." Again, Barclay observes so practically:

There is many and many a man who has been a great public figure . . . whose voice has kindled the hearts of thousands of people, . . . who has carried an almost intolerable burden of public service and public responsibility, all of whom would have gladly borne witness that they could never have survived the effort and the demands of the task, were it not for the love, care, sympathy and service of someone at home, who was never in the public eye at all. When true greatness is measured up in the sight of God, it will be seen again and again that the man who greatly moved the world was entirely dependent on someone who, as far as the world is concerned, remained unknown. Even the prophet must get his breakfast, and have his clothes attended to; even the prophet must have his home. Let those who have the often thankless task of making a home, cooking meals, washing clothes, shopping for household necessities, caring for children, never think of it as a dreary . . . weary round; it is God's greatest task; and they will be far more likely to receive the prophet's reward than those whose days were filled with committees and whose homes were comfortable. . . . The great beauty of this passage is its stress on simple things. The Church and Christ will always need its great orators, its great shining examples of sainthood, its great teachers, whose names are household words; but the Church and Christ will also always need those in whose homes there is hospitality, on whose hands there is all the service which makes a home and in whose hearts there is the caring which is Christian love; and as Mrs. Browning said, "All service ranks the same with God."

But in what sense are we to understand **prophet** or **righteous man**?

1. *Literally?* According to this view, Jesus would be listing, in more or less descending order, the categories of service in the Kingdom: the Apostles themselves ("you," v. 40),

prophets, then **righteous men** (v. 41), and, least of all, the humblest beginner among the **disciples** of Jesus (v. 42). If this is Jesus' intention, then His argument proceeds from the less to the greater: "If God rewards those who assist the service of the (apparently) least disciples, how much more can He be trusted to reward those who help you to whom I entrust this vastly more important ministry and apostleship?" (See on 10:15) Though this interpretation is good, it does not depend for its effectiveness upon a four-step descending scale, as the following view, which also includes this application, will show.

2. *Proverbially?* It might well be that the **prophet** and **righteous man** are merely two designations for two classes of God-fearing people in the OT period which was coming to an end in the days of Jesus. It could be argued that these two classes are totally inclusive and representative of the Hebrew people inasmuch as they speak of (1) those to whom and (2) for whom the Word of God came. (Cf. Mt 13:17; 23:29-34 — Lk. 11:47-51) Accordingly, Jesus would be saying, "Even as it is commonly believed among us that anyone who opens his house to those whom we regard as great and good men, receives from God a suitable blessing, so I too am putting my humblest disciple on that same level. God will never forget the simplest act of kindness done for MY people in my name!" Thus would He put His own people in the same high plane at which they esteemed the great men of the OT. In this sense, then, Jesus would not be talking about **prophets** or **righteous men** who would live during the Christian dispensation, since He has used them only as a standard of comparison by which the humble Galilean Apostles could value the importance of their own ministry as well as estimate the high preciousness of their care in the eyes of the Father.

This latter view of the matter is probably to be preferred, since it removes at once the question of what consisted a prophet's or a righteous man's **reward**, by leaving both in the realm of an illustration that formed the basis of a comparison. Further, if these two illustrations are exactly that, i.e. proverbial, then we need not go into great detail, searching for the explicit applications to NT prophets and righteous men, since whatever it is that was usually presumed that the benefactor of an OT **prophet** or **righteous man**

would have received, will now fall to those who provide even minimal aid to Jesus' disciple, so great is His estimate of their importance. But WHY are these humble followers so significant? Because to receive any one of them in their character as disciples of JESUS is to welcome Jesus Himself and, ultimately, God.

McGarvey is right in quoting Alford (*Matthew-Mark*, 95) to say that *in the name of a prophet* or *in the name of a righteous man* is a Hebraism meaning "because he is a prophet, righteous man." (See also Edersheim, *Life*, I, 651) To receive such a person in this character or for this reason is a distinct recognition of his relation to God; "and to that extent God is honored by the act." McGarvey sees the antithesis of this phrase as "in the name of humanity, or because the recipient is a human being." Many high-minded souls would render service to a Christian, not because of his attachment to Christ, but merely because they would do it to any human in need as a magnanimous humanitarian gesture. In this case the giver has not been moved to give by the intention to honor God, hence are promised no reward. Jesus is not discussing mere humanitarian gestures, but acts of kindness to disciples BECAUSE THEY ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS. Motive is all-important.

Plumptre (*PHC*, 243) takes this one step further: "*In the name of . . . for the sake of that which the name connotes—the prophet's work as a messenger of God, the righteousness of which the living righteous man is the concrete example.*" In a very real sense these two qualities were going to be fused into one person as each of the Apostles would soon literally become God's "prophets and righteous men." And those who helped them for what they were, would receive suitable rewards.

He shall receive a prophet's reward . . . a righteous man's reward. Regardless of whether we understand this verse literally or proverbially, it is essential that we understand the teaching on **rewards** (*misthōs*) propounded here and in the following verse. (See the Special Study Introductory to the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, 198-201: "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewards for Righteousness," since Jesus' meaning in this section is to be harmonized with His views expressed elsewhere.) The problem concerns the degree of strictness with which we interpret **reward**, since our eternal salvation is not a question of **reward** or salary, but of grace. This dilemma is so acute that Lenski (*Matthew*, 421) decides:

This *misthōs* was always one of pure grace, beyond any merit

of their own, as generous as the great Lord God whom they served.

McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 95) agrees: that the reward, whatever is it . . . (is) not synonymous with final salvation; for while it is true that in heaven we will have full reward for all the good we do on earth, we will have infinitely more than this, and our admission into heaven is a matter of *grace*, not of reward. So then the promise of the text does not imply the salvation of all that receive a prophet, etc., but simply that he shall be rewarded. If he be a pardoned man, he may receive his reward in heaven; if not, he will receive it only on earth.

There are several facts to notice about this **reward**:

1. Jesus does NOT say precisely what the **reward** will be. In general, it would be "the reward of (worthy of, or coming to) a prophet, a righteous man."
2. Nor does He explain where it will be given, so it could be received many times and long before the judgment, as well as at that time.
3. Its very character must be harmonized with other clear revelation about the nature of God's blessings.

With these facts in mind, it is well to realize that many people would not recognize God's **reward** on earth if He handed it to them, just because it would be something they would not even consider to be a **reward**. Ewen's discussion (*PHC*, 262, 263) is worthy of repetition here:

Two questions suggest themselves to the thoughtful reader of these words: 1. What is a prophet's, a righteous man's reward? 2. No matter what the reward is, is it quite fair and equitable that a man who merely receives a prophet or a righteous man; who, that is, gives shelter and hospitality to them because they are what they are, should get the same reward which those men themselves get? If a man may get a prophet's reward by merely being hospitable to either of them, what is the good of being a prophet or a righteous man?

* * * *

- I. The Master does not here tell us what is the . . . reward. Yet here must lie the key that will open for us the mystery, . . .
A. Did they know already?

- B. Or did the Master tell them before this what it was?
- C. Or were they left to learn the nature and extent of it gradually by the teaching of experience, which, through the help of the Holy Spirit . . . was to develop in them the power of spiritual apprehension and understanding—was to bring all things again to their remembrance, and help them to interpret His teaching aright?

- 1. I think we must accept this latter as the correct assumption.
- 2. Our Lord had taught the nature of the . . . reward before this, as after it, but I fear we cannot credit the disciples at this period with having fully grasped it.
- 3. They partook too largely of the spirit of their race and of their times to rise so early as this to the loftier conception of Christ's kingdom and of the rewards it conferred on those who were of it . . .

- II. The whole tenor of our Lord's teaching was to bring out in regard to this matter that a man's wealth lay in himself, not in his belongings, not in his surroundings . . . the prophet's gifts and the righteous man's character.

- A. The true reward of the prophet, the only one that really enriches him, is the growing power of seeing more deeply into the things of God, and the growing power of revealing these more and more clearly to men.
- B. The true reward of the righteous man is his becoming more righteous still, his finding virtuous principles within him growing stronger, the vicious in their presence becoming weaker, his finding the path of duty before him growing clearer and clearer, and himself more able to walk in it without stumbling.
- C. The reward of the one is the growing strength of his character, that of the other the increasing fitness for his office.

- III. It is not hard to see why the man who receives the prophet in the name of a prophet, and the righteous man in the name of a righteous man should receive their reward—the same reward as they do.

- A. Observe that in the one case the man receives the prophet in the name of a prophet.
 - 1. He receives him because he knows him to be a prophet.
 - 2. This indicates that the man esteems the prophet for the sake of his office, that his sympathy is with him, and that he is interested in his work.

3. He rejoices to hail this stranger, and gladly offers him hospitality, because he is of a kindred spirit to himself.
4. And what follows? Their intercourse brings to the host the prophet's reward. The host is enriched in his prophetic gifts by his guest's conversation, and truly receives the prophet's reward, shares with him and through him that enlargement of mind and that penetrating spiritual vision which are the richest fruits of his prophetic labors, as well as the power of clothing his thoughts in more accurate and impressive speech.
- B. The other case is similar to this. The righteous man is received in the name of a righteous man; that is, because he is a righteous man. The man who thus receives him has himself the cause of righteousness at heart, and his ready hospitality brings to his table, to his heart, one whose words and example stimulate all his own virtuous aspirations; evoke and strengthen everything that is noble and good in him; bring him, in fact, the reward of the righteous man.

While it is not necessary so drastically to limit the blessings the man of God brings to the home and life of his host, yet Ewen does point out a psychological receptivity that leaves a man open to all that God has to offer, from the best of this earth to the finest eternity God can imagine. Jesus is talking in general terms as He pronounces this blessing upon those whose hearts make them willing to receive the Christians. Hence He does not spell out in detail whether the individual, whose heart was once sufficiently open to God's representatives, would remain so long enough to lay claim to the reward. It is a matter of sad history that many whose lives were once open to the Lord, change their minds, cut the Creator out of their career and ultimately despise the reward He has been trying to offer them, because it was not suited to their perverted tastes or desires.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 158) is right in observing that "the reward is not offered as a motive for action; the motive in each case is love and reverence for the prophet, or righteous man, or disciple, and therefore for Him whose servant he is." This is obvious from the consideration that this promise would not have been heard at all by those who would have helped the Apostles originally, hence could not have moved them to act from selfish or calculating motives. This being true, the promise is to be interpreted as furnishing assurance to the Apostles that God would reward those who received and

helped them. In this sense, it furnishes motivation for the Apostles to trust God to supply their needs on this journey.

C. A SPECIAL APPLICATION (10:42)

10:42 Jesus makes particular use of the foregoing illustrative standard in a startling way: "If you think the prophets and righteous men were important, I tell you that even the most seemingly inconsequential help provided one of these little ones, will be immediately noticed and remembered by God!" Who is **one of these little ones**?

1. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 652) sees in the term a Jewish technical term for those who were "still learning the elements of knowledge, and would by and by grow into 'disciples.'"

2. Plummer (*Matthew*, 158), on the other hand, thinks:

That "little one" was a Rabbinical expression for a disciple, is doubtful. Here it seems to mean that the disciples were people of whom the world would not take much account. In comparison with the Prophets and saints of the OT, they would seem to be very insignificant. And their mission was to be short, probably only a few weeks; so they would have no great opportunity of making a name for themselves. It is possible that everywhere (18:6, 10, 14; Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2) "one of these little ones" means "one of my disciples."

3. Lenski (*Matthew*, 423) sees the term as relative to other disciples:

Some of the disciples will not be prominent, even as far as faith and works of faith are concerned. Yet they are disciples, and whoever renders them the least service in connection with their discipleship, recognizing that they are believers in Jesus although among the very least, shall have his reward.

Whether taken in comparison with the Teacher, the great of the world or with other disciples, **one of these little ones** is still among Jesus' brethren (cf. Mt. 25:37, 40), and whatever is done for them is done to Him!

A cup of cold water, while it may seem like so small a service to render a tired man on a hot day, yet was most significant because those who gave it to help a Christian were thereby honoring

his Lord. Some, knowing that the man was a disciple of Jesus, rather than offering even this small service would rather spit on the ground in disgust, refusing to give the time of day to "one of those renegades."

Why did the Lord choose this simple example of useful service? He is using an argument proceeding from the least to the greatest, i.e. almost any help is more than this, yet this too is noticed and rewarded by God. How much more, then, anything greater! Lenski (*Matthew*, 423) has it: "It is not the magnitude of the service that determines the size of the reward, but the motive and its appreciation by the Lord." Consider, by contrast, the sad case of the Pharisees (Mt. 6:2) who sought to gain great reward with God and the praise of men by giving public alms. Whereas Jesus declared them already paid in full ("they have their reward"), hence can expect no more, the Savior here affirms that even a cup of cold water given to an otherwise unknown and quite insignificant disciple of Jesus holds great and imperishable reward!

Verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward. Besides introducing this sentence in His solemn style of emphatic affirmation, the Lord uses most emphatic Greek ("**in no wise**," *ou mē*) to indicate that it is not possible to fail to be rewarded for even this simple act motivated by love and appreciation for Jesus. Anything done for the Master is never insignificant or forgotten by God (Heb. 6:10; 1 Co. 15:58), however remote the benefactor may seem to be from the "right" group, the "right" religious connections or background. (Cf. Mk. 9:38-41!) The Father has no fear, such as we do, that His **rewards** might go to the wrong people, since He knows that the wrong people would not think of His gifts, His salary, His rewards as being worth much to them. More than one wise man has pointed out that even Heaven itself, to an unregenerate, would be worse than Hell. God's richest rewards can be lavished on the unwilling in this life and still be turned down with the whine: "But I expected something else—I don't want that!" So what is wrong with letting this magnanimous promise of Jesus have its widest application possible, including even many non-Christians? Like King Midas of old, the wicked can turn one of God's finest rewards into a curse upon themselves within five minutes when they get their hands on it, if they even cared that much about it. God's gifts are for people who appreciate *spiritual* rewards. From this realization comes three impressive conclusions:

1. Here is motive for profound confidence in the providence of God, for who could seriously wonder about the care of a

God who takes special note of simple gifts like a cup of cold water only? If He is so concerned with elementary service or help such as this when rendered to His people, could He somehow miss their need for food, clothing, shelter and other needs?

2. Here is motive for deep reverence for God: He knows the hearts not only of those who give because the recipient is a disciple, but He reads the heart of the disciple as well!
3. Here is motive for deep gratitude to God for His magnanimous mercy: He leaves His rewards lying around for anyone to claim, saint and sinner alike. His goodness, even to those who do not appreciate it, surpasses our understanding, even if not our gratitude. (Cf. Ro. 2:4)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain how anyone who accepted the message and ministry of the Apostles, was at the same time accepting the will and mercy of God.
2. Explain the meaning of the expression: "in the name of" as used in this text.
3. What, exactly, is the reward coming to anyone who helps a prophet, righteous man or little one among Jesus' disciples?
4. State the declarations in this section that emphasize Jesus' authority.
5. What two special lessons about God arise out of the declaration that "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward"?
6. What is the use Jesus makes of the observation that anyone who receives a prophet or righteous man because they are such, will receive a reward commensurate to that of those whom they help? What literary form does this observation take? What is Jesus' purpose for bringing these two figures into His discourse?
7. How is it possible for Jesus to promise rewards from God to just anyone who helps one of His disciples, and, at the same time, have no fear that unworthy people will be blessed wrongly? What is there about the rewards of God that cause them to go unclaimed by people who have earned them?
8. Who is "one of these little ones"?

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Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE
APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

VI. THE TWELVE APOSTLES DEPART TO
EVANGELIZE (Mark 6:12, 13; Luke 9:6)

Mark 6:12, 13

And they went out and preached that *men* should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Luke 9:6

And they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss miracles: What various kinds of miracles did Jesus work?
- b. Why were miracles wrought? There were several purposes.
- c. Under what circumstances was Jesus willing or unwilling to perform them?
- d. Discuss Jesus' ability or inability to work them at any time or place. Discuss the disciples' limitation in working miracles.
- e. What conditions did Jesus require before He worked a miracle? Did He always require such conditions?
- f. How did the apostles acquire miracle-working power? When did they receive the Holy Spirit?
- g. What miracles did the apostles work (before the cross) and what means did they use?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

So the disciples scattered all over Galilee, going from village to village, telling the good news and urging men to turn from their sins back to God. They cast out many demons and healed sick people everywhere anointing them with olive oil.

SUMMARY

Village after village felt the increasing influence of Jesus' ministry now as six evangelistic teams plus Jesus Himself evangelized. In effect, the Apostles became just that many more "Jesus Christs" calling Galilee to repentance, proving the authority of their message

by giving that supernatural evidence that only God's messengers could give.

NOTES

THE TRIAL FLIGHT A GREAT SUCCESS

Whatever negative effect may have been made upon the Apostles by the ominous warnings and shocking statements in their ordination sermon, Mark paints their courage in bold letters: **"They went out and preached . . . !"** The Lord's frank message, though not promising very much from a human viewpoint, did not deter any of the Apostles from fulfilling the challenge they had taken up. (It was greed, or perhaps a mistaken nationalism, but not fear, that caused Judas Iscariot to turn traitor.) Positively, these words girded the Apostles for vigorous action, stirred them to attack, and equipped them to reach all the objectives Jesus had outlined. This they did during their first mission in Galilee. And they kept going. And the Church of Jesus Christ today is irrefutable evidence that they were so prepared. Is not the Church, despite all her faults, living proof, not only of God's blessing upon her, but also the concrete demonstration that these Twelve believed, worked, sorrowed, courageously endured and magnificently produced? Even still more amazing is the observation that after the post-ascension prayer meeting (Ac. 1:13, 14), we never hear of more than half of them by name again. But that these men labored, the entire Church's existence is eloquent testimony. The immediateness of their victory stands out in sharp relief against their apparent total lack of qualifications. Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, 34, 35) sensed this:

What hopeless nobodies the twelve disciples were! They were the least promising material Jesus could have picked. Everything was stacked against their ever accomplishing anything. A roll call of nonentities, this aggregation was hardly the type anyone would depend upon, especially for such serious responsibilities as God demands. Among them there was little prestige, wealth, power or education.

So it was Jesus that made the difference. They KNEW no message, no lordship, no power, no direction but His. Bruce (*Training*, 99) explains:

The disciples could do no more than proclaim the fact that the kingdom was at hand, and bid men everywhere repent, by way of preparation for its advent. This was really all

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they knew themselves. They did not as yet understand, in the least degree, the doctrine of the cross; they did not even know the nature of the Kingdom. They had, indeed, heard their Master discourse profoundly thereon, but they had not comprehended His words. Their ideas respecting the coming kingdom were nearly as crude and carnal as were those of other Jews, who looked for the restoration of Israel's political independence and temporal prosperity as in the glorious days of old. In one point only were they in advance of current notions: they had learned from John and from Jesus that repentance was necessary in order to citizenship in this kingdom. . . . Far from wondering, therefore, that the preaching program of the disciples was so limited, we are rather tempted to wonder how Christ could trust them to open their mouths at all, even on the one topic of the kingdom.

At this point it is a proper question whether the Apostles understood even this message of Jesus just preached (Mt. 10:1—11:1). If their prejudices were very deep-rooted, regarding the nature of the Kingdom and of the Messiahship of Jesus, how could they have grasped the full import of their own ordination sermon? It may well be that they did not comprehend it perfectly before the facts or the experiences alluded to in the message were fulfilled, even as a prophecy is somewhat unclear prior to its undoubted fulfilment. Bruce (*Training*, 115) shows his usual, sensitive comprehension when he notes:

It was a rare, unexampled discourse, strange to the ears of us moderns, who can hardly imagine such stern requirements being seriously made, not to say exactly complied with. . . . It is a mountain at which we gaze in wonder from a position far below; hardly dreaming of climbing to its summit. Some noble ones, however, have made the arduous ascent; and among these the first place of honor must be assigned to the chosen companions of Jesus.

And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. (Mk. 6:13) . . . healing everywhere. (Lk. 9:6) Does miracle-working power always depend upon the obvious presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to the extent that people may conclude that miracles are a necessary demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence? No, because the Apostles

obviously worked miracles before the official giving of the Holy Spirit. This mission occurred six months at least before Jesus' declaration regarding the Spirit's influence and power in the of the believer. (Cf. Jn. 7:38, 39) Jesus' authority and power was, of course, that of the Holy Spirit in Him, but in the total absence of any reference to the influence or presence of the Holy Spirit at this point, and in agreement with a specific declaration that Jesus conferred power upon His men (10:1), we must conclude that the power exercised by the Apostles is Jesus' personal working in them. Bruce (*Training*, 99) agrees:

All the miracles wrought by the twelve were really wrought by Jesus Himself, their sole function consisting in making a believing use of His name. This seems to be perfectly understood by all; for the works done by the apostles did not lead the people of Galilee to wonder who they were, but only who and what He was in whose name all these things were done.

Mk. 6:14: "King Herod heard of it; for Jesus' name had become known." See also Mt. 14:1 and Lk. 9:7.

Did the Apostles work miracles after this mission and before Pentecost? Apparently not when they were with Jesus. Peter walked on water, but Jesus was present. Peter fished up a fish with a coin in its mouth, but though Jesus was absent, this was His miracle, not Peter's. Later, the Seventy worked signs and wonders upon commission from Jesus, while away from Him. So also the unknown miracle worker (Mk. 9:38-40). The fact that they did no more than this seems to indicate that they

1. lacked occasion to work miracles,
 - a. either because Jesus was physically present with them,
 - b. or because they were not sent on other missions than those mentioned:
2. or else, when Jesus was absent, they themselves lacked the necessary faith. (Cf. Mt. 17:19, 20)

They anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. What does oil have to do with the Apostles' miracles of healing?

1. Some suggest that the oil was curative, used as medicine. (Cf. Lk. 10:34) But this is not a likely interpretation here, since the purpose of the act of healing was to identify the Apostles as messengers of God, supernaturally accredited by the miracles. The supernaturalness of the healing would

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certainly be discounted if the **oil** used were thought, by those upon who it were used, to be common medicine.

2. **Oil** was also in personal body comfort, much as hair oils, bath oils, hand and face creams are used today. (Cf. 2 Sam. 12:20; Mt. 6:16, 17; Lk. 7:46) Why would this be significant here? If we assume that the sick person had let these comforts go during the course of his illness, then for him to permit himself to be **anointed with oil** preparatory to going back to normal life, as if the miracle were already worked, this would be a challenge to his faith in the power of the Apostles to heal him. Seeing the sick person's faith thus demonstrated in his willingness to be anointed, the Apostles then healed them supernaturally with no recourse or connection with the oil. Note that Mark seems to separate the two actions: (1) they **anointed with oil . . .** and then they (2) **healed them**, a fact which agrees with this latter conclusion.

Even if the anointing with oil should be seen as a mechanical method more directly connected with the healing than is suggested in this second interpretation, nevertheless the justification for their use of such a method is found in the fact that Jesus Himself used several different "methods," probably to show clearly that the power is not in the method, but in the Lord Himself. (Cf. Jn. 9:6, 7; Mk. 8:22-25; Lk. 17:14, etc.)

On the general subject of anointing with oil done by Christians later (Jas. 5:14-16), there remains the problem of application: whether James' exhortation speaks to all ages of the Church, or only to first-century churches that had miracle-working elders, or whether ANY faithful person should anoint the sick with oil, praying with faith and so expect God's miraculous healing. (On the general problem of miracles, of which anointing the sick with oil is but one illustration, see the Special Study on the Miracles, included at the conclusion of chapter nine.)

What was the effect of this mission? For final notes on this evangelistic tour, see on Mt. 14:1, 13. Bruce (*Training*, 101) astutely observes that "in quality the results of the mission appear to have been much less satisfactory than in their extent." He goes on to point out that shortly after this mission in Galilee, Galileans themselves left Christ almost in a body,

scandalized by His mysterious doctrine. Those who did this were for the most part, just the men who had listened to the

twelve while they preached repentance. Such an issue to a benevolent undertaking must have been deeply disappointing to the heart of Jesus. Yet it is remarkable that the comparative abortiveness of the first evangelistic movement did not prevent Him from repeating the experiment some time after on a still more extensive scale. (Lk. 10:1)

What is the effect of this message and this mission on us? Lewis and Booth (*PHC*, 258, 259) would have us note:

1. The points of resemblance between us and them. In their measure all true disciples are in a similar position with these. They have the same Master above them, the same deposit entrusted to them, the same duty in regard to it, the same choice and the same difficulties before them, the same assurances to support them. . . .

(To this, Barclay [*Matthew*, I, 367] would add: "They were very ordinary men. . . . Jesus is looking, not so much for extraordinary men, as for ordinary men who can do ordinary things extraordinarily well. . . . [As a group] they were the most extraordinary mixture.")

2. The points of difference. When the Apostles thus went forth to their work with their lives in their hands, they went forth to a forlorn hope in the eyes of the world. We in our day and in this respect, are not called to the same. We have the benefit of both their example and experience, and that of the generations like them till now. All the greater, therefore, would be our disgrace if we were to hang back. Every disciple is not expected to lead like these first; but no disciple can expect to be called a disciple if he "does not follow when led."

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is there any evidence in this section or any hint in Matthew 10 regarding the length of this ministry performed by the Apostles in Galilee?
2. What is the significance of the mention of the Apostles' "authority over unclean spirits"? (According to Mt. 10:1, 8; Mk. 6:7, 13; Lk. 9:1)
3. What is the special evidence of Jesus' divine nature and authority revealed in this little section?
4. What is the purpose for the anointing with oil in relation to

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healing of the sick? What other NT passages speak of anointing with oil?

5. What was the obvious source of the Apostles' miracle-working power? Who gave them this power?
6. Did Judas Iscariot work miracles? Did Peter? What does your answer to these questions reveal about the nature of miracle workers in general, who do real miracles but whose life is all but perfect? Does the fact that a man works miracles indicate that God approves of his message and his life? How do you distinguish between those miracle workers sent by God and those miracle workers who will one day be rejected by Jesus at the great judgment? (See Mt. 7:21-23)
7. Did the Apostles work any miracles after this mission in Galilee during the ministry of Jesus before He ascended to heaven? If so, when?
8. Does miracle-working power depend upon the special baptism of the Holy Spirit in the life of the miracle worker? That is, are miracles necessarily a special demonstration of the presence and working of God's Holy Spirit?
9. Summarize what the Apostles actually accomplished during this evangelistic tour.
10. What does the fact, that Jesus empowered such men as Judas and Peter, to work miracles and preach the Gospel, tell us about His confidence (1) in the message He would have them preach; (2) in the men themselves? That is, what do we learn about Jesus from the fact that He was willing to entrust such men with such a message?

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

VII. JESUS ALSO GOES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

TEXT: 11:1

1. And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Jesus Himself go alone, whereas He had sent the Twelve out in pairs?
- b. What do you think Matthew intends to say about the material that immediately precedes this verse, by affirming, "When Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples"? What does this say about the unity of the discourse that precedes this statement?
- c. What is the fundamental difference between the methods of "teaching" and "preaching" in which Jesus engaged?
- d. What psychological effect on the Twelve would the knowledge make, that Jesus, too, is engaged in the same effort as they?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At the conclusion of His instructions, Jesus sent the Twelve Apostles two by two to evangelize Galilee. Then He too set out, on a mission of instruction and gospel proclamation throughout the cities.

NOTES

11:1 **And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples . . .** Thus Matthew draws to a definite close the ordination discourse of the Twelve. Though some feel that Matthew took bits and pieces of other sermons and wove them into the fabric of this message, thus taking great liberties and badly mixing time elements, nevertheless, let it be remembered that Matthew heard the sermon. The modern arm-chair critics did not. (See Introduction to Chapter 10 for fuller notes.) **His twelve disciples**, though now fledgling Apostles with all the power and authority that this grand title implies, they are still and must always be **disciples**, even to be true to their high mission as apostles. Ironically, it was when Judas stopped being a **disciple** that he forfeited all that his apostleship should have meant. What a lesson to us: we never get beyond being **disciples** of the Lord, however great our gifts, however long our service, however vast our knowledge. When we do think we have grown past that point, all of God's gifts in us, intended "for disciples only," will be warped as we try to press them into our own service. It is only in character as **disciples** whose minds are ever open to whatever the Lord reveals, whose will is submitted to His discipleship, that any of us, Apostles or not, are able to be of any use to the Master.

He departed thence to teach and preach in their cities. Having commissioned and empowered His Twelve disciples and divided them into six teams of two workers each, Jesus Himself goes to work on another front, thus making seven evangelistic thrusts in Galilee. Because the Apostles preached His message, shared His ministry, worked His miracles, and copied His manners, in a sense it may be said that they became twelve more Jesus Christs to confront the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" with the tender appeals of the Good Shepherd Himself. Good leadership, as Jesus here demonstrates, does not consist in doing the work of twelve men Himself, but in getting the twelve men to work. Recall his procedure:

1. He shared with all His closer disciples His vision of the task that lay before them. (9:36, 37)
2. He involved them personally in praying about the need for more workers. (9:38)
3. He then chose the most ready among His many travel companions who had known Him, followed Him and already had some experience observing His *modus operandi*. (10:2-4)
4. He empowered them adequately to accomplish all He required of them. (10:1)
5. He explained carefully how they were to proceed and what they might expect. (10:5-15)
6. He gave them a general survey of the long-range direction and purpose of their work, so they might see the specific importance of their immediate tasks. (10:16-39)
7. He gave them hope of succeeding brilliantly despite temporary and seemingly impossible setbacks. (10:40-42)
8. Last, but not at all least, He worked alongside them, not content to be ministered to even in this way. There is no little comfort and encouragement in the knowledge that "Jesus is just over in the next town working at the same task, facing the same hardships, preaching the same message, as we are here!"

It is evident that Jesus did not work in the same villages at the same time as any of the apostolic teams, because both Mark (6:30) and Luke (9:10) signal a definite coming back together as if by appointment. Even without this proof, we could still arrive at the same point, since it would be psychologically crippling to the Apostles' learning process if Jesus had been physically present during any of the presentations of His message, since it would have made

so much more sense to them to let Him do the preaching and, reasonably, receive all the attention. Tactically, too, it would be a mistake, since He would be needlessly duplicating effort in every village where His physical presence overshadowed the evangelistic efforts of the two Apostles trying to labor there. It is more likely to conclude that, once the Twelve had been sent forth, Jesus did not intend to meet any of them again until they convened at a prearranged point sometime near Passover time. Further, He had given the instructions in this discourse what to do if persecuted, so He did not need to rescue them from difficulty. (See notes on 10:23 on "till the Son of man be come.") Also, if there was a prearranged appointment, there was no need to recall them in from their labors for rest.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus do while the Apostles were busy evangelizing Galilee?
2. What was the practical effect of Jesus' sending out the Twelve in teams of two each and then going out Himself to labor in other towns?
3. What emotional effect would be produced on the Apostles themselves by the knowledge that Jesus, too, is working alongside them in other towns?
4. On what basis do we decide here that Jesus did not work in the same towns at the same time as the Apostles themselves visited them?

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

Matthew 10

Who said the following statements? On what occasion? To whom? Why did they say it? What did they mean? Are there parallel passages? variant manuscript readings? important variant translations? Are there any problems of interpretation? How or to what extent should we apply it to our lives?

1. "Get you no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor *shoes*, nor *staff*."
2. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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3. "If the house be worthy let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you."
4. "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
5. "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come."
6. "For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."
7. "... rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
8. "I came not to send peace, but a sword."
9. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher. . . ."
10. "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city."
11. "He that receiveth you receiveth me. . . ."

SPECIAL STUDY

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Cryptic statements keep cropping up in the Gospels, which speak of a coming of Jesus in His glory during the lifetime of that generation in which the Apostles lived. At first reading, one would think, however, that such notices would be interpreted with primary reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of this age of the world. In fact, some commentators have accused the early Christians, notably Paul, of "mistakenly expecting the imminent return of Christ in his own era, whereas that event has not yet taken place."

On the other hand, there are intriguing coincidences and factors that present quite another picture of Christian eschatology in the first century. Some of the points to be noticed are the following:

1. It is generally presumed that Paul died around 67 or 68 A.D., thus prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the virtual end of the Jewish state. Thus, his references to the coming glorification of Christ during his own lifetime might be affected in part by this fact. This same observation would be generally true of most of the other writing Apostles or Evangelists, except John, if our present state of information (or ignorance) be any indication. In the cases where we have no definite dates for the death of the NT writers, it becomes necessary to depend upon their last message which expresses their views. For this reason we must found our under-

CHAPTER TEN

standing of their doctrine on the best information available to us regarding the date of their writings that have come down to us. While there is by no means unanimity of opinion among scholars about the dating of each NT book, there is reasonably general agreement that all but the Johannine books were written prior to 70 A.D. (See critical introductions to individual books in encyclopedic articles, e.g. *ISBE*, as well as the formal critical introductions to the NT and its books, for delineation of the traditional datings as well as the problems and arguments for dates after 70 A.D.)

2. While the coming of Christ back to earth in the person of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-28) was to be an event with world-shaking consequences, yet the actual narrations of the activity of the Holy Spirit, that was witnessed from the day of pentecost onward until the conclusion of the history included in the NT, do not exhaust all the meaning of those passages which speak of a glorious appearing of the Lord in the lifetime of the Twelve. Nor yet do the strictly Pentecostal manifestations of the coming of the Spirit exhaust the prophecy of Joel (2:28-32) cited by Peter (Ac. 2:16-21; see below on this text.) Those texts which seem to describe a first-century "coming of the Son of man" seem to be picturing an event which is to occur following, but not immediately connected with, the glorious establishment of Christ's Kingdom in its visible manifestation as the Church. Nor yet are these passages especially connected with the final appearance of the Lord at the end of this age. (See below on Mt. 16:28.)
3. A third suggestion is here offered, but not adequately defined, with respect to the Apocalypse of John. It cannot be dealt with adequately here, and must be offered only as a suggestive comment to stimulate further research, since it is not the purpose of this article to deal with all the problems that arise in the interpretation of that book. However, the thorough treatment of this important subject would demand that this exegesis of John's Revelation be made, before any certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the coming of the Son of man. This is true especially if the apocalyptic methodology of Revelation in any way touches that period covering the lifetime of the Apostles. (See below on VI, VII.)

The visions of the Revelation are specifically called "apocalyptic," (from *apokalypsis*, Rev. 1:1). It would there-

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fore be expected that THIS Apocalypse share something of the nature of apocalyptic literature, with the single exception that this Apocalypse, as opposed to all others, is inspired by Jesus' direct revelation of the visions John saw. J.E.H. Thompson (*ISBE*, 161-178) describes the character of apocalypses as a literary method, contrasting this with the method of prophetic books.

Both in matter and form apocalyptic literature and the writings associated with it differ from the prophetic writings of the preceding periods . . . while the predictive element is present in Apocalypses, as in Prophecy, it is more prominent and relates to longer periods and involves a wider grasp of the state of the world at large. Apocalypse could only have been possible under the domination of the great empires. Alike in Prophecy and in Apocalypse there is reference to the coming of the Messiah, but in the latter not only is the Messianic hope more defined, it has a wider reference. In the Prophets and Psalmists the Messiah had mainly to do with Israel. . . . In the Apocalypses the imperial outlook is prominent, beginning with Daniel in which we find the Messianic kingdom represented by a "son of man" over against the bestial empires that had preceded (Dnl. 7:13) and reaching the acme of Apocalypse, if not its conclusion in the Revelation of St. John: "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). While the prophet was primarily a preacher of righteousness and used prediction either as a guarantee, by its fulfilment of his Divine mission, or as an exhibition of the natural result of rebellion against God's righteous laws, to the Apocalypticist prediction was the thing of most importance, and in the more typical Apocalypse there is no moral exhortation whatever. . . . In the literary form employed there are marked differences between Apocalyptic and Prophecy. Both make use of vision, but in Prophecy, in the more restricted sense of the word, these visions are as a rule implied, rather than being described. . . . In the case of the Apocalypses the vision is the vehicle

by which the prediction is conveyed. . . . In (Prophecy) the symbols used are natural, not, as always in Apocalypses, arbitrary . . . (In Apocalypses) there is no natural reason for the changes that take place, only a symbolical one. . . . The apocalyptists always used pure prose, without the elaborate parallelism or cadenced diction of Hebrew poetry. The weird, the gorgeous, or the terrible features of the vision described are thrown into all the higher relief by the baldness of the narrative. . . . (Of the works entitled Apocalyptic) they all claim to be revelations of the future—a future which begins, however, from the days of some ancient saint—and then, passing over the time of its actual composition, ends with the coming of the Messiah, the setting up of the Messianic kingdom and the end of the world. There are others . . . in which the revelation avowedly looks back, and which thus contain an amount of legendary matter.

While the Revelation is both epistolary with regard to its readers and prophecy in its essential spirit and message, it is an apocalypse with respect to its contents. "The Revelation honors apocalyptic methodology but makes it subserve genuine prophecy." (Harrison, *Introductions*, 431)

Thus, while this use of John's Revelation to discuss events prior to its actual composition during the reign of Domitian during John's exile to Patmos (c. 96 A.D.) would perhaps raise objections, since the book is also confessedly a prophecy (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:6, 7, 18, 19) regarding things that "must soon take place," i.e. after the writing of the book itself (cf. Rev. 1:1, 19; 4:1; 22:6, 7), yet if it be assumed that John's Revelation partook of the literary form of other apocalyptic books, a form which enclosed within its cosmic sweep the writing of history to show some purpose of God seen in the sequence of events, as well as to predict the future, then this objection would have less force. The Revelation could conceivably describe some events prior to, during, and after, the beginning of the Church, the early evangelization, the persecutions, the Jewish War, the destruction of Jerusalem and proceed right on to picture those elements signalling the beginning of the fall of the Roman empire and look out into the distant future to the end of

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time. It remains then, a matter of careful exegesis both of the relative Bible texts involved, as well as a careful reading of history, to determine whether or not this is, in fact, the case.

Besides the foregoing, there are a number of Matthean texts, which seem to picture the coming of the Son of man in judgment upon the Jewish nation during the lifetime of the Apostles.

- I. **"When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes."** (Mt. 10:23)

At first glance, it would seem that Jesus is speaking here of His following up the advance preparation for His coming made by the disciples. In this case, they would merely have gone ahead of Him as an advance advertising committee, in order to assure Him a large interest and popularity in the cities of Israel. Then the point of this exhortation would be haste, since it would be impossible to cover all the Jewish cities before Jesus Himself arrived. But the very context of this solemn admonition demands a graver explanation, more harmonious with the immediate context itself and with the subsequent events. The assumption here is that Jesus' discourse in Matthew 10 is one entire message delivered on the same occasion. (See arguments in the Introduction to chapter 10.)

1. The context, as well as the verse itself, describes fearful persecutions and harrassment by both religious and political rulers, incomprehension within the families of His disciples, universal hatred of Jesus' followers, leadership of the Holy Spirit, betrayals to death and, finally, the necessity to flee, faithful endurance and open confession of allegiance to Jesus in face of certain death.
2. Further, the paragraph in which this admonition is found (Mt. 10:16-23) is itself repeated in the great discourse concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). Interestingly, though Mark and Luke both record without significant variations these words contained in Matthew 10:16-23, Matthew himself, while recording the prophetic discourse in his 24th chapter, does not repeat this paragraph. Instead, he limits himself to a couple of summary sentences that are necessary for the connection of thought. Though some would give another explanation to this phenomenon, we believe that Matthew deliberately omitted to

repeat this particular material (even though he does repeat some other obviously repeated events and sayings of Jesus elsewhere), not only because he had recorded this sermon in chapter 10. He probably omitted the repetition of this material (10:16-23) because he intended to develop the theme of moral preparation required for the great cataclysmic events. This is a hypothesis developed, of course, from what he actually did. (Cf. Mt. 24:37—25:46) By contrast, Mark and Luke, who neither one had recorded this complete discourse in one place (however, see Luke 12:2-12), give their testimony regarding Jesus' great prophetic discourse and omit, or greatly abbreviate, the material Matthew includes on watchful preparation. The point is, of course, that Jesus intended for this material (i.e. Mt. 10:16-23) to be understood primarily in the framework of that period following His ascension into heaven and not in connection with the early efforts at evangelization by the Apostles or the Seventy.

3. Subsequent events in the ministry of the Apostles themselves as they labored under the limited commission (Mt. 10:5-15) until they were reassembled (Mt. 6:30; Lk. 9:10), indicate no such difficulties as are here pictured. This indication is based solely on the information about the Apostles transmitted to us in the four Gospels. If they did in fact encounter persecutions prior to Jesus' crucifixion, we cannot know about it.

But lest Jesus be accused of exaggerating the trials to which the Apostles would be subjected, let it be remembered that Jesus is fully justified in preparing His men in exactly this fashion, since they must face, from the very first of their own ministry, the stubborn reality of opposition to the truth they must preach. Whether this opposition began soon or later should make no difference to them: they must steel themselves for its eventual arrival. The appropriateness of Jesus' warnings during His first commission is seen in the fact that He sends them out fully prepared for whatever may come, even if the worst does not appear until much later when intransigent opposition to Jesus Himself will have hardened and expressed itself in His crucifixion. Psychologically, His men will have already been inured to trouble by His many previous warnings and by their own personal

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experiences in the field when not under His direct supervision.

While the Apostles did not have to face the pictured trials during their early missions, they certainly did have to meet them later. And to deflate any tendency to overconfidence based upon the seemingly overwhelming successes of their first missions, Jesus repeated these warnings in His great prophetic discourse (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21) just two months before He sent them out to evangelize the entire world. At THAT time they would begin to grasp the significance behind those cryptic words uttered earlier (Mt.10:23).

It is obvious, therefore, that the "coming of the Son of man" must have a direct relationship to the ministry of the Apostles AT SUCH TIME AS THEY ACTUALLY FACED THE PERSECUTIONS AND CONSEQUENT NECESSITY TO FLEE pictured in this text. Since they apparently faced the trials and difficulties, that Jesus describes, only after Pentecost and before their own deaths, which, in the case of most of them, occurred before 70 A.D., if tradition may be relied upon to furnish the dates, "the coming of the Son of man" must have some reference to that period. This "coming of the Son of man" must have relationship also to the "cities of Israel," and not to the world in general. The beginning of the end of those "cities of Israel" as a corporate, national entity, can be dated about the same time as the disastrous Jewish War (66-70 A.D.), even though the final, bitter end did not come until the devastations by the Romans after the uprising of Bar-Cochba (132-135 A.D.) Morgan (*Matthew*, 106) poses the intriguing query:

Who shall say that in His Personal Form He did not guide the Roman legions as they took Jerusalem? It is quite certain that there can be no explanation of the coming of the Son of Man in this case except in the sense of judgment. His coming at the fall of Jerusalem, ended the cities of Israel, and this accounted for His urgency and haste in driving His apostles out to tell the story of the King and the Kingdom.

While it is somewhat inexact to say that the "cities of Israel," meaning the existing villages and towns, came to an end with the fall of Jerusalem, yet "the national identity of Judaism was completely and forever lost. The last two institutions of their distinctly national life, the Sanhedrin and the sacrifice, were abolished, never to reappear." (Dana, *NT World*, 105) "Judaism persisted as a religion, but dis-

associated from any political organization or state." (Tenney, *NT Times*, 307)

The above considerations strongly suggest that Jesus intended to intimate to His Apostles that His coming would take place during that period of their ministry in which (1) they faced terrible persecutions; (2) while there were yet in existence the "cities of Israel;" and (3), in some connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the state of Israel.

II. **"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom."** (Mt. 16:28)

Needless to say, this verse and its parallels must be considered apart from the verses preceding (i.e. Mt. 16:27; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26), which describe the second coming of Jesus in judgment of the whole world, an event which none of the Apostles lived to see, since this has not yet occurred. Therefore, what Jesus intends by the declaration in question has nothing to do with His return to earth at the end of this age: there are two specific events clearly before His mind.

A quick comparison of the parallel texts of this same saying reveals all Jesus said at that moment:

Mt. 16:28

Mk. 9:1

Lk. 9:27

	And he said to them,	
"Truly, I say to you,	"Truly, I say to you,	"But I tell you truly,
there are some stand-	there are some stand-	there are some stand-
ing here	ing here	ing here
who will not taste	who will not taste	who will not taste of
death before they see	death before they see	death before they see
the Son of man coming	the kingdom of God	the kingdom of God."
in his kingdom."	come with power."	

This glorious coming of the Son of man, within the lifetime of the Apostles, which is seen as a manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ and God, is susceptible of application to those events later described as the coming of Christ's Kingdom with power. It is important to remember the larger context of this declaration is the promise that Jesus would establish His Church, an event for which He promised Peter the keys of "the Kingdom." This event obviously began to occur on Pentecost 30 A.D. But this latter fact by no means signifies that the complete fulfilment of Jesus' promise, that the Apostles would live to see His coming in His kingdom, occurred only on that

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day and did not also find fulfilment in events even after that date which continued to establish the obvious rule of Christ.

The coming of the Kingdom of God with power from God certainly took place and visibly on the first Pentecost after Jesus' ascension into heaven. (Lk. 24:49; Ac. 1:3, 8; 2:1-47) But despite the marvellous manifestation of God's power by means of the visible and audible demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's presence, obvious to all then present in Jerusalem, this did not signal the public, definitive and final repudiation of the Jewish nation by God nor the end of the theocracy. The Jewish nation and religion continued on a "business-as-usual" basis at least for another forty years, during which time even the Jewish Christians maintained relatively close relations with the Temple and its rites. (Cf. Ac. 21:20b-26) While the Church actually came into existence and preached its message, yet the full vindication of Christ's claims and the tangible evidence of God's rule (Kingdom) were not so clearly seen until the permanent destruction of Jerusalem as the effective center of Judaism and the total collapse of the Temple and its ministry took place.

But if Jesus' promise (Mt. 16:28) be thought to refer to Pentecost, the spread of Christianity or the internal development of the Gospel in the life of the Church, it is necessary to point out that Jesus does not comfort all of His Apostles by affirming that they would *all* live to see these glorious expressions of God's Kingdom. Rather, "there are some standing here." (*eisín times*: all Synoptics) This limitation, as Plummer (*Luke*, 250) notes, "implies the exceptional privilege of some, as distinct from the common experience of all," and provides a test regarding the time meant, a test that excludes Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, at least, as the first or primary reference of this prophecy. This, because all the Apostles and most of Jesus' disciples lived to see those great events, while that to which Jesus now makes reference was to be the exceptional privilege of only John and perhaps a few others of those present who lived to witness the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which signalled the end of the old dispensation and left the Church of Christ fully vindicated and identified as the only bearer of the divine oracles.

It is revealing in this connection to recall that Jesus promised that the very generation of which He was a part would live to see the fulfilment of His prophecy would be desecrated after a disastrous war. The things which took place at that time Jesus describes as the nearing of "the kingdom of God." (Lk. 21:31, 32; cf. Mt. 24:33, 34; Mk. 13:29, 30) But this latter prophecy cannot in any sense refer

to the beginnings of the Church but has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem.

In order, therefore, to concede as much as possible to those who view Jesus' prophecies that His death would not hinder the establishment of the Church and that, rather, some of those then present would live to see Him come in His Kingdom with power, as having some reference to the establishment of the Church, let us admit that the fulfilment of Jesus' words may have included that. But it is urgent that we recall that the Kingdom of God and Christ is always greater than the Church and includes it. It is never exact to say that the Kingdom equals the Church and vice versa. It is better to define the Kingdom as "the Government of God, the dominion of His laws." The Church is that group of people who willingly submit themselves to God's Kingdom. But there are millions of people who still fall under the rule of God who neither accept that dominion nor are members of the Church. Therefore God's Kingdom includes within its sphere of influence all the wicked, and any time God wants to make His powerful rule felt, by bringing swift punishment upon them, He can and He does. This He did in the lifetime of the Apostles and in that generation of Jews by giving sudden, shocking but deserved punishment to those who had rejected Jesus. While this was not specifically a revelation of His Church (although the Church was revealed as the authentic bearer of the divine oracles of God and finally freed from the vestigial shackles of Judaism), it was a definitive revelation of God's Government, or, the Kingdom of God.

If we have correctly understood Jesus' meaning in this text, then, according to the exact wording of Mt. 16:28, this entire revelation of the Kingdom of God is to be spoken of as "the coming of the Son of man."

III. "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it." (Mt. 21:43)

While this passage does not speak directly of a coming of the Son of man during the generation of His earthly sojourn, its reference to the transfer of the Kingdom of God is most appropriate and interesting. Coming as it does at the conclusion of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and specifically stated as its outcome, it clarifies the entire point of the parable and sheds light on some of its terms. The historical moment suggested within the parable itself, when the Kingdom of God would be conspicuously taken from the Jews who had rejected Jesus and the messages of all the prophets,

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and turned over to another group that would produce the results God intended, is precisely when the Lord of the vineyard comes to His vineyard to put those wretches to a miserable death. At that historical juncture, the Kingdom of God will manifestly become the sole responsibility of a separate group of people. At exactly this point in the narrative (Mt. 21:44; Lk. 20:18) the Lord summarizes two prophecies that describe the menace to the wicked represented by the Messiah Himself. (Cf. Psa. 118:22, 23; Isa. 8:14, 15; Dan. 2:34, 35, 44) He Himself is such a menace, for He is the Stone upon which those, who do not see Him for what He is, break themselves; He it is who will fall upon Israel to crush that wicked nation.

Should it be objected that the coming of the Lord of the Vineyard, to be true to the figure of the parable, refers to God, not to the Son who was cast out of the vineyard dead, it must be recalled that (1) the parable could go only so far in describing the reality without inserting the specific information that "the Son then arose from the dead and reentered the vineyard, destroyed those wicked husbandmen, etc. . ." It was Jesus' purpose, obvious from what He actually did say, to evoke a moral judgment from His hearers' sense of right. It was not His purpose to shock their minds with the resurrection, a point actually unnecessary to carry His meaning. (2) The identification of the Lord of the vineyard with His Son is certainly possible, once we understand the unique character of Jesus' relationship to the Father.

IV. **"The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."** (Mt. 22:7)

The parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Mt. 22:1-14) covers exactly the same ground as the preceding one (Mt. 21:33-46), with but one major advance in thought. The two parables have two common sections:

<i>The Wicked Husbandmen</i>	<i>The Marriage of the King's Son</i>
1. God's dealing with Israel (Mt. 21:33-41a)	1. God's dealings with Israel (Mt. 22:2-7)
2. God's dealings with the Gentiles (21:41b-43)	2. God's dealings with the Gentiles (22:8-10)
	3. God's dealings with individual Christians (22:11-14)

Notice that the turning point between the first and second sections of both parables is the same and significant for our purpose here: after

God had sent many messengers to those who had a covenant with Him, i.e. those who were His subjects, and after these had rejected His longsuffering mercy, He visited judgment upon them, taking away their rights, their privileged position as His subjects. What He had intended for their blessing, He immediately turned over to others who would appreciate His bounty. A closer look at the key verse, which marks the transfer, shows that in this latter parable Jesus bares the method by which God would put those ungrateful wretches to a miserable death: He would use troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. While it may be fairly objected that this detail is but part of the scenery of the parable, necessary to its comprehension but not to be taken literally, it is worthy of note that the literal interpretation of this detail does find an exact fulfilment of Jesus' words when in 70 A.D. the Roman Tenth Legion under Titus battered and burned Jerusalem to the ground.

Further, after the removal of those murderers who spurned God's grace, God throws open the invitation to enjoy His blessings to "just any and everybody," in contrast to those who thought they had most right to them, since they had been invited and should have been prepared. At a particular point in Jewish history this great transfer took place: God's army shattered Jewish nationalism for centuries to come, releasing the Church from any further relationship to Judaism, permitting the world to see the universal character of the Church made up of believing Jews and Gentiles.

In light of these two parables, it is not surprising to hear the Master finish describing the true signs, which precede the destruction of Jerusalem, by mentioning the disastrous war in which "this people will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Lk. 21:23, 24) In literal language He predicts the character of the age to follow that of Jewish opportunity: it shall be a Gentile age. Not only would God use Gentiles to initiate the period by punishing the Jews, but the period would be one of gracious opportunity for the conversion of the Gentiles.

V. **"Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"**
(Mt. 23:38, 39)

These heart-broken words of the rejected Messiah were spoken at a point in Jesus' last week in Jerusalem that is important to note

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and probably surprising to some: they were pronounced AFTER the Triumphal Entry (Mt. 21:1-11). Notwithstanding the certainty that He had already pronounced the same lament regarding Jerusalem the killer of prophets (see Lk. 13:31-35), since it is uttered here at the conclusion of Jesus' exposure of the true character of the corrupt leaders of Judaism whose sins defied Divine Justice, this dark warning becomes the sad farewell of Israel's truest Patriot as well as the solemn sentence pronounced by Israel's true Judge. The obvious import of His words announces the desolation and abandonment of "your house." Whether this "house" is to be understood with reference to the Temple, to the city of Jerusalem (see Plummer, *Matthew*, 325), or to the people of Israel ("the house of Israel"), makes no fundamental difference, since they were to be desolated together. Should it be asked when this national disaster would occur, the context of this lament provides the general time-period: "Upon you (will) come all the righteous blood shed on earth . . . all this will come upon this generation." (Mt. 23:35, 36) That the expression "Generation" is to be taken in its literal, usual sense, and not broadly defined to mean "this race or nation," will be noted later on Mt. 24:34, where the meaning is the same.

The point to notice in this warning is Jesus' cryptic prediction that that generation of wicked, unbelieving Jews would certainly live to see the day when He would appear to them under quite other circumstances than those under which they had brutally rejected Him Who was God's last offer of mercy. But such an appearance does not necessitate a personal visible coming, such as He will make visible to all at the end of the world (cf. Mt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7), but rather a coming in judgment upon Palestine. Should it be objected that "You will not see me until . . ." signifies "You will see me after . . ." i.e. that this coming to Israel must be visible to the naked eye, we would respond that it was not a visible personal coming to which Jesus referred when He promised His disciples that they too would live to "see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom." (Mt. 16:28)

Further, Jesus would be hidden, from the then living generation, in a certain sense and for a certain period of time which He describes as "not . . . until you say, 'Blessed be He . . .'" Some feel that this pictures a future conversion of the Jews. If so, this suggestion, in effect, becomes equivalent to saying: "You will truly see me for what I am: your Messiah, when you can join your voices to those who recently acclaimed me their Christ during the Triumphal Entry three days ago." That is, when the Jews were individually converted to

Him, they would be able to take up this welcome. However, rather than promising any future wholesale conversion of Israel, according to some millennial theories, this is a threat! "I hereby leave your house desolate. You must preserve as best you can this city and Temple which have been under Divine protection until now. You will never see me again as your Messiah, until you yourselves can take up the joyous welcome to me. My mission to you as your Savior is finished. What I have said and done for you should have been enough to convert you. From now on I personally will not disturb you. If you wish to be taught and saved by me, the initiative must come from you." This interpretation is possible, but there is another emphasis that can also be harmonized with the judgment Jesus pronounced upon the Hebrew nation: "You will not see me again until that moment when I bring devastating punishment upon the house and nation of Israel. In that horrible moment from you will be wrung that cry, that confession, now willingly owned by others, for which you would even this week crucify me! I will come again in judgment and this generation will see it and acknowledge that I was truly the Messiah, but then it will be too late." Jesus has nothing to say about the willingness of those who thus make the cry He predicts. (Cf. similar cases; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13; 6:12-27; Ro. 14:11)

Since the day of grace was not yet completely over for Jerusalem and since Pentecost was yet future, some Jews actually did repent and see Jesus as Messiah, as witnessed in the book of Acts, but by no means all of them did so. This simple decision separated the obdurate from the obedient.

If we have understood this text correctly, Jesus is predicting a moment when He Himself would return during that generation, a time when Judaism would behold and acknowledge as vindicated Him Whom they had rejected. It would be a moment of Divine Justice, resulting in the permanent desertion and desolation of Israel's famous "house."

VI. "So also when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place." (Mt. 24:33, 34)

Before dealing with this text it must be observed that there is no masculine pronoun ("he") in the Greek text, as represented here by the RSV text; the "he" may well be substituted with "it" or any indefinite subject, since there is no subject expressed in Greek either in this verse or in the text of Mk. 13:29. Something is very near,

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even at the very gates, about to take place or become visible, of which the signs Jesus had just mentioned are indications (Mt. 24:14-22 and perhaps also vv. 23-31). It is Luke (21:29-32) who, in recording the same material, fills in the blank and identifies the "it" left unspecified by Matthew and Mark: "So also when you see these things taking place, you know that THE KINGDOM OF GOD is near." The very things the disciples will have seen taking place are easily identified. They are the many false alarms preceding the universal proclamation of the Gospel for a testimony to the nations, the specific sign of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies and Jerusalem's fall which included the crushing end of classic Judaism. This, says Luke's narrative, is but a herald of the exceeding nearness of the Kingdom of God. The important Lucan text to remember in this connection is Luke 9:27 (see under point II above) which recorded Jesus' exciting promise: "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see the KINGDOM OF GOD." Out of this similarity we detect two tempting conclusions:

1. That the expression "this generation" (Mt. 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 21:32) is to be taken in its natural sense, referring to the people living in Jesus' time. This phrase is not to be applied to the entire race of the Jews living down through the centuries to the present time, however tempting it might be to see their continued existence, despite the terrible judgments just mentioned, as a real wonder, or sign. This definition is sound since Jesus is talking about the same manifestation of the Kingdom of God during the lifetime of the Apostles. So "this generation" means "the people living right now, in these times," i.e. the generation in which Jesus was on earth.
2. That a significant manifestation of God's Kingdom would take place in Jesus' own generation, long after the beginning of the Church and somehow connected with the destruction of Jerusalem is also deduced from this information.

If the identification of this manifestation of the Kingdom of God with "the Son of man coming in His Kingdom with power," be valid (Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27), then that generation of Jewish people would live to see Jesus coming in punitive judgment upon those very people who would have murdered Him. Even if they did not see Him personally coming from heaven in triumphant glory in that era, they would certainly be forced to recognize that their own divine punish-

ment was just, that the Rule of God has passed out of their hands, that the Kingdom of God is now of another people. We who have accepted Jesus recognize that His prophetic words were true and that there is a new people of God, a new holy and royal priesthood, elect out of every nation.

Should it be objected either that "all these things" must include Jesus' prophecies concerning what may be taken to be the events surrounding His own Second Coming (i.e. Mt. 24:23-31; Mk. 13:21-27; Lk. 21:25-28) and therefore Jesus erroneously thought that His own return must occur within that generation, or that "all these things" must include the Second Coming and therefore "this generation" must include all the generations of Jews down to Christ's Second Coming, we respond that all the facts may be otherwise harmonized, rendering both these conclusions incorrect.

J. Marcellus Kik (*Matthew XXIV*) has shown in his excellent exposition of that critical chapter in Christian eschatology that ALL the information in the first section (Mt. 24:4-35) can be interpreted in connection either with the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation or with the theological significance of those events. He considers Mt. 24:34 to be the key to the understanding of the times and seasons involved in Jesus' discourse, since he places all that follows that verse within the unknown time limits within which Jesus will return the second time. In the section that most assume has reference to Christ's second coming (Mt. 24:23-31; Mk. 13:21-27; Lk. 21:25-28), Kik believes Jesus is using standardized apocalyptic language for completely earthly events. He feels that this "apocalyptic dialect," created by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel and others, was used by Jesus to convey the fundamentally theological notion that universal dominion, glory and a kingdom has been given to Him as "the Son of man" *par excellence*. (Cf. Dan. 7:13, 14) Kik's contention is that Jesus' "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30), as well as all the other concomitant phenomena in this section (Mt. 24:27-31), may be so interpreted in light of the apocalyptic language of the OT that even this coming of Jesus, seen by the Jews of that generation, found its fulfilment in the judgment of the Jews and the vindication of Christ's rule in the Church.

While Kik's thesis regarding this section (Mt. 24:23-

31) demands further study, it is certainly undeniable that anyone who deals with prophecies given in a Jewish context must also deal with the problem of apocalyptic language which cannot, repeat, must not, be taken literally without doing violence to the meaning intended by the author. This is true whether one is interpreting Matthew 24, the prophecies of Ezekiel or Daniel or the book of Revelation which calls itself "the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ." (See above on apocalypses.) Kik has shown us a consistent interpretation of the sentences (Mt. 24:33, 34) which includes all the information that precedes them (Mt. 24:4-32). Before we can refute his thesis we must see whether it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus would have inserted a full paragraph of "apocalyptic dialect" into a discourse made up of normal prophetic language (to be taken more or less literally). But before passing on, it is worthy of notice that this thesis posits a "coming of the Son of man" at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the nation.

VII. Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt. 26:64)

Under oath before the whole council of the Jews, Jesus not only confessed to being the Christ, the Son of God. He added, without its being required, that a time would come when those seated there before Him, those who were almost entirely and immediately responsible for His judicial murder, would, in a certain sense, behold Him fully vindicated for the magnificent claims He had just made. These tremendous and magnificent claims are stated before the highest court in the Jewish nation. They are stated, therefore, in the most public way, not only as Jesus' self-incrimination in the eyes of that court, but most especially are these words Jesus' highest revelation of Himself, given in the most formal, public way. But what did He mean?

It is no little temptation to regard these claims literally, i.e. with reference to Jesus' Second Coming, especially since John repeats the latter figure in the Revelation (1:7), a book believed to have been written long after the destruction of Jerusalem. But even John's use of these figures in that place cannot be considered definitive, since he may be citing the OT expressions in regard to Jesus, even as Jesus Himself is apparently doing here. The point of both passages

(i.e. Mt. 26:64 and Rev. 1:7) will have to be sought in the use each makes of those expressions.

In the claim itself we have two separate Messianic references:

1. "Seated at the right hand," as an application of Ps. 110:1 becomes a high claim to messiahship, since this passage was held to be messianic. (Cf. Mt. 22:43-45; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 720, 721) Taken also in connection with the formulation of the oath by which the high priest held Jesus obligated to commit Himself ("Tell us of you are the Christ, the Son of God." Mt. 26:63), this phrase might also call to mind the great Anointed Son of God who as King would rule the nations (Psa. 2; Cf. Jn. 1:49; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 716, 717).
2. "Son of man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven," is a phrase which the high priest would have recognized as a reference to Dan. 7:13, 14. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 733, 734)

While it may be possible to view these two references as two separate eschatological events or phases of Christ's ultimate divine majesty and coming to judgment in divine glory at the conclusion of the world, yet it would harmonize better with Jesus' immediate situation to interpret His admittedly apocalyptic language in literal language thus: "I admit to being the Christ, the Son of God. Though you consider this blasphemy, nevertheless I can tell you that you will live to see my most daring claims vindicated! You will see my messianic majesty and greatness and dominion as spoken of by the Psalmist and Daniel." Rather than quote the entire passages in each case, Jesus chose key phrases that rapidly summarized the messianic impact of His sovereignty. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1066) is probably right in deciding that

Jesus adds this statement in order to bring his judges to a realization of just whom they are about to condemn to death. He is defining for them who "the Messiah, the Son of God" is: he whom they themselves will see in his divine power, rule and majesty.

No, those Sanhedrists were not to be through with Jesus when they had crucified Him, for just four days later God would designate Him "Son of God in power . . . by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:5). Not long thereafter this same Sanhedrin had to deal with the rapidly spreading Gospel of the risen Christ preached by a handful of disciples. The chief point of the Apostles' preaching was "let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God had

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designated both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified!" (Ac. 2:33, 36; 4:10-12; 5:29-32) God's mercy with these Jewish leaders lasted yet 36 years longer (30-66 A.D.), until the Jewish War began. It was then that the storm broke over Palestine that lashed the nation economically, politically and religiously reducing it to a smoking shambles of its former glory. It was then that Jesus came in judgment upon that people, and the Sanhedrists lived to see it.

There are several problems involved in this interpretation of this text:

1. Jesus does not here in the trial scene predict the fall of Jerusalem and His coming in judgment, as He had done earlier on many other public and private occasions. (Cf. Lk. 13:35; 19:41-44; Mt. 23:29-39) It would have been so much more convenient for the theory of His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem and Judaism, had He done so. But He did not clearly speak of this, so, so much the worse for the theory if it fails to explain the language He used.
2. If we believe that Jesus were using "apocalyptic language" derived from the Psalms and Daniel to express His meaning, then, when this same "apocalyptic jargon" is reduced to literal language by expressing the literal meaning of the figures used—by Daniel especially—then there is left no literal "Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven," (itself part of the vision). What is left is Jesus' claim to be vindicated as the reigning, glorious Messiah in the near future in a manner observable by His jurors. One cannot "translate" figurative language into literal, and still hope to make direct use of some part of that figure in his literal interpretation. This is "having one's cake and eating it too!" This observation is not fatal to the theory sustained here, because it is not argued that Jesus appeared over Jerusalem in a manner visible to the Jews, when He punished that city and nation. So the "coming (of the Son of man) on the clouds of heaven" harmonizes perfectly as a concept, with the "coming of the Son of man" described elsewhere.

Answers to these problems may be the following: Jesus meant more than His vindication upon the Jews in the destruction of their Temple and nation, so He did not limit this appearance to the Sanhedrists to merely that single event. He meant His resurrection, the establishment of His Church, the victory of His Gospel, the validation of His claims in the Apostles' ministry and finally, in the generation, the total

collapse of all that those Sanhedrists stood for: the Temple, its ministry, their nation and the place that these Sanhedrists held dear. (Cf. Jn. 11:48) There is no doubting the obvious reference to Dan. 7:13, 14, because of the special rage, scorn and incredulity of the high priest that Jesus would commit Himself so far, incriminate Himself so completely. What is sure is that these Jewish rulers were not to see a personal and visible coming in their generation. Rather, as Kik (*Matthew XXIV*, 84) puts it:

This high priest was to see Christ sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. Can this possibly refer to Christ's second coming when the description "sitting on the right hand of power" precludes such interpretation? It means rather that after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus would ascend into heaven and take his place on the right hand of God, the Father, as described in Daniel 7:13, 14. . . . When Christ ascended into heaven he was seated upon his Messianic throne. This is in full accord with the declaration of Christ as he was about to ascend into heaven: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." One of the first manifestations of the power and the glory of the Messiah was the destruction of the city that refused to accept him as King and Savior. This act of judgment gave evidence that all power had indeed been given unto him. He did come in the clouds of heaven and rained destruction upon those who had rejected and crucified him. This caused the tribes of the earth to mourn. The sign of the reigning Christ was seen in the destruction of Jerusalem. And the contemporary generation, indicated in verse 34 (i.e., Mt. 24:34), witnessed fulfilment of these things as Christ had prophesied.

Outside of Matthew, let us notice some other texts that suggest the same sort of a coming of Christ in judgment.

VIII. "The coming of the Lord is at hand." (Jas. 5:8)

This verse has particular force, inasmuch as James, if he be identified with James the Just, is remembered by tradition as spending most of his labors in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem. Accordingly, his death in that city prior to its destruction would lend particular force to the admonitions to patient, uncomplaining endurance, since within a few short years, historically speaking, the Lord would actually come in judgment upon Judaism, snatching away from the

unbelievers among the Jews the power to persecute Christians. . Objections to this view come from the text itself where the actual wording used by James may be much more technically intended than this interpretation permits. In verses 7 and 8 he adopts the expression *parousia tou kuriou*, a phrase almost if not always used with reference to Christ's Second Coming.

IX. "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Heb. 10:25)

While this verse has no direct reference to a coming of the Son of man in the lifetime of the Apostles, it does make use of another technical term usually thought of as having reference to the great day of the Lord's wrath and judgment, especially that to be witnessed at the end of the world. But in the same context the writer cites Habakkuk 2:3, 4 with specific reference to the Messiah (Heb. 10:37, *ho erchomenos hēxei*) On this unusual rendering of the Hebrew text, Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 71) comments:

The LXX have rendered *chi boh jaboh; hōti erchōmenos hēxei*, which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. x. 37) has still further defined by adding the article, and, connecting it with *mikrōn hōson hōson* of Isa. xxvi. 20 (LXX), has taken it as Messianic, and applied to the speedy coming of the Messiah to judgment; not, however, according to the exact meaning of the words, but according to the fundamental idea of the prophetic announcement. For the vision, the certain fulfilment of which is proclaimed by Habakkuk, predicts the judgment upon the power of the world, which the Messiah will bring to completion.

The notes of Milligan (*Hebrews*, 284, 292ff) may be of help here:

To what day does our author here refer? To the day of judgment, say Delitzsch, Alford, Moll and others; when Christ will come in person to raise the dead and reward every man according to his works. But this interpretation is manifestly erroneous. To me at least it seems perfectly obvious that the Apostle refers here to a day which both he and his brethren were looking for as a day that was very near at hand: a day that was about to come on that generation, and try the faith of many. And hence I am constrained to think that Macknight, Scott, Stuart, and others, that the reference is

most likely to the day of Jerusalem's overthrow. Christ himself had foretold the near approach of that event (Matt. 24:34); he had also spoken of the signs of its coming and of the great calamities that would accompany it (Matt. 24:4-41 sic: 29-31?). No doubt, therefore, the Christians in Palestine were all looking forward with much anxiety to the time when this prophecy would be fulfilled. They would naturally speak of it as "the day," the day of trial; the day when seeing Jerusalem encompassed with armies, they would themselves have to flee to the mountains (Luke 21:20-22). . . . But to refer to it exclusively to the day when Christ will come in person to judge the world is clearly inadmissible. See notes on vers. 37. . . .

37. *For yet a little while*, etc. More literally: for yet a little little while (that is, a very little while), He who is coming (*ho erchomenos*) will come, and will not tarry. The coming One here spoken of is manifestly Christ himself. But what is meant by his coming? To what coming does our author here refer? Many say, "To His second personal coming." But this is plainly inconsistent with the scope of the Apostle's exhortation, as well as with the truth itself. His obvious design in the passage is to encourage the Hebrew brethren in their begun Christian course, on the ground that the coming of Christ was then very near at hand, when they would all be delivered from the snares, reproaches and violence of their persecutors. But how could he consistently and truthfully encourage them to do this, on the ground that the second personal advent of Christ was then very near at hand? It will not do to say with some that the Apostles themselves so believed and so taught. They did neither, but just the reverse. For when some of the Thessalonian brethren so understood Paul's teaching (I Thess. 4:15-17), he promptly addressed to them a second letter, in which he very emphatically corrected their mistake. . . . (2 Thess. 2:1-3). This, then is a clear and satisfactory refutation of the charge that the Apostles believed and taught that the second personal coming of Christ was near at hand in their own day. And so also is the book of Revelation a refutation of it. . . . The coming of Christ, as referred to in our text, must therefore mean, not his second personal coming but, his coming in providence most likely, to destroy Jerusalem, and so to

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deliver his elect from the violent persecutions to which they had long been subjected by the unbelieving Jews (Matt. 24:29-41 sic: 29-31?) To this Christ himself refers encouragingly in Luke 21:28, where, speaking of the signs of Jerusalem's approaching ruin, he says, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." . . .

This view of the matter is also further corroborated by the fact that our author finds in the prophecy of Habakkuk, concerning the overthrow of the Chaldean monarchy, language so appropriate to his purpose that he here takes and applies it to his own; thereby showing that the two cases are very analogous . . . it will be seen that our author does not quote the exact words of God's reply to the Prophet; but as is usual in such cases of accommodation (see Rom. 10:6-8), he so modifies the language as to adapt it to the case in hand. The main lesson is, however, the same in both Hebrews and Habakkuk; viz.: that God would certainly come and execute his purposes at the appointed time: and that while the proud and self-reliant would of necessity perish under the righteous judgments of God, the just man's faith, if it wavered not, would certainly support him under the severest trials.

This was all impressively illustrated in the fall of Jerusalem. The unbelieving Jews were all slain or taken captive; but not a Christian perished in the siege. . . .

X. **"The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day."** (Ac. 2:20)

Did the events prophetically described by Joel (2:28-32) and cited by Peter (Ac. 2:17-21) find exhaustive fulfilment on the day Pentecost, or were they not rather but the beginning of a series of events that began that day, but did not receive complete expression until the final fall of the judgment of God upon the Jewish nation, the destruction of Jerusalem and the conclusive end of the Jewish economy based upon its priesthood, sacrifices and Temple? One feature of Joel's prophecy, yet cited by Peter, that has no apparent fulfilment at all on Pentecost is the figure of the great astronomical portents: "And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned

to darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." (Joel 2:30; Ac. 2:19, 20)

"The day of the Lord," as shown by Butler (*Minor Prophets*, 84ff), is a technical term used in the OT with four major significations, hence, having as many different kinds of realization in the history of God's dealings with men: (1) judgments upon the covenant people; (2) redemptions of the covenant people; (3) judgments upon the nations; (4) redemptions of the nations. Joel himself in this case describes the particular "day of the Lord" that must occur in his own time, using the same apocalyptic language of judgment. Several times in his description he speaks of astronomical cataclysms (Joel 2:1, 2, 10, 11; 3:15). This gives a specific flavor of "punitive judgment" to these symbols, so that when they are used by Peter, his audience could not but shiver at the awesome threat and divine warning implied in those figures.

If we have understood Mt. 24:4-32 correctly (see above under Mt. 24:34, point VI), it may be that the celestial phenomena, described in the section most often interpreted with reference to the Second Coming (i.e. Mt. 24:29-31), have nothing at all to do with those heavenly bodies. Instead, there, as here, we may see the standard apocalyptic vision of divine judgment. As has been repeated many times before, divine judgment did actually fall on Palestine many years after Pentecost. But is it possible to apply this prophecy just to the fall of the Jewish nation? What has been said earlier about the use of apocalyptic stereotyped language might be true here, inasmuch as we have a clear example of an OT prophet cited whose own contextual information leads us to view his language as highly figurative, hence NOT intending LITERAL celestial phenomena. (Cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 10, 11; 3:14, 15 with Isa. 13:1-22 esp. 9, 10; 5:30; 24:21-23; 50:3) While it is true that the Christian writers can speak of the final judgment as "the great and notable day of the Lord," yet the use of this phrase in the OT makes it doubtful whether every appearance of this phrase in the NT must necessarily be applied exclusively and always to the great final judgment at the end of the world. Even the salvation of the believers here predicted (Ac. 2:21) proved to be two-fold salvation, not only of their souls, but also of their lives. They believed Jesus and so were saved from their sins; they believed Jesus' prophecies and so were not destroyed on the great day of the Lord when Jesus judged Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews.

XI. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers." (I Pet. 4:7)

These words were addressed by Peter "to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (1 Pet. 1:1) probably prior to 70 A.D., since traditional dating of Peter's own martyrdom is placed prior to that date. But would this sentence have much point for the exiles of the Diaspora living in lands distant from Palestine, whose lives and security would not be materially affected by the vicissitudes in Judea? If these are primarily Jewish Christians, as the words of the inscription imply, Peter's admonition would take on particular strength and receive special fulfilment as the nerve center of world-wide Judaism would be torn to the ground, never to rise again for centuries, if ever. The value of this exhortation to these distant Christians would be obvious, since the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, God's chosen house, would probably be looked upon as almost, if not entirely incredible. It would probably be less incredible to these Christians than it was to the disciples who heard Jesus predict these events originally (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21), since the Apostles themselves could have repeated much of the Lord's prophetic discourse to their converts. Hence, just a word of reminder, such as this exhortation of Peter's, would suffice.

But should it be objected that Peter says "The end of ALL things is at hand," it must be remembered that Jesus used similar language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. (Cf. "all these things" Mt. 24:33, 34 and parallels) Or if it be objected that Peter's words, being indefinitely stated, are also capable of *double entendre*, this is true, but not fatal to the theory suggested here. If it be thought that Peter's words here should be interpreted in light of his later message (2 Pet. 3:8-13), then we respond that here the words are indefinitely aimed at some "end near at hand," whereas Peter in the other passage addressed himself to the scornful demand made by mockers: "Where is the promise of His coming (*parousia*)?" an obvious reference to the Second Coming.

PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THIS THEORY OR ITS PRESENTATION

1. One of the most painfully obvious weaknesses of this study is the fact that it does not take into adequate account the various differing views of each single passage. There are certainly other

passages that should be presented here, just as there are more objections to some used here. As a necessary consequence, the presentation of the evidence is quite one-sided. The justification for this presentation lies therefore in the hope that the reader is already familiar with the other views to which this presentation is but an alternative. This collection of coincidences and single texts must be examined in their contexts in their entirety to appreciate the impact they represent.

2. Another weakness, more serious to the suggestion that the special "coming of the Son of man" refers to Jesus' coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation, is the fact that none of the inspired writers ever declares this interpretation to be the theological meaning of the demise of the Jewish city and nation. This is true, unless the figures of Revelation be so interpreted. (Cf. Rev. 11) Our present state of knowledge regarding the date of NT books gives no mathematical certainty regarding the relationship between the writing of the bulk of the NT books and the date of the Jewish War (66-70 A.D.) While the conservative scholars tend to place the dates of most of them before that tragedy, yet the enigma remains when the Johannine Scriptures are considered. If John wrote considerably after the fall of Jerusalem, why did he not once mention that fact, even though he talked all around the subject of Jerusalem itself in his Gospel and in his Apocalypse could have made reference to it?

There may be other weaknesses too, but let us ask ourselves:

WHAT IS TO BE GAINED IF THIS THEORY BE ACCEPTED AS TRUE?

1. This suggestion provides a possible harmonization for other passages of the NT that contained problems that had seemed insoluble under other schemes, rendering it more difficult to accept the Gospel at face value, for those who did not see this solution. It is not necessary, on the basis of Gospel studies, to conclude that "Jesus was mistaken, since He thought that His own second coming must take place shortly after the fall of the Jewish economy." Nor is it necessary to conclude that "the Apostles themselves and the early Christians erroneously presumed that they would live until the Second Coming." Worse yet, is the opinion that "the discourses in which the eschatological events are predicted are not factual recordings of anything Jesus ever actually said, but are the theological opinions of later ages put into the mouth of Jesus to give them greater credi-

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bility." Instead, if this solution here offered be valid, then the exegesis upon which these unbelieving conclusions were based, may need correction.

2. If this suggestion be true, that Jesus actually came in judgment upon the Jews, then, of course, many texts that were formerly considered as dealing exclusively with the Second Coming will now be subtracted from discussions of that subject. As a result, the texts that actually deal with the Second Coming will be seen much more clearly, since the confusion, created by trying to weigh texts on the destruction of Jerusalem into the conclusions about the Second Coming, would, presumably, no longer exist, since the texts about Jesus' judgment on Judaism would not have to be considered. Needless to say, such clarity made available for eschatological studies surrounding the Second Coming would be of great value. (Rev. 1:3) This clarity would help to place eschatological studies on a surer basis and give them respectability in the eyes of the average Christian who must throw up his hands in despair in face of the present state of confusion in the field.

3. Out of this last expression comes another conclusion. This suggestion that Jesus actually came in judgment upon the Jewish world in the first century would provide us one more reasonably clear evidence that Jesus intends to keep His Word about that future "great day of the Lord" when He will come personally and visibly to judge the nations. His promise would be enough for the average believer. But the certainty of His promise is driven home with redoubled force, when men realize that He has already clearly shown the greatness of His power and the dependability of His promises in the historically verifiable act of judgment upon Judaism in the events beginning with the unsuccessful Jewish Revolt and the disastrous fall of Jerusalem with all its religious consequences for all future ages of both Jerusalem and the Church. Jesus is a Gentleman who keeps His appointments! This, of course, poses an unveiled threat to every complacent person who frankly enjoys his sinful way of life. The eschatological hope of the Christians is not unfounded, wishful thinking, but rather a splendidly concrete reality already in motion, of which the smashing judgment of unbelieving Judaism and the glorious vindication of the Church's claims was but an earnest and evidence.

4. The historical importance of the destruction of Jerusalem and the blotting out of the Jewish theocracy is inestimable to Christianity in the following ways, listed by Newman (*Manual of Church History*,

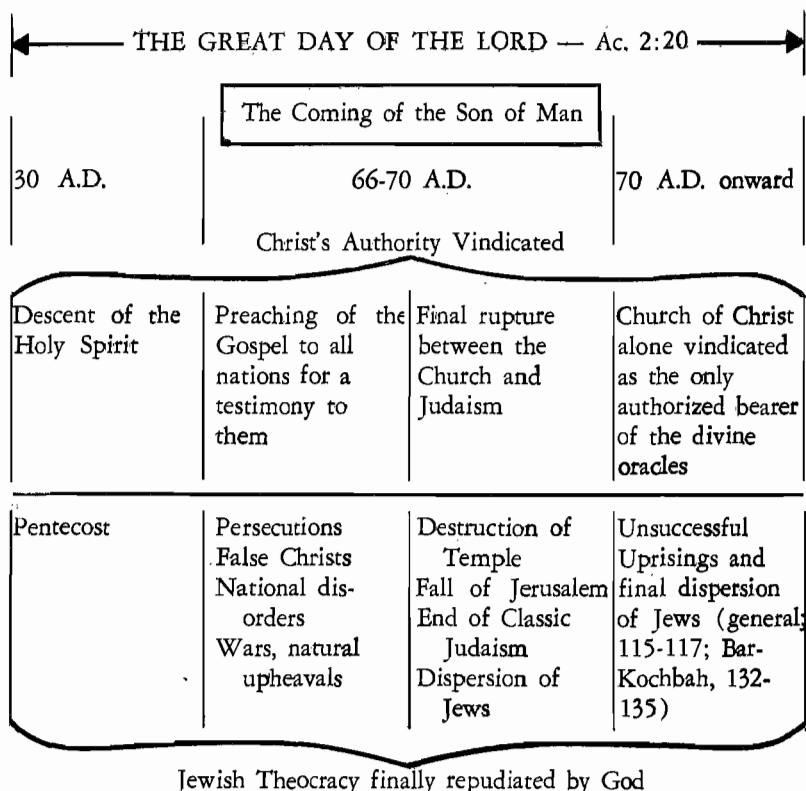
I, 118, 119; see also Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, I, 402, 403):

- a. It marked in the most unmistakable way the end of the old dispensation and the complete emancipation of Christianity from the thralldom of Judaism. It was henceforth impossible for any one to observe the ceremonial law in its fullness. No doubt the Pauline type of Christianity would ultimately have become dominant apart from this fearful interposition of Divine Providence. Judaistic Christianity was to persist in the form of sects, but catholic Christianity could no longer be Judaizing.
- b. The destruction of the city was very commonly looked upon by Christians as a divine judgment on the Jewish people for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. It may safely be said that if the Jews as a body, or a large portion of them, had accepted Christ as their Saviour and had become partakers of the Spirit of Christ, the Jewish Zealots, who brought ruin upon their people, would not have arisen or would not have secured popular support.
- c. The great catastrophe may be regarded as a direct fulfilment of our Lord's predictions as recorded in Matt. 21:43 and 23:37-39 and in Luke 21:20-28.
- d. This great event is regarded by many as a fulfilment of our Lord's prophecies regarding his speedy coming in his kingdom (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 24:34), and of such passages in the apostolic Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles as represent the Lord's advent as imminent. It seems harsh to associate so glorious an event as the Lord's coming with a catastrophe so terrible; yet there can be no question but that the destruction of the city and the theocracy gave a freedom and a universality to the gospel which mark an epoch in the history of Christianity and placed the gradually advancing kingdom of Christ on a firm basis.
- e. There is no reason to think that the Roman authorities at this time discriminated carefully between Christianity and Judaism in favor of the former; but the time had past when the accusations of Jews against Christians would be heeded by the civil courts. Henceforth the Jews were without political influence and were treated with contempt by the Roman officials.

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In view of the foregoing, consider the following

SKETCH OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS REPRESENTED



SOME FURTHER COMMENTS ON ARGUMENTS FOR JESUS' DEITY AND AUTHORITY

I. HIS PRECISION AS A PROPHET

G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 104): "One of the most profound reasons for trusting Christ today in the matter of all Christian service

is that here and elsewhere He revealed His perfect knowledge of conditions which no man could forecast, and which yet have transpired exactly as He foretold them." What is more significant, as Morgan declares, is that the keenest of human foresight could not foresee the distinct changes of direction that history, in direct relationship to His disciples, would have taken. "Let us notice that the change of conditions created by the crucifixion of Jesus, and again by the fall of Jerusalem, are self-evident. The position of these men was greatly changed after the crucifixion of Jesus; and it was greatly changed again when the principal force in persecuting them was broken. It is perfectly clear that the King foresaw these things, and that He understood perfectly the whole movement of the years that stretched before Him."

II. HIS CANDOR, HONESTY AND COMPASSION

Barclay (*Matthew I*, 385): "Here is my task for you—at its grimmest and at its worst—do you accept it?"

McGarvey, (*Matthew-Mark*, 95): "There is a contrast between Jesus and the originators of earthly enterprises, whether secular or religious. It is the custom of the latter to paint in glowing colors the brighter prospects of the causes they plead, and to conceal from both themselves and others the darker side of the picture. But Jesus presents faithfully before His disciples all of the hardships and sufferings which await them, not omitting death itself—and death, it may be, on the cross. The foreknowledge displayed is proof of His divinity, while the compassion and the candor which accompany it are such as we would expect in the Son of God."

Notice that His revelations of the brutal realities in the fearful future are not given in a brutal manner. The Lord compassionately shows the help available in time of need.

Though it is not the usual way to win followers, nevertheless Jesus appeals to that adventurer hidden in the heart of every man. In the long run, one does not attract MEN to the easy way by inducements of comfort, advancement, ease, and fulfilment of worldly ambitions. It is the honest challenge of the heroic that ultimately appeals to men. The Church softens this approach and waters her message to her peril!

III. HIS ROYAL DEMANDS

Plummer (*Matthew*, 157): "'For My sake.' Again we have a claim which is monstrous if He who makes it is not conscious of

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being Divine. Who is it that is going to own us or renounce us before God's judgment-seat (32, 33)? Who is it that promises with such confidence that the man who loses his life for His sake shall find it? And these momentous utterances are spoken as if the Speaker had no shadow of doubt as to their truth, and as if He expected that His hearers would, at once accept them. What is more, thousands of Christians, generation after generation, have shaped their lives by them and have proved their truth by repeated experience."

IV. HIS ASSUMED AUTHORITY

Bengal, (cited in *PHC*, 242): "Great is the authority of conferring authority." Notice how simply Jesus is reported to have done it. (Mt. 10:1) There is no great apologetic which lists reasons why Jesus should have the right to confer authority upon His disciples. Matthew says, "He simply did it, and that was that!"

Note His claim, everywhere implicit in the chapter, that our faith in Jesus determines our standing before God.

Other points suggested by Lewis and Booth, *PHC*, XXII, 245:

V. THE CONSISTENCY OF THE SAVIOR.—The prayers He enjoins, the provisions He makes, the instructions He gives, are all of a piece.

VI. THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SAVIOR.—He does not set His workmen to begin at the top of the ladder. He does not ask them at first what, to many among them, will not be too easy at last. Not first apart from Him, but first by His side.

VII. THE FORETHOUGHT OF THE SAVIOR.—He sets them at first to that which will help to qualify them for what has to be done at the last.

CHAPTER ELEVEN OUTLINES

Section 24

JESUS RECEIVES QUESTIONS FROM JOHN AND PREACHES SERMON ON JOHN (11:2-19)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Section 25

JESUS CONDEMNS UNBELIEVING
CITIES AND INVITES "BABES" TO
COME TO HIM (11:20-30)

STUDY OUTLINES

- I. Challenging the Christ to Change (11:2, 3)
- II. Christ Convinces and Cautions His Captive Comrade (11:4-6)
- III. Christ's Charitable Commendation of the Conscientious Champion (11:7-11)
 - A. A Changeling's Character? (11:7)
 - B. A Courtier's Costume? (11:8)
 - C. A Colossal Communicator! (11:9-11)
- IV. Christ's Conclusions Concerning the Kingdom (11:12-15)
- V. Christ Condemns the Contrary Critics' Contemptuous Caricatures (11:16-19)
 - A. A Cameo (11:16, 17)
 - B. A Contrast in Caricatures (11:18, 19)
 - C. A Confident Conclusion (11:19b)
- VI. Heartbroken Condemnation (11:20-24) Invincible Unbelief
 - A. Impenitence = Unbelief (11:20)
 - B. Opportunity = Responsibility (11:21-24)
- VII. Heaven's King (11:25-27) Unconquerable Submission
 - A. Joyous Thanksgiving (11:25, 26)
 - B. Majestic Self-revelation (11:27)
- VIII. Heart-felt Compassion (11:28-30) Pleading, Universal Invitation

Section 24

JESUS RECEIVES A QUESTION FROM
JOHN AND PREACHES A
SERMON ON JOHN

(Parallel: Luke 7:18-35)

TEXT: 11:2-19

2. Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples
3. and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

4. and Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see;
5. the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them.
6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.
7. And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken with the wind?
8. But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft *raiment*? Behold, they that wear soft *raiment* are in king's houses.
9. But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.
10. This is he, of whom it is written,
Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee.
11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.
13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.
14. And if ye are willing to receive *it*, this is Elijah, that is to come.
15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
16. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call unto their fellows
17. and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn.
18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon.
19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! And wisdom is justified by her works.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If John is shut up in prison, how is it that he is so free in prison to send messengers to Jesus?
- b. If you had been preaching fiery judgment upon Israel, warning the people that the Messiah would come with a threshing shovel in His hand to separate the wicked from the righteous and threat-

ening the wicked by saying that the ax is ready at the foot of the trees to hew down the wicked that produced no fruit,—if this had been YOUR message, and yet the Messiah came along watering the trees, what would have been your reaction? You had preached judgment, but He proclaims mercy and the grace of God. What kind of questions would YOU have had?

- c. Some commentators feel that John was not asking this great question for himself but rather for his disciples. Do you think this is correct? If so, on what basis do you agree? If no, why not?
- d. Why, would you say, do questions hurt men worse than torture?
- e. Do you think it is God's will to torture men with agonizing questions? If not, then why does not God answer their questions? If so, then how do you harmonize His goodness with this permission that lets such questions continue to harass the minds of His creatures, yes, even the minds of such great men as John the Baptist?
- f. How do you account for the true greatness of John the Baptist?
- g. Do you feel that people would be more godly today if they imitated John's general manner of life, his austere food and clothing? If not, what should they imitate? If so, how would this imitation better the moral quality of society?
- h. When a man is shut up in prison for a period of time, one begins to see the real fiber of which his character is made. That confinement of his body and that limitation of the free expression of his spirit is more than many a man can bear. What expressions of faith and high moral character does John yet reveal now while in the imprisonment?
- i. What do you hold to be the secret of John's greatness?
- j. What do you hold to be the reason why John was actually greater than other prophets?
- k. In what respect is "the least in the kingdom of heaven greater than he"? Explain how John, the greatest man ever born, could be less than the least in God's kingdom.
- l. How can John the Baptist be "the Elijah who is to come," whereas John himself denied being Elijah? (See Jn. 1:21)
- m. Why do you think Jesus keeps saying in so many of His sermons: "He who has ears to hear with, let him hear"? Were the people of His time short on ears? Or were they just not using the equipment they had? Explain what Jesus meant by that pithy admonition.
- n. Do you think that this question John asked was painful to Jesus, since He was surrounded by multitudes who surely must have heard

John's messengers pose the question? Was it not a latent lack of confidence in the evidence that Jesus had already given of His identity and consequent authority?

- o. Explain how God's kingdom had suffered violence and how violent men were taking it by force, even since the beginning of John's preaching.
- p. What evidence should have already convinced John once and for all that Jesus was everything that John had predicted Him to be? What evidence did Jesus send back to John to persuade him this time?
- q. Jesus describes the personal habits of John the Baptist as those of an ascetic or a recluse, "eating no bread and drinking no wine." He describes His own habits as those of one who mixed well with people "eating and drinking." Now, discounting as exaggerations the slanders that the Jews levelled at John and Jesus both ("He has a demon." "Behold, a glutton and wine-drinker"), yet is there any basis of fact in the inference drawn from Jesus' own statement, that Jesus certainly drank wine? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- r. How is the intended slander levelled against Jesus, "a friend of taxcollectors and sinners," in a higher sense, His glory and finest proof that He is really God come in the flesh?
- s. Standing this side of the cross, John Hallett can teach us to sing, "There's no disappointment in Jesus, He's all that He promised to be . . ." Ideally, of course, this is true. Yet, John the Baptist stood in grave danger of being "disappointed in Jesus." What one ingredient, common to our human predicament, would put you personally in the prison of perplexity and cause you too to be shocked and even infuriated that Jesus is not what you thought Him to be?
- t. Now, having answered the preceding question, what is there in Jesus' answer to John that attenuates your perplexity too, comforts your disappointment or, at least, makes it not nearly so important as it had seemed? In what frame of reference is it possible to sing: "His love and His care comfort me everywhere; He is no disappointment to me"?
- u. Is it completely true that we must never become a stumbling-block for our neighbors? Jesus knew fully well that His message, ministry and manners were a terrible scandal to His own people, and yet He did not alter His program or character nor tailor His gospel on that account. To what extent then are we to adjust to

our environment so as not to give an occasion of sin to our fellows without compromising our Gospel and to what extent must we never change regardless of how many fall? (Study Mt. 18:5-10; 1 Co. 8; 10:23-33 in contrast with 1 Co. 1:18-25 esp. v. 23; 1 Pet. 2:4-8)

- v. Puzzle of puzzles, why did not Jesus liberate John by a blazing word of miraculous power? Why did He permit him to die what looks like a senseless death, with a silly dancing-girl and her scheming, wicked mother managing the whole thing?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

It was while John the Baptist was in prison that he heard about all the things Jesus was doing. His disciples came to him and reported the deeds Jesus Christ was accomplishing. Selecting two of his followers, he sent the Lord a message by these men, asking, "Are you really the Messiah, or are we to keep on waiting for and expecting someone else to be the one?"

So when these two men arrived where Jesus was, they repeated John's question: "John the Baptist has sent us to ask you, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we going to have to look for someone else who will do the job?'"

Right then and there Jesus cured many sick people who had all kinds of diseases and evil spirits. To many that were blind He gave their sight.

Then Jesus made this reply to John's question, "You go tell John exactly what you have just seen and heard today: how the blind recovered their sight, the lame are walking again. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf can now hear. I have raised the dead to life again. Even people who could never afford to pay for it are getting to hear the Good News! John, you will be a happy man indeed, if you can trust me implicitly. Do not be shocked or hurt over what you do not understand of my ministry that does not seem to match your concept of what it should be."

It was later, when the messengers of John had left to report to him this answer, that Jesus began to address the crowds concerning John the Baptist:

"What spectacle drew you out into the wilderness? A reed easily bent by the wind? A weak, trembling man disturbed by the slightest rumor of danger? No? Then why did you go out there? To see someone clad in silks and satins? Of course not! The dapper dressers

with their soft, elegant garments and their life of luxury are to be found in royal court circles, not in kings' prisons! Tell me now, why did you really go out there anyway? To see a prophet? Let me tell you this: you saw someone far more than an ordinary prophet! This is the very man about whom Malachi penned the ancient lines (3:1):

'Behold my herald whom I am sending on ahead of you:

He shall prepare your way for you.'

I tell you this: there has never yet been born on earth the mother's son that can excel John the Baptist! And yet, paradoxically, the humblest member of God's Kingdom is a greater man than John!

"Ever since the appearance of John the Baptist until today God's Kingdom has been subjected to violence. Violent men, like the Zealots, try to seize control of it. Until John came, only the Law of Moses and the prophets represented God's Word to men. However, if your mind is open to receive this information, I would say that John is the great 'Elijah' that Malachi (4:5) promised would come. Pay close attention to the meaning of what I am saying!

"When the common people heard John, they all, even the most notoriously wicked among them—even the tax collectors—agreed that God's plan was just. They showed this by being immersed in harmony with the rite preached by John. All the people, did this, that is, except the Pharisees and the lawyers. These latter rejected God's eternal purpose for them, as far as they personally were concerned, because they refused to be immersed by John the Baptist."

Jesus went on: "But what description adequately reflects the mentality of the people of today? They are like a group of children sitting in the marketplace, protesting to their playmates, 'We wanted to play wedding, so we piped to you and you refused to dance. Then we tried playing funeral. So we wailed, but you did not cooperate: you did not mourn nor weep! What DO you want to play?' I tell you this, because John lived an ascetic life, neither eating common food nor drinking wine like a normal person would. But you slander him, saying, 'Something must be wrong with a man like that! He has a demon—he's mad!' Then I came along, living the normal life, eating and drinking like anyone else, and what do you say? 'Look at that glutton! He's a drinker and a party-goer! He certainly knows how to pick his friends too: outsiders, tramps, no one with whom any respectable person should have anything to do!' Nevertheless, despite your unreasonableness, real wisdom is proved true and right by what it produces! The ultimate verdict about the wisdom of our different

approaches lies not with you contrary critics, but with the results John and I produce."

SUMMARY

When John the Baptist learned of the merciful ministry of Jesus, he determined to learn the real meaning of the difference between his own fiery predictions and what Jesus was planning. His two messengers relayed his question to Jesus. Rather than answer them directly, Jesus continued to give evidence of His true identity by doing God's work in the presence of John's envoys. Then, in messianic language drawn from Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus summarized His ministry and evidence to give John reasons to continue to trust Him. John's messengers then reported this message back to John.

After they departed, Jesus eulogized John's greatness as God's prophet, calling him the greatest man who ever lived, the great herald of the Messiah, the promised prophet whose coming immediately preceded the great day of the Lord. Further, those simple people who accepted John's message vindicated God by accepting the word of His prophet in obedience, whereas the religious leaders of the nation frustrated God's plans for them. Worse, the majority of Jesus' contemporaries rejected John because he was too serious, not human enough, but rejected Jesus because He was too human, not holy enough. But the course chosen by each will be vindicated by the ultimate results each achieves.

NOTES

I. CHALLENGING THE CHRIST TO CHANGE (11:2, 3)

11:2 **Now when John heard in the prison**, taken as introductory to this section, does not affirm that this event has even the slightest connection with the foregoing material in Matthew's chapter 10. The time reference is most general: **Now when John heard** (*ho de Ioánnēs akoúsas*). The aorist participle indicates no time relationship at all, except that related to the main verb of the sentence, *eipen* (said), another aorist that views the action as a mere past event without stating any connection or continuity with what preceded it. It is Luke who informs us both of the more precise chronological connections, how it was that John was informed and what specific deeds of Christ were most likely the subject of John's musings: "The disciples of John told him of all these things." (Lk. 7:18) Very likely, the disciples' report included the curing of the

Centurion's slave and the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain and many other signs. (Lk. 7:1-17) Details of John's imprisonment are available from many sources (Mt. 4:12; 14:3-5; Mk. 6:17-20; Lk. 3:19, 20; cf. also Josephus' *Antiquities*, XVIII, 5, 2). Had we only Matthew's Gospel, we would be puzzled by the very access John's disciples had to their master who was very clearly bound in prison under lock and key (cf. *édesēn* and *katékleisen* of Mt. 14:3; Lk. 3:20) by Herod who ultimately murdered him there. The enigma is solved by Mark, who, although he does not record the incident of John's question, yet furnishes the explanation by inserting a fact in quite another context that explains John's liberty to send the message to Jesus. "Herodias had a grudge against him and would willingly have executed him but she could not do it, for Herod had a deep respect for John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, so he protected him. When he listened to him he was greatly disturbed, yet he enjoyed hearing him." (Mk. 6:19, 20) From these sources we may conclude that in Herod's border-castle, Machaerus, near the northeast end of the Dead Sea, was the site where John spent his last days. The puppet-king Herod Antipas merely shut the wilderness preacher in the fort, but did not ill-treat him. The imprisonment, while politically necessary from Herod's view, must have been half-hearted, because the king's troubled conscience clearly accused him. Antipas knew where the path of truth and righteousness lay. Though he must often have conversed with the Baptist, he did not repent. (See notes on Mt. 14:1-12) In this frame of mind, he conceded John the visits of his disciples. Later, these followers were permitted to bury their leader after his execution. (Mt. 14:12)

An even greater perplexity is to be found in the expression "John's disciples." After the revelation of the Messiah's identity at His baptism, why did not John just drop everything to become Jesus' personal disciple? Was it further necessary to make disciples on his own? Why did these men remain attached to John after their master had unequivocally indicated the Nazarene to be the "Lamb of God," "the Son of God," "the Bridegroom"? Further, how could John be satisfied when his understudies remain under his tutelage? Or is the answer to be found in the intermeshing of the events in their time-sequence? That is, was there too little time to conclude his own work and join Jesus before Herod got him? If so, John would be in prison almost a year now when he sends this query to Jesus. (Cf. the connections between the events recorded in Jesus' early ministry immediately preceding John's arrest: Mt. 3, 4; Mk. 1;

Lk. 3; Jn. 2-4.) If the 40 days of Jesus' temptation be added to the period He spent in Galilee (Jn. 2:1, 12) before the first Passover of His public ministry (Jn. 2:13ff), and if His ministry in Sychar of Samaria were concluded "four months before harvest" (Jn. 4:35, supposing this to be a calendar reference used as the basis for spiritual teaching), and supposing His trip north through Samaria to have been occasioned by pressure from the Pharisees (Jn. 4:1-3) as much as by the imprisonment of John (Mt. 4:12), we conclude that there were as much as four summer months between John's first identification of Jesus as the Messiah before his fatal imprisonment. But before we condemn John for not swinging the entire bloc of his movement behind Jesus, let us recall the state of communications of that period. While he may have been able to immerse many pilgrims from many lands on their way to the great national feasts, he would not see most of them until the next feast, nor they him. Apparently some of them never heard about Jesus even years after Pentecost. (Cf. Ac. 18:24, 25; 19:1-4) Now if John could publish no communiques for nationwide distribution prior to his incarceration, how much less could he influence his own followers after Herod held him practically incommunicado, isolated from the center of national life and influence!

John heard in prison the works of the Christ. Matthew writes what it was that John heard described to him, but did John hear it just this way, i.e. the works are those of Jesus the Messiah? Or is Matthew's personal faith just coming through this narrative, seen in the choice of words he uses? If John heard that Jesus was Christ known by His works, he is the more in error for forming the question he does. For, from whatever motive, who could propound such a query, once he is firmly convinced that Jesus is indeed the Messiah with all the divine authority that this involves? He who fully understands that the Messiah is to be God Himself come in human form, could hardly bring himself to presume to challenge Him about any portion of His program. But did John grasp this? As Jesus will show later (11:11), John's life was lived out in an era before the full-orbed revelation was given.

Before proceeding to the problem why John should have asked such a dangerous question, we must ask who is this **John . . . in prison?** Who was he as a prophet and as a man?

1. His own divine inspiration and calling by God cannot be doubted. (Lk. 3:2; Jn. 1:6; 5:33)
2. At Jesus' baptism, John heard the voice of God indicating

Him as "the Son of God," and saw the coming of the Spirit upon Him. (Mt. 3:13-17; Jn. 1:29-34)

3. His description of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" indicates a profound revelation of the mission of Jesus. (Jn. 1:29, 36) Did he understand what it meant to be God's "Lamb"?
4. Further, the prophecies of the OT received significant confirmation in the revelation God made to John at the baptism of the Lord. (Cf. Ps. 2:7 with Mt. 3:17; Isa. 61:1; 11:1-5 with Mt. 3:16)
5. There is great moral comprehension of his own relative unimportance expressed in the magnanimous declaration: "He must increase and I must decrease!" (Jn. 3:26-30; cf. Mt. 3:11)
6. Immediately prior to this question sent to Jesus, he had heard men speak of the works of the Christ, i.e. as well as His general mode of operation. (Mt. 11:2; Lk. 7:18)

But John was human too. Before "the word of God came to John" (Lk. 3:2) he had been just plain John. Before "there was a man sent from God," (Jn. 1:6) he had been a man, and that man, now trapped in Herod's prison where his life will be tragically snuffed out, must learn a fundamental lesson facing all true prophets. Simply stated, the lesson is that once an unquestionably inspired prophet or apostle has delivered his God-breathed message, that man of God must then submit himself with faithful allegiance and unswerving personal obedience to that message, even though he may not have had revealed to him all the other explanations of God's will that may bear directly on what the prophet already knows. God does not have to explain everything to a man, not even to a prophet. But God will always give grounds for faith that that man may trust Him, leaving the unexplained in God's hands to reveal them as He chooses. Or, to state his quandary differently, what did John NOT know? His divine commission and past inspiration did not also guarantee him omniscience as well. John had preached a message of judgment, of threshing fans, of axes laid at the foot of trees and of unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:10-12), but Jesus keeps watering the trees, trying to save them! (Cf. Lk. 13:6-9) John could not see how Jesus' merciful ministry could fulfill his own divine predictions about that ministry. Abuses were everywhere; sin was going unchallenged. Judgment was needed! John could not see how the Christ was seeking, in the goodness of God, to sow the seeds of faith upon which the great, ultimate judgment of humanity would be based. Was John in prison meditating on Malachi 3:1-4:6? Was he reflecting on the messages he had

thundered to the nation, shaking it out of its lethargy and indifference? Certainly the passion for righteousness still blazed like a prophetic fire in his breast.

QUESTIONS HURT MEN WORSE THAN TORTURE

- a. Remember Job's cries, "Why? Why?" (see Job 3:11-23; 7:19-21)
- b. Consider Habakkuk's complaint: "Why are you not doing something about this wicked people, Israel?" (Hab. 1:1-4) God answers: "I am doing something! I am rousing the Chaldeans for Israel's punishment." (Hab. 1:5-11) "But God, how can you use vile idolators to punish a nation more relatively righteous than they?" (Hab. 1:12-17) God's famous reply is paraphrased: "By definition, a 'righteous man' is one who lives by his confidence that I know what I am doing. Habakkuk, you can trust me, even though you see what appear to you to be deep, far-reaching contradictions in the arrangement of my plans!" (Hab. 2:2-4) There is sweet submission in Habakkuk's prayer as he admits the justice of God's punishment upon Israel. Though it meant personal and immediate trial for him and other righteous men in Israel (Hab. 3:16, 17), yet he can rest in God who is Himself the answer to Habakkuk's complaint (Hab. 3:18, 19).
- c. Out of Paul's experience in praying three times that his "thorn in the flesh" might be removed, he learned true strength. (2 Co. 12:8-10) With many good and sufficient justifications Paul could have importuned God by arguing how much more effective a work he could be doing without this weakness: "Why, Father, must I, your Apostle to the Gentiles, be so hampered?" But after revealing Christ's message to others, Paul must also submit himself to the daily discipline as any other believer.
- d. Peter, after preaching the universality of God's grace "unto as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him" (Ac. 2:39), still did not grasp the fact that this must also mean Gentiles too. (Ac. 10, 11; Gal. 2)

Examples could be multiplied of divinely inspired men whose torturing, unanswered questions, which could reasonably be expected of thinking men, remained to disturb their minds. These all, John the Baptist included, could and must rest in

the confidence that God knew what He was doing, even though His reasons were not immediately evident.

John's peculiar problem probably lay in his own concepts and expectations regarding the Messiah, which, in turn, were likely not wholly uninfluenced by the popular concepts of the times, even though greatly molded by his own inspired preaching. To him had not been revealed, for example, the time-distances between the appearance of the Messiah immediately after John's own ministry and the farther baptism by the Christ in the Holy Spirit and the still more distant judgment by fire. (Cf. Mt. 3:9-12) The burden of the prophetic message of John had depicted a Messiah that would have brought to Israel an immediate, inescapable punishment upon the wicked. But it seemed to John that Jesus was doing nothing but help the wicked, even going to the unthinkable lengths of eating and drinking with them, while trying to redeem them! Because of Jesus' actions, it seemed to John that He was not fulfilling the messianic concept that John himself had predicted. So he needed an explanation both of the mission and purposes of the Lord, since neither was clear to him. (Remember 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Mt. 13:16, 17)

11:3 and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? John's choice of words implies "Do we await **one of another** kind?" (*hétéron*) Although Luke (7:20) has *allon* ("another of the same kind"), despite the fact that good MSS have *hétéron*, even *allon* must imply "another somewhat different" and not an exact twin. Otherwise, a Messiah exactly like Jesus would not accomplish all that John dreamed. **He that cometh** (*ho erchómenos*), in John's mouth here, means "the Christ." Was this a fixed phrase, or, a technical term, used by the Greek-speaking Jews, at least, to mean "the Messiah?" (Cf. Ps. 118:26; Hab. 2:3; Mal. 3:1; Dan. 7:13 with Mt. 21:9 and parallels; 23:39; Lu. 13:35; Jn. 1:15[?]; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Heb. 10:37; Rev. 1:4, or are these merely coincidences in Greek that prove nothing?) Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 668) thinks it not too likely, since Jewish thought ran more to the coming age ushered in by the Christ. But that John's question rings with messianic emphasis is demonstrated by the fact that Jesus' answer, for those who have ears to hear it, definitely affirmed Him to be the Christ. (See below on 11:4-6)

Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? The meaning of this surprising question is bound up in the motivation behind it, so inextricably interwoven with it that one is incomprehensible without the other. While the obvious import of John's

question is whether Jesus be "the Christ" in an absolute sense, on what rational basis could the Baptist even consider possible the existence of a second "Coming One," somehow different from Jesus? Were two Messiahs conceivable in Jewish thought? Indeed, such a double-Messiah concept was entirely possible to any Jew who had not yet seen the full-blown revelation of the union in one person of all the many-sided characteristics to be found in the Son of God, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, the Prophet, the High Priest of Melchizedek's Order, etc. John has too much evidence to disregard, or refuse, Jesus as the Christ in at least some wonderful sense. But since He did not seem to aspire to the positions usually assigned to the Messiah by popular Jewish expectations, or even by John's own reflections on the subject, perhaps John arrived at the alternate theory of not one unique Messiah, but two. Accordingly, Jesus would then be partially Messiah in one significant sense, because He brought to fruition some of the ancient prophecies, but (so John may have reasoned) another Coming One would be required to fulfil the balance of the prophecies. Jesus is unique, and only a long-range view of His total ministry would have unveiled what John could not see.

But before criticizing John for having too low a view of Jesus, let us appreciate this striking paradox: the Lord of the Universe who is coming for us, will be so different from the Jesus of Nazareth remembered by any who knew Him in the flesh that we may almost describe Him as "Another (of a different kind)!" When we contrast His past humiliation, His lowly service, His apparent defeats with majesty and glorious judgment as King who will finally bring to pass the second phase of John's wonderful predictions, we too begin to perceive that we also believe that the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth is not the whole story, for we, like John, have seen only His first coming. As in the case of John, so also in ours, the time element between the first and second comings of Jesus has not been revealed. But John perished before discovering what we know, who live after Jesus' first coming: that Jesus did not intend to fulfil all of John's predictions on His first coming. Ironically, we too are scanning the heavens for that very "other Christ" about whom John queried the Lord, that other Messiah who will one day swing the axe into fruitless trees, purge His threshing floor, gather His grain and blash the chaff with inextinguishable fire! (Cf. Phil. 2:20, 21; Col. 3:4; 1 Th. 1:10; 3:13; 4:13-18; 2 Th. 1:7-10; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 7:24-28; 9:27, 28; 1 Jn. 3:2, 3)

If that be the meaning of John's question, what could be the motivation behind it? The Baptist's following included widely-scattered men of deep commitments like Jesus' early disciples, Apollos of Alexandria and others. (Cf. Jn. 1:35ff.; Ac. 18:24—19:7) So the great influence wielded by John over Israel in earlier months could not now be ignored as his question is dropped like a live hand grenade in this public assembly around Jesus. (see Lk. 7:21) If it be true that John and Jesus were preaching by the same Spirit, as they had led others to believe, why is it that one poses this seemingly embarrassing problem to the Other? Is this now a break in the monolithic system that these two had hitherto represented? Two authentic spokesmen for the same God cannot contradict each other or call into doubt the other's message or identity. John's preplexed "Are you the Christ—or not?" rumbled with ominous significance. Embarrassed disciples of Jesus must have fumed at this surprise attack from an unexpected quarter, even as embarrassed commentators today seek an explanation for this incongruous perplexity tearing at the heart of John. Why did John ask it?

1. Did he wish perhaps to confirm to his disciples what he himself had claimed for Jesus?
 - a. One writer (*PHC*, XXII, 265) exclaims: "But even so, it is surprising that his disciples should have such doubts to clear up. To think that he should have to send them to the Saviour Himself to settle their minds about Him. What had been the aim of his preaching amongst those disciples? What the subject . . . power . . . the effect? Apparently the very message he came to teach has been so taught by him as not yet to be learned!" This could be important, since his disciples had not left him to follow Jesus as they should have done long before. (See on Mt. 9:14-17) On the other hand, in fairness to them, it must be said that the fact that he continued to have disciples may only imply that he continued his work so long as he was free to make devoted followers whom he could mold for Jesus. But had they truly understood John, they would not have crystallized his movement into a permanent sect during his imprisonment. Perhaps they tended to do that earlier, but now that he is thrown into prison for his courageous preaching, his rating in their estimation zoomed to heroic proportions. Their zeal for his cause and their personal affection made it all the more

imperative that they NOT leave him at this crisis. Their dogged unwillingness to leave him now, though appreciated for its human worth, marked the furthest limit of their progress and sealed his failure. His imprisonment leaves them without a shepherd capable of guiding them into further truth or checking their excessive zeal toward sectarianism. There was none but Jesus Himself who could help them now. According to this view, then, John, finding himself totally frustrated, unable to continue his converting people to follow Jesus, sends two of his most reliable men directly to the Lord in the hope that He be able to convince them to follow Him.

b. Objections to this view have been suggested:

- (1) There is no necessary evidence that the disciples, on leaving Jesus to carry the message back to John, even understood their message. This is not to say that Jesus' cryptic words were incomprehensible to the average person, since we who live in the full light of His total revelation may draw colossal encouragements from them. But those who lived in a period not yet enlightened by this exposition of truth may not have grasped His meaning at all very quickly. The reply itself is better understood upon reflection and by those steeped in OT Scripture who could evaluate the evidences herein offered.
- (2) Christ's reply was addressed not to the disciples but
 - (a) "Go and tell John" (Mt. 11:4)
 - (b) The blessing is stated in the singular "Blessed is he" (*makários estin hōs. . .*), as if deliberately levelled at John. Admittedly, this singular can be a universal blessing, as the commentary below will show.
 - (c) Neither Jesus nor John are pretending either to ask or answer this question. That is, this is John's own question, not one put by him in the mouths of his followers that would express their doubts. (See Lk. 7:20) Nor does Jesus pretend to go along with the game by feigning to answer John while really answering the Baptist's representatives then in His presence.

- (d) The psychological need for Jesus' discourse about John (11:7-19) demands explanation if only a few of his disciples were seeming to waver in their convictions about Jesus. Jesus' defense of John is only plausible on the basis that John himself needed the defense.

2. Was John beginning to doubt?

- a. The psychological justification for this view is strong, since a man facing death cannot afford to be tortured by questions. He must be certain. He is not afraid to die but does not intend to die for the wrong thing. Greater anguish than death is torturing his mind now. Had John become so discouraged, so humiliated by his imprisonment that he needed further proof of Jesus' identity that would serve to verify even his own ministry to himself? Ederheim (*Life*, I, 661) seems to hear those stabbing doubts.

Was this the Kingdom he had come to announce as near at hand; for which he had longed, prayed, toiled, suffered, utterly denied himself and all that made life pleasant. . . . Where was the Christ? Was He the Christ? What was He doing? Was He eating and drinking all this while with publicans and sinners, when he, the Baptist, was suffering for Him? . . . had he succeeded in anything? . . . What if, after all, there had been some terrible mistake on his part? At any rate the logic of events was against him. He was now the fast prisoner of that Herod, to whom he had spoken with authority; in the power of that bold adulteress, Herodias. . . . It must have been a terrible hour. . . . At the end of one's life . . . to have such a question meeting him as: Art Thou He; or do we wait for another? Am I right, or in error and leading others into error? must have been truly awful.

- b. While this view is psychologically possible in light of "questions that try men's souls," nevertheless John's stern wilderness preparation, his being inured to hardship by his lonely vigils in the wilds of Judah, compounded with the positive identification of Jesus as the Messiah by God, combine together to render the case too certain to be

surrendered by doubt now. Nor is John likely to be disloyal or lose courage because he suddenly lost the freedom to stride up and down the Jordan valley preaching, since just such persecutions had awaited the great prophets before him. He was not unaware of the price for being a prophet in a wicked and turbulent age. It would be a greater psychological quirk in John to imagine that he had forgotten the events of no more than one year previous, which had signalled to him the identity of Jesus, or that these events were so utterly insignificant to him as to permit him to entertain such doubts as would mark a shattering of his faith in the Nazarene. Note:

- (1) He shows great faith by sending to JESUS for information, willing to accept whatever answer He gave.
 - (2) He perhaps doubted his own conclusions and asks Jesus in real humility how his own message about Jesus could harmonize with Jesus' actual fulfilment of that message.
 - (3) He surely knew that a false Christ would never admit to being an imposter.
 - (4) John may be a bit impatient with Jesus' slow, gentle ministry, wishing He would make more obvious progress but John's very approach proves John's extreme confidence in Jesus: Jesus would answer this question well and must answer in such a way as to bring action.
 - (5) John's last public word eloquently declares his faith from his prison cell: "Go ask JESUS! He knows the answers that can save us!"
3. Or perhaps the Lord's herald longed for clarification of something in the mission of Jesus that was not at all clear to him.
- a. Inspiration on some subjects, after all, does not mean omniscience on all. The possession of great visions or the ability to work miracles does not override the power to reason. This question, accordingly, is not a failure of confidence or of John's personal faith, since John sends his disciples directly to Jesus and to no one else. The main thrust of his evangelism had been a call to repentance in view of the coming judgment at the hands of the Messiah. Jesus, although indubitably marked as God's Anointed One, was using methods clearly (to John)

contrasting with, if not contradicting, his predictions. Further, while certain features of the Lord's first and second comings were revealed to and through John, yet the Baptist's recorded messages give no hint that the Messiah was actually to appear two times on earth, at times separated as widely as several milleniums. (Cf. Mt. 3:1-12; Mk. 1:2-8; Lk. 3:1-18; Jn. 1:19-34; 3:25-36) If these facts were disclosed only by later revelations, it is not surprising that this caged lion did not know them, hence needed clarifications on many points. (Cf. Ac. 1:6)

- b. Objection to this view is seen in the exceeding (if not, exaggerated) forcefulness of John's phrasing. The imperious, almost judicial tone of John demands that his inquiry be interpreted as something more than a simple, gentle request for information. How could a humble, trusting disciple, like John is here supposed to be, even dare to admit his own inner turmoil by comparing Jesus with "another (that cometh)"? No, there is too much bite, too much ill-disguised impatience with Jesus, in that phrasing. Interestingly enough, Jesus' reply provides John with no new information that would clarify Jesus' program which had so puzzled the prisoner. Rather he calls John back to reconsider the old evidence furnished by the miracles, the ancient prophecies and the responsibility to trust God despite one's own incomplete understanding.

4. Was John impatient?

- a. This is a young man's reaction: John was burning to see some action! (He was only six months older than the Lord Himself. Cf. Lk. 1:36, 56; 2:1-7) Absolutely convinced that his Cousin was God's Messiah, John could not fathom why Jesus was not making more progress, why He was not claiming a more indisputably prominent position, why He had not yet destroyed such iniquitous chaff as Herod Antipas and Herodias. How futilely inconsistent it seemed to John for Jesus to do "the works of the Christ" and not establish a Messianic throne in Zion! Even though John himself had predicted the great messianic works of grace ("Holy Spirit," Mt. 3:11; "gather wheat into garner" Mt. 3:12; show all men "the salvation of God" Lk. 3:6), yet Jesus' actual service seemed all grace and no judgment, so John was impatient. Just a single

word from Jesus could destroy the wicked rulers, unite the righteous, free John and usher in the kingdom of God! His question, then, may be paraphrased with the rude expression: "Are you really the Christ, or are we going to have to find someone else to do the job?" With this kind of prodding, John determined to pressure Jesus into changing the fundamental nature of His program from a slow, gentle ministry of patient mercy to one of fiery judgment. This reveals John's tactical reason for making this question and, consequently, its answer, as public as possible. Had the disciples asked Jesus the same question privately, it would not have had the same psychological pressure to force Him to answer it decisively, as it did publicly. John could foresee that both friends and critics would hear it, would be intensely interested in His reply and move in closer to see and hear how Jesus reacted. The result would be increased pressure on Jesus to declare Himself openly and, presumably, get on with the business of bringing in the messianic kingdom.

- b. Objections to this view are not easy, since this explanation combines the fierce love of John for Jesus, his total confidence in His ability, his imperious familiarity (he felt that he could talk to Jesus that way and get away with it), his zeal for God's Kingdom and righteousness. One objection to this as the exclusive meaning of John's question, is the fact that Jesus' answer is adaptable to all four possibilities in one way or another. (See below under "the evidential value of this section.")

While it is not easy to reject absolutely any of these suggestions, because a plausible case can be made for each, yet the psychological probabilities lie more clearly with the last one.

EVIDENTIAL VALUE OF THIS SECTION

The significance of the presence of this very incident in the Bible lies in two directions:

1. The internal value: Could this narrative be the unmasking of a cunning devised fable? It would be presumed that the great messianic herald could not have become so thoroughly disappointed in Jesus as to pose Him this impatient question! Which part is true then: the narrative of John's earlier testimony to Jesus' Messiahship, or this one which tells of his misgivings? But this very record, which bares the weakness

of this strong man, could have no sense except in light of his previous witness to Jesus. This ignorance, this impatience is precisely what we should expect from one who said all that John had previously preached. Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 668) notes:

When he sent his disciples with this question straight to Christ, he had already conquered; for such a question addressed to a possibly false Messiah has no meaning.

So this astounding question harmonizes perfectly with what is known of John earlier, and the testimony of Scripture which contains both accounts stands so much stronger for including both in the narrative.

2. This question posed by John is our question too! Is Jesus the final revelation of God, or not? Is there someone else besides Jesus with whom we shall have to do? Whether we need help in convincing others, or whether we are plagued with doubts of our own, whether we think that we need clarification when we should rather trust Him despite our limited knowledge, or whether we are impatient for God to do something about evil in the world, whatever our perplexity, Jesus' answer fits our need perfectly! John's perplexity furnished the occasion for Jesus to answer the heart-cry of all thinking men: "Are you God's last word, the ultimate reality, or must we turn to Another for the satisfaction of our soul's deepest need?"
3. One other detail that portrays the stark realism in this section was noticed by Foster (*SLC*, 1955, 404):

We do not envy those two disciples the task which had been assigned to them. As they stood in the great throng and watched the amazing miracles of Jesus and heard His thrilling sermon, they must have found it very difficult to persuade themselves to move to the front and actually ask Jesus such questions that challenged His whole campaign. But their devotion to John and the recollection of his command in prison and the certainty of his imminent death, if Christ did not come to his rescue, made them bold to speak. . . . These were the questions uppermost in the minds of all the people. They must have been stirred to the depths of their hearts as they heard John's disciples ask these questions.

They must have pressed a little closer to hear the discussion, for these were the very things they themselves wanted to know.

II. CHRIST CONVINCES AND CAUTIONS HIS CAPTIVE COMRADE (11:4-6)

However anguishing this question must have been to Jesus, coming as it does from a man who, given his extraordinary privileges to know more than others, should have responded better, yet with inimitable gentleness, understanding and sympathy, the Lord formed His reply to John. He grasped perfectly the torture of the Gethsemane out of which His famous cousin cried. He knew every hour of anguish John was then enduring down in the dank cell of Machaerus. Though this impatient question challenges Jesus' whole course of action, though curious, critical crowds by their very presence add to the pressure on Him, the Lord is Master of Himself! With consummate patience and wisdom He worded His strongly suggestive yet modest answer. As to the substance He provided a decisive conclusion to John's query, while not directly committing Himself on this crucial issue. This fact, however, suggests another mystery: Why did not Jesus just say, "Yes, John, I am the Christ" and be done with it?

1. Because to respond directly to THIS question in the presence of THESE multitudes (Mt. 11:7), would have meant that Jesus must openly declare Himself to be the Messiah (was John counting upon that eventuality?), even though the popular crowd would not have understood the true, spiritual meaning that the Lord would have wanted to communicate by that term. The crowd would have accepted Him as Jewish Messiah and crowned Him to be such a king as they desired. But this very act would have turned Him into their slave, reducing His grand mission to a rule over a tiny, insignificant kingdom and would have made Him dependent upon their extremely restricted conception of the true Messiahship as God had intended it. Jesus could not have answered John's question directly and openly before that mob, because to have done so would have instantly compromised His entire spiritual mission.
2. He did not answer John with a simple affirmation unsupported by ulterior evidences, because to have done this would still have left doubts in the mind of John. Any imposter could have claimed, "Yes, I am the Christ."

3. Jesus answered the way He did, because John's true need was not for an answer that would have made him believe in Jesus on the basis of a mathematical certainty. John needed to trust Jesus on the basis of the firmly established evidences already available to him. John did not at this point need intellectual debate or overwhelming argument that forced him to have a helpless confidence in Jesus' program. He must now stand fast, confident of the proofs already given, and so experience the real meaning of faith.

Luke, at this point, includes a striking detail that serves as background for Jesus' proof: "In that hour He cured many of diseases, plagues and evil spirits. On many that were blind he bestowed sight." (Lk. 7:21) Did Jesus do this on purpose with the specific end in view to make John's disciples eyewitnesses? Did He make John's disciples wait for His reply while, unperturbed, He continued His healing? If so, Jesus' self-mastery is thrown into even greater relief, since He deliberately lets John's question float lazily over that excited crowd while, all unruffled, Jesus calmly goes about His work as if nothing at all had occurred, but fully knowing that the tension in the crowd is growing to fever pitch: they too must hear the full answer to that question. Instead of shouting to get their attention, as was sometimes necessary (see Mt. 15:10; Mk. 8:34), He lets John's explosive demand agitate the crowds into moving in closer and quieting down to hear. When they were fully ready He made His move:

11:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see:

11:5 The blind receive their sight,

and the lame walk,

the lepers are cleansed,

and the deaf hear,

and the dead are raised up,

and the poor have good tidings preached to them.

THIS is a fit answer for the fuming campaigner down in Herod's prison? Here he had expected a drastic change in the Messiah's program which would violently overthrow God's enemies and get the Messiah's Kingdom underway, and this is the best excuse the Messiah Himself can give for His amazing lack of progress in that direction! His response is almost anticlimatic for people who were aching for a positive statement. But let their tempers cool, let them examine the indisputable evidence to feel the force of this brilliant argumenta-

tion! Jesus' proof of His identity is all the stronger because He is deliberately understating His evidence! Notice further that He sends no list of philosophical arguments why John (or anyone else) should believe Him to be the unique Messiah fully in control of His proper mission. Rather, He orders the two messengers to report to John what is happening, what He himself is doing. Jesus unconditionally applies to Himself, and invites John to subject Him to, the acid test of deeds and results, a test He will later (see on v. 19b) put into the hands of His critics. The Lord wished to be measured not only by the power of His talk. He constantly pointed to His "works," His deeds which identify Him to be God's final representative. (Cf. Jn. 14:10, 11; 10:37, 38) In other words, Jesus repeats for John the Baptist the very same evidences given to everyone. The Lord is not partial, giving to some special help not also available to any other. This fact is crucial, since the answer of Jesus will contain the all-sufficient proof that should identify Him to any man anywhere. What is this answer?

1. EVIDENCE of His identity and consequent right to expect unwavering allegiance: the miracles.
 - a. Done in the presence of hundreds of eyewitnesses, including John's disciples, they could not be gainsaid. (Lk. 7:21) They were not a matter of hear-say evidence.
 - b. Jesus claimed to work miracles. (Mt. 11:4, 5; Lk. 7:21, 22) The fact that He states only what occurs to the afflicted, leaving it to John's disciples to add that Jesus is actually working these prodigious miracles, does not detract from this emphatic declaration. Let those eclectics who think they believe Jesus' words but, ironically, reject His miracles, consider this affirmation! (See the special study on Miracles.) The impressive list of miracles cited argues how extensive and how commonly known was the proof Jesus had provided the nation as a foundation for settling just such a question as now stood before Him!
 - c. The impact of this evidence lies in the fact that the miracles could only have been done by the power and with the approval of God. They became, thus, the authenticating stamp of approval upon the precise course followed by Jesus. This fact alone rebukes both doubt and impatience.
 - d. For the doubters of our age it is well to remember with Plummer (*Luke*, 203) that

It is clear, not only that Luke and Matthew understand Jesus to refer to bodily and not spiritual healings, but that they are right in doing so. John's messengers had not "seen and heard" Christ healing the spiritually blind and the morally leprous. Moreover, what need to add *ptōchoi euaggelizontai*, if all that precedes refers to the preaching of the good tidings? It is unnatural to express the same fact, first by a series of metaphors, and then literally. All the clauses should be taken literally.

- e. While it is true that the works of healing would prove no more than Jesus was a great prophet, nevertheless they were not unexplained wonders unconnected from a well-known schema of revelation that runs through the OT right up to Christ. Nor were they unconnected from what Jesus was saying about Himself. As proof, they do not make Jesus' claims or His teaching true, but they are the attestation of God that His claims are well-founded and His teaching God's. Since, then, Jesus claimed to be more than merely a great Prophet, His miracles attest God's approval of Jesus' affirmations about Himself. His wonders and signs are God's way of testifying that Jesus' highest claims are true. (Cf. Jn. 4:25, 26, 42; 8:12, 24, 31, 32 etc.)
2. EVIDENCE by implication from the nature of the miracles themselves. Because Jesus' miracles are directly linked to God's preparation for His coming, worked out in the OT prophets, it is not surprising to hear Him describe His ministry by using snatches of prophetic passages. (Cf. Isa. 29:18, 19; 35:5-7; 61:1-3 with Lk. 4:18-21) Jesus' choice of words are no mere recitation of facts, made more singular by the fact that He omits explicit mention of His own great part in this. His recital concludes with the most sublimely cryptic words, that would have almost no meaning for someone not in tune with OT prophecies: "The poor have good tidings preached to them." But to the man well-read in Isaiah, this simple phrase speaks volumes: "Reexamine what the prophets had predicted the Christ would do!" By implication Jesus is saying that the OT prophets had predicted just such a ministry as that in which He was then engaged. So doing, the Lord drives John right back to his Bible to reconsider the prophets'

message in order to see the perfect harmony between His program and their predictions concerning the Messiah.

3. **EVIDENCE** from the unworldly nature of His ministry: **The poor have good tidings preached to them.** John had already heard of the miracles (11:2) and much of His procedure (Lk. 7:18), so much of Jesus' present answer was not new to him. But it was superbly Messianic and unfortunately new that the impoverished, the afflicted, the meek, the humble, the "inferior," in short, the common people should be the special object of divine care. This concern for the weak, those who do not count, who cannot pay, whose voice is too weak to cry aloud for help, this genuine concern that brings a Royal Gospel to these without money or price, is remarkable proof of its divine origin. (Cf. Isa. 11:4; 29:19; 32:7; 55:1ff.; Rev. 21:6; 22:17) To borrow Plummer's vivid expression (*Luke*, 203), "The poor, whom the Greek despised and the Roman trampled on, and who the priests and the Levite left on one side," commonly neglected or exploited as worthless and ignorant, are now, by God's special choice and the Messiah's efforts, brought into the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Jas. 2:5, 6; Lk. 6:20) This simple phrase ("the poor receive the Gospel") measures the distance that separated Jesus' messiahship from the common Jewish concept, and demonstrates how completely Jesus was proceeding in perfect harmony with God's plans.

Several commentators note that Jesus' rehearsal of His Messianic accomplishments rises dramatically from common miracles of healing to (what would seem to us to be) the crowning miracle, resurrection of the dead. What could be higher or of more value than this? But Jesus continues in climactic fashion, finishing by estimating the proclamation of the gospel to the poor as above all miracles generally, superior even to the power to resurrect the dead! If this be correct, from an apologetic standpoint, it is most interesting. Among peoples whose sacred literature abounds in unexplained wonders and to whom miracles in legends is the rule rather than the exception, as well as among skeptical peoples who have lived to see the exposure of counterfeits and frauds, there is especially needed one other crowning proof of the divine origin of the message of Christ. Here the Master furnishes that critical proof. The sheer genius behind His

choice of this evidence is the fact that, while miracles and signs can be counterfeited by any pretended prophet, it is not likely that human selfishness in the prophet himself would permit him to counterfeit a tender, long-suffering sympathy for helpless sufferers who can in no way remunerate Him. Compassion of this kind does not belong to this world. It marks itself instantly as divine.

Here again, Jesus submits Himself to the test of time. He is willing not only to point to His miraculous works which already tell us so much about Him. More than this, He underlines the value of the long-range estimate of His life and ministry. It is as though Jesus had said, "My miracles identify my Messiahship as truly divine; my concern for the poor marks my ministry as humane in its highest sense."

The Lord Jesus fully understood the absolute essentiality of all three proofs of the divine authenticity of His message and mission, and His Church ignores any one of them to her peril! Church history is spotted with overemphasis or crass ignorance of one or more of these evidences: miracles, prophecy or genuine humanity to man in its highest sense. Later (15:1-20) Jesus will thunder to the Pharisees a lesson we can learn here: "No religion, regardless of its pretended origin and miraculous proofs, can call itself divine if it makes a man mean, inhuman, or indifferent to the weak!"

In this answer returned to John, significant for its absence is any reference to judgment and vengeance. (Cf. Isa. 35:4) This omission is meaningful, since John must have been straining to hear just these very words. His silence on this subject says to John, "Be patient: I am proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor now. One day I will announce the day of the vengeance of our God. But not yet." Even though He breathes not a word to John about the fiery vengeance of the Messiah upon the wicked, He not only refuses to side-step the issue, but solemnly declares Himself openly to the multitudes. (See on 11:20-24)

11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me. There is something strangely ominous about this tender beatitude. While it possesses all the gentle persuasion of a blessing, its gentleness lies in its form not its content! Expressed as a benediction, its antithesis is clear: "Woe be to the man who is so disappointed by me that he ceases to trust me and so is lost!" So certain is Jesus that He would become a "stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall," and misunderstood by the

majority of the people, that He issues this warning sheathed in a blessing. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:8; Isa. 8:14, 15; Mt. 8:34; 13:57; 26:31; Jn. 6:60, 61; 1 Co. 1:22-25) What kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be, if not to be shocked by Him is seen as something especially blessed? But the very reason for framing His warning in the form of a blessing at this point, points to the very need of John and everyone else who would be scandalized by Jesus. Even the most satisfyingly persuasive miracle will fail to convince anyone unless his mind is open, willing to be won over, unless his prejudices are laid aside in favor of a new love. This appealing gentleness of Jesus is deliberately calculated to open the mind and close the sale. This approach is the more psychologically sound and effective because of the long-standing preconceived notions men have about what God's Messiah has to say and be. Rather than shout and pound His fist, ramming His point home (as was sometimes the case and necessarily so), the Lord intentionally uses "soft-sell," understating His evidence, weakening His cause in the eyes of all neo-Maccabeans, quietly closing with a patient refusal to change anything.

How could John the Baptist, of all people, possibly have been scandalized by Him? That this is no remote possibility is amply proven by considering what evidence John had already been given, evidence that should have sufficed to allay any doubts and calm all impatience. John is seriously tempted to ignore the clear voice of God speaking directly to him from heaven and the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Master. What greater evidence could another Christ give, if these were the credentials that certified Jesus? What in John would cause such profound dissatisfaction with Jesus that lowered Jesus in his esteem to be something less than the Coming One? These perplexities may be resolved by posing another question: Why should any person be disappointed in Jesus?

1. The Lord failed the Zealots by not forming a liberation army against the Romans.
2. Jesus did not interest the rich, self-sufficient Sadducees because of His humble birth, lack of proper rabbinical accreditation and because of (ultimately) unpopular religious, social and political views.
3. He turned off all the popular enthusiasts, since His entire program failed to support commonly held preconceptions.
4. He shocked the leaders of established religion, the Pharisees, by opposing the rabbis, whose position was held in maximum reverence by the Hebrews themselves.

5. He lost the ear of the grand majority by not blessing what they wanted, did not do what they pleased, nor catered to their whims.

Another (PHC, XXII, 273), adhering more closely to John's personal problem, analyzes the reasons for being offended by Jesus:

1. The peculiarities of early education often give rise to this temptation of offence in Christ. . . . We too have the prejudices of our own special education and standpoint.

2. This temptation is sometimes connected with the fact that Christ seems to abandon His friends to the most cruel suffering and oppression. The unbelief that starts in suffering, rather than in a syllogism of the scribe has a special claim to sympathy and patient love. . . . Do we not sometimes fall into the temptation of thinking that Christ under-estimates our temporal well-being?

3. The limitations that hem in our love of the excitements and activities of public service often give rise to this peril. . . . Possibly we feel within us a capacity for effective religious enterprise, from the exercise of which we are cut off by some embarrassing condition in our lives.

4. This peril sometimes springs up because our knowledge of Christ comes through indirect and prejudiced channels. . . . This offence may arise in us because we have to view Christ, in some of His relations, through crude, ignoble, small-minded representatives.

A man will always be discouraged with Jesus if he thinks that he himself knows best. Unless we hold lightly and tentatively our views about what the Kingdom of God has to be, unless there is a definitely humble willingness to learn from Jesus, an intelligent flexibility and intellectual honesty about our own great ignorance, when Jesus Christ cuts across OUR ideas, we are in for a shock! So John, too, could have been scandalized by holding tenaciously to his own concept of the Messiah. But like any prejudice, his concept represented only a partial vision of the truth. Had John known all the truth about Jesus, he probably would not have dashed off this question. Nevertheless, it was this PARTIAL vision, this INADEQUATE understanding which would cause John to disbelieve, if he clung blindly to it. Not only John, but any man, definitely stands in danger of stumbling into the same fatal error of rejecting the claims of Jesus because they do not suit his own views.

To him and to all, Jesus would say, "Though I may not seem to be moving rapidly enough in the right directions to suit the views, tastes and ambitions of many people, I know where I am going. I know best how to plan my Kingdom. I do not intend to change my pace or my course, even though this will mean that many, who are unwilling to trust me to know what I am about, will be left shaken, will walk away in disgust and never come back. Happy is the man who can stand the shock when my methods, my manners, my message and my mission collide with his opinions about them. Blessed indeed is the man who can trust me perfectly, who can see me for what I really am, accept me for what I am really doing, even though he does not understand why,—who can do all that and not doubt!"

This simple beatitude is a call to trust Jesus to know what He is doing, for only this unhesitating childlike confidence will keep us from falling (see on 11:25). Only a disciple can keep from falling; the wise and understanding, who know too much to accept things as Jesus presents them, will always stumble.

The Bible writers do not provide us the sequel to this incident, leaving us thus with unanswered questions: how did John react to the mysterious message repeated to him by his couriers? Did he plummet into further despair at what must have seemed (humanly speaking) to be the failure of his attempt to get answers and action out of Jesus? In light of the Judge's praise (see on 11:7-19), it is more probable that he plunged into profounder reflection upon the whole burden of the prophetic message, and, like the very prophets themselves whom he read, bowed his head in perplexity, struggling with the meaning of it all. (1 Pet. 1:10, 11) In a world of limited knowledge, vast ignorance and imperfect justice, ruled by a patient God who will have all men come to repentance, John had to learn what it means to cry: "Not my will but thine be done!" It required a sinewy, tough-minded trust to hold John steady as he lay in his dungeon, captive, doomed and alone, yes, but blessed, and not offended by Jesus.

Offended. Jesus' personal example speaks volumes on the subject of causing one's neighbor to stumble. He was the greatest stumbling-block the Jews were ever to know. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-8; 1 Co. 1:23) His mode of life, His message of mercy, the speed and direction with which He conducted His ministry, His view of the Messiahship were all good things that definitely caused many of His own people so utterly to fall that they never rose again to believe Him or follow Him further. Nevertheless, the Lord did not change one iota of

His program or life-style in order to keep that from happening. No one was more sensitive to the weaknesses of the little ones than He, yet He did not swerve from the path of righteousness, even though He knew this to be a collision course with popular error. He also knew that He could not win over everyone, but this realization did not at all lessen the heartbreak nor keep Him from trying. (Cf. Mt. 7:13, 14 with 23:37) But this beatitude (11:6) by its very existence represents a hard look at the probabilities and marks as particularly blessed those remarkable individuals who trust Him enough to swallow their disappointment and remain His disciples.

III. CHRIST'S CHARITABLE COMMENDATION OF THE CONSCIENTIOUS CHAMPION (11:7-11)

11:7 And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes . . . Observe how Jesus permits John's messengers to get well out of earshot before taking up the line of thought that follows. He may have done this deliberately for two reasons:

1. The multitude themselves needed to reflect deeply on (what must have seemed to them) the mysterious message sent to the Baptist. It is as if Jesus were feeding them in two courses, giving ample time to digest the information, before giving them more.
2. Further, had John's messengers overheard Christ's high praise for John and reported it to him, this might have tended to cancel the effectiveness of the evidence Jesus gave him. So it is best that they not hear this commendation. Many men are very tough-skinned against all manner of abuse or reviling, but have no effective defense against the negative effects of praise. They immediately puff up, their eyes swell shut, hindering them from seeing themselves objectively in light of that praise.

If Jesus' message to John contained any rebuke or suggestion that the Baptist were less praiseworthy, then Plummer's remark (*Matthew*, 161) is to the point:

In society men are commonly praised to their face or the faces of their friends, and blamed behind their backs. Jesus does the opposite. . . .

Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John . . . It was John, not his disciples or anyone else in particular, who had fired that explosive question. It was John to whom Jesus

returned a simple, conclusive answer. Now it is **John** concerning whom the Lord addresses the crowds. But why did Jesus feel He needed to speak about His herald in THIS way at THIS time?

1. Because John's question might have caused the multitudes to feel that the great prophet was having a crisis of faith if he is driven to ask this question so ambiguously full of doubt. Is John himself now failing? If so, the people would certainly be tempted to reevaluate, and perhaps even reject, John's message upon which Jesus' own mission was based. Although Jesus had refused to answer John's impatient demand directly, and although His veiled rebuke might be interpreted by some to mean that the desert preacher is no longer worthy of notice or honor, Jesus immediately corrects such a notion. Although one doubt, if strongly held, can unmake a character, and although a bossy impatience can destroy childlike trust and humble service, yet neither one doubt nor zealous impatience mean that John has fallen. Jesus leaps immediately to his defense, clearing him of unwarranted suspicion. In fact, He does more: He sought to sustain their former confidence in John and rekindle their initial admiration for him.
2. Because Jesus needed to attenuate the apparent difference between the view of John the Baptist and His own with regard to the Messiahship. The crowds, ignorant of the real relationship existing between John and Jesus (Jesus is John's Lord), might have tended to misinterpret this rift as merely the schism between two equal teachers. Jesus must now defend the God-given mission of John, show its limitation and its difference from His own mission, and then push the crowds to decide about both. Note how some of the implications of this text demand of Jesus that He possess absolute divine authority in order for Him to make the statements He does. This fact could not have escaped the notice of at least some in the crowd.
3. The impatient, somewhat critical undercurrent of the Baptist's question could not help but stimulate people to take a serious, more critical look at John or Jesus or both. Perhaps Jesus, who knows men's hearts could read the unfriendly criticism and honest puzzling written there: "Say, John's right: if Jesus be the Messiah, then why does He move forward so meekly, enduring the reviling and the murderous scheming of His enemies? And how could He leave John to rot in Herod's

dungeon; When is He going to get this Kingdom of God moving, claim the Messianic throne for Himself and begin to rule the world?" The anguished question out of this dungeon turned the multitude to examining the claims of Jesus, since the phrasing of the question concentrates all the various aspects of the mission of Jesus into one burning issue to be resolved immediately without embarrassment or hesitation. It became an instant issue to be dealt with by visible proof and cogent argument that would justify all that Jesus had been claiming for Himself. The comprehension and conscience of the people was thus thrown into crisis, since they too needed to decide about this same issue.

4. Jesus could never have deprecated the mission of John without at the same time undermining His own ministry, since John's work preparatory to Christ's coming had been perfectly valid for its purpose. Jesus came not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them, and John was the last of the great prophets! (11:13; see on Mt. 5:17:20) John had initiated this exciting discussion by asking, in effect: "Who are you?" but Jesus fully answers this question before the multitudes by demanding, "Who is John the Baptist?" For only those who accept John the Baptist at full value can truly appreciate who Jesus is. (See on 11:14, 15)

Who was John the Baptist? While many had dismissed him from their minds as an ill-dressed, brassy-voiced, low-country evangelist, the Son of God has quite another estimate. With a mighty barrage of thought-provoking questions, He provides a strong rebuttal to any criticisms of John's person or ministry entertained by the crowds.

What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? Why did Jesus begin His message on John with a series of questions?

1. Because questions arouse in the listeners an interest in what Jesus will say later. An affirmation does not engross the attention quite so well as does a short barrage of questions. Yet, since these are rhetorical questions, Jesus is making a series of most striking observations.
2. Even though these are rhetorical questions, yet by their very nature they make the audience take a position about John and about themselves. They ask "What was it in you yourselves that prompted you to trek out into the wastelands of Judea? What was it about John that so stirred your souls?"

From Jesus' use of past tense verbs (*exēlibete*, all three times, translated "you went out") it becomes obvious that He is hammering on the folks' memory of what they saw at the time they originally went out to hear John at the Jordan River. These questions, then, refer to what John was at that time. Further, since Jesus makes no exceptions or reservations about him, He definitely implies that John never has been, or has yet become, anything else but what they have always known him to be, a towering rock of spiritual power, moral courage and unwavering godliness. It is clear that this is Jesus' evaluation. The mere fact that the Baptist is now perplexed about the program of the Master in no way reduces that estimate. The fact that he is in prison and is not whining for miraculous release as the price for his trust in Jesus re-doubles the force of this impression.

The Lord's praise for the forerunner and his work, given especially at this juncture, is excellent evidence of the authenticity of the fact itself, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 669) has it:

He to Whom John had formerly borne testimony, now bore testimony to him; and that, not in the hour when John had testified for Him, but when his testimony had wavered and almost failed. This is the opposite of what one might expected, if the narrative had been a fiction, while it is exactly what we might expect if the narrative be true.

The Master nurtured a deep respect for His herald, ever speaking of him with generous appreciation. (Cf. Jn. 5:30-35) Bruce (*Training*, 71) comments:

John reciprocated these kindly feelings, and had no sympathy with the petty jealousies in which his disciples sometimes indulged. The two great ones, both of them censured for different reasons by their degenerate contemporaries, ever spoke of each other to their disciples and to the public in terms of affectionate respect; the lesser light magnanimously confessing his inferiority, the greater magnifying the worth of His humble fellow-servant. What a refreshing contrast was thus presented to the mean passions of envy, prejudice and detraction in other quarters, under whose malign influence men of whom better things might have been expected spoke of John as a madman, and of Jesus as immoral and profane!

But this battery of questions is most impressive. As the Lord probes for an answer, offering alternatives, He is making the multitudes answer that question: "What did you go out to see?" As a master

orator, Jesus punches out a simple outline, eliminating unworthy alternatives: "Not this, not this, but that, and even more than that." Study His outline: "Who is John the Baptist?"

1. Certainly not a fickle sychophant (v. 7)
2. Certainly not a dapper courtier living luxuriously (v. 8)
3. But rather a prophet of God (v. 9)
4. More than this, he's the personal messenger of Jahveh (v. 10)
5. He is the greatest of the race (v. 11a)
6. Transition to Jesus' revelations on the Kingdom: "Yet he's inferior to the humblest Christians." (v. 11b)

So doing, He zooms in one one major worthwhile reason for commending John. Having confirmed it, He used it as a springboard from which to launch His revelations concerning the true office and ministry of the Baptist. But before He could do this, He must assure Himself of the crowd's sharing the same footing, the same fundamental appreciation of John.

A. A CHANGELING'S CHARACTER?

His first question cracks like a rifle-shot: **a reed shaken with the wind?** Is Jesus flaying their present criticisms, doubts and worldly ambitions with withering scorn and sarcasm, or is this a calm, reasoned defense? Some take Jesus' words literally; others, metaphorically:

1. *Literally*: "You would have found many such canes out there in the desert along the Jordan River, but would a tall reed waving and bent by every wind have really so attracted your attention so fixedly as to drive you out there to see it?" Tall reeds are the most common sight along the Jordan River, but are not so marvellous as to lure crowds out into the wilderness. The very fact that people did go out proves the extraordinariness of John. People would hardly cross the street to see the kind of person they could meet any day, not to mention trekking miles through wilderness country.
2. *Figuratively*: The very fact that Jesus offers this obvious metaphor for weakness and instability indicates that He really advocates the opposite: "No, you went out into the wilderness because you expected and found a rock of a man, a giant of unswerving fidelity and moral power in the face of great personal difficulties. No fickleness of spirit would have so commanded your attention. That man dared stand firm against the Pharisees and unmasked their hypocrisy! He fearlessly

rebuked sin, though the king himself were the sinner, even when his own freedom, yes, his own life hung in the balance!"

The audience's moral sense was awakened. If John had been a man who easily yielded to popular opinion, bending with it because he has no solid convictions of his own, then why is he at this very minute down in Herod's prison? He is there because he would not compromise, because he could not shut his eyes to what the Jewish religionists had not the moral stamina to denounce and about which the silent majority stayed silent, because they were just plain afraid.

But Jesus is not merely defending John here; His attack is also aimed at the weakness and failure of the whole nation. The whole Jewish nation was made up of reeds swaying before popular currents, but John did not sway! Here is written the quality of the moral fiber of his real faith and piety. His was a non-conformity in things that count.

B. A COURTIER'S COSTUME?

11:8 But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. While His audience is still reeling under the first salvo, Jesus rams home another. Again His words have been taken,

1. *Literally*: "You might have been attracted to the wilderness to see such a man. But let's be frank: you would not have found such a man where John was actually preaching! Dapper courtiers are to be found in kings' palaces, not in the badlands of Judea. Realistically, a wilderness pilgrimage is totally unnecessary for those who would see luxurious worldlings. You would not have had to go very far to observe pliant, flattering courtiers fawning before Herod." Jesus' sparkling figure of speech is the very antithesis of John's actual manner: his austere diet and desert dress and personal discipline, his entire renunciation of self, even in things entirely legitimate, damn the heresy that ease of living is life's highest expression and goal. With no thought for his own personal comfort or advancement, his whole life was concentrated on being a "Voice crying in the wilderness."
2. *Figuratively*: The phrases, **soft raiment, king's houses (or courts) and live in luxury** (Lk. 7:25), strongly suggest a person who knows the courtier's art of flattering kings whereby one secures to himself **royal favor and promotions**. The irony of Jesus' words would strike hard at the conscience of the wavering multitudes, since they had humbly and joyously

accepted John's coming and message precisely because John was NOT a yes-man for any earthly ruler. He stood head and shoulders above common man, attracting admiration because he could not be bought by royal favors. His unswerving fidelity to God and to His Word drove him as God's ambassador to take up the dangerous occupation of telling the truth to kings.

The crowd knew that John had not yielded either to the popularity craze or to the craving for luxury, riches and comfort. They also knew how many self-styled spiritual leaders were even then bending in every direction of the compass as the pressure of flattery or threats was applied to them. They also knew that pliable preachers and those craving the praise of men and the riches of the world as ultimate objectives do not end in prisons as martyrs for the truth. The collective conscience of the audience must have been deeply stirred as Jesus poured searing scorn upon their own worldly dreams, because if Jesus is (by implication) praising the very opposite of what they thought fine and worthy of their ambitions, His is a challenge to the most excruciating self-examination. Who among them did not fully expect that the Messiah Himself would be **clothed in soft raiment, live in luxury in kings' houses?** Who among them did not aspire to the same sort of treatment?

C. A COLOSSAL COMMUNICATOR

11:9 **But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet?** After eliminating other unworthy alternatives, Jesus expresses the image that was forcing itself into the mind of His hearers: a prophet! As the Jews had cried for release from their oppressors and the establishment of the Messiah's reign, they had faced the horrible possibility that God had abandoned His people, for the heavens had remained silent now for 400 years. Almost any voice that cried with the old familiar ring of the prophets could not help but cause the Hebrew pulse to race with unwonted excitement: God has again visited His people! (Cf. Lk. 1:68, 78; 7:16) They had eagerly flocked to the Jordan, knowing that "the Lord God will do nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) It stood to reason that the Almighty was about to act, for there on the banks of the Jordan stood His prophet. (See notes on 3:1-12, Vol. I)

Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. Thus, the multitudes had been correct in their estimate of John, but

they had not set their evaluation high enough. Jesus gives it as His own emphatic judgment that they had seen more than they intended to see. But how is it possible that anyone could be **more than a prophet**? Besides combining in himself all the usual functions of the prophetic office, John was assigned the task not only of prophesying about the Messiah, but also of preparing the way for Him and announcing Him to the world as having come. Jesus enlarges upon this declaration:

11:10 **This is he, of whom it is written,**

**Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee.**

In short, John the Baptist is the personal herald of Jehovah Himself who will shortly appear. (Mal. 3:1—4:6) For the Hebrew in whose heart burned Malachi's words, Jesus' quiet, but terribly significant, assertion must have been His most thrilling revelation up to this point. In this restrained disclosure are inherent three assumptions:

1. Jesus Christ depends upon the divine origin and trustworthiness of the OT prophecy, citing it here as indirect proof of His own identity and direct evidence of John's. For what cannot be known today of Malachi's prophecy, we are indebted to Jesus, who does not hesitate for a moment to quote textually the ancient prophet.
2. Christ declares the exact fulfilment of Malachi's words, pointing to John the Baptist as their unique fulfilment: **"This is he!"** (See also on 11:14) Not only is predictive prophecy a possibility, but we have here a specific case in point of its actual occurrence and fulfilment.
3. Since Jesus is the One for whom John the Baptist had prepared, He hereby declares Himself to be the Lord God in Person come to His Temple. This is equivalent to a claim to deity on the part of Christ Himself.

The earth-shaking importance of this citation of Malachi's prophecy by Jesus can best be appreciated by studying the prophet's own words in their context. About them Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 456ff.) notes:

To the question, 'Where is the God of Judgment?' the Lord Himself replies that He will suddenly come to His temple, but that before His coming He will send a messenger to prepare the way for Him. The announcement of this messenger rests upon the prophecy in Isa. 40:3ff., as the expression ("prepare the way") which is borrowed from that passage, clearly shows.

The person whose voice Isaiah heard calling to make the way of Jehovah in the desert, that the glory of the Lord might be revealed to all flesh, is here described as *maleâch*, whom Jehovah will send before Him, i.e. before His coming. This *maleâch* ("messenger") is not a heavenly messenger or spiritual being . . . nor the angel of Jehovah *kat'exochên* (*par excellence*), who is mentioned afterwards and called *maleâch habberith*, but an earthly messenger of the Lord, and indeed the same who is called the prophet Elijah in ver. 23 (4:5 in some versions), and therefore not "an ideal person, viz. the whole choir of divine messengers, who are to prepare the way for the coming of salvation, and open the door for the future grace" (Hengstenburg) but a concrete personality—messenger who was really sent to the nation in John the Baptist immediately before the coming of the Lord. The ideal view is precluded not only by the historical fact, that not a single prophet arose in Israel during the whole period between Malachi and John, but also by the context of the passage before us, according to which the sending of the messenger was to take place immediately before the coming of the Lord to His temple. . . .

Preparing the way (an expression peculiar to Isaiah: cf. Isa. 40:3; 57:14 and 62:10) by clearing away impediments lying in the road, denotes the removal of all that retards the coming of the Lord to His people, i.e. the taking away of enmity to God and of ungodliness by the preaching of repentance and the conversion of sinners. The announcement of this messenger therefore implied, that the nation in its existing moral condition was not yet prepared for the reception of the Lord, and therefore had no ground for murmuring at the delay of the manifestation of the divine glory, but ought rather to murmur at its own sin and estrangement from God. When the way shall have been prepared, the Lord will suddenly come. . . . The Lord (*h'âdôn*) is God; this is evident both from the fact that He comes to *His* temple, i.e. the temple of Jehovah, and also from the relative clause "whom ye seek," which points back to the question, "Where is the God of judgment?" (ch. 2:17). . . . This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Christ, in whom the angel of the covenant, the Logos, became flesh, and in the sending of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Him.

With the coming of the Lord the judgment will also begin; not the judgment upon the heathen, however, for which the ungodly nation was longing, but the judgment upon the godless members of the covenant nation. . . .

But compare Malachi's original words with the uniform NT quotation of them (Mal. 3:1; Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 7:27):

Malachi:

Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.

New Testament

Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

While it may be true (and should be noticed therefore) that all the Synoptics concur on this rendering independent of either the Hebrew text or the LXX, as if they were citing a popular form of this prophecy extant in no manuscript remaining to our time, this version of Malachi's words is interpretative. The interpretation in the mouth of Christian Apostles is not suspect, however, and could be perfectly Jewish and stereotyped in this form long before the Evangelists made use of it.

The reason for this is obvious and commonplace in prophecy: what Jehovah does through agents He may be said to do for Himself: In Malachi's prophecy God Himself prepares to come in judgment to Israel. But even in the Hebrew text (represented in our English versions) Malachi represents God as changing from first person singular, "I," "my," and "me," to the third person singular: "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." To the attentive reader, Jewish or Christian, this change may mean a distinction in personages between the God who intends to reveal Himself and the actual Person through whom He makes Himself known. (Study what appears to be a similar case in Ezek. 34:11-24) Therefore, in light of the distinction in Persons between Jehovah who inhabits eternity and His actual manifestation in time, a Jewish scholar might read back into God's words the proper personal pronouns that would clarify that distinction. Further, since this interpretative translation is particularly irreprehensible in view of the distinction between the Persons of Jesus the Son and God the Father, a distinction borne out in the fulfillment of

the prophecy in question, the Christian Evangelists would find this popular rendering especially suitable

The change of wording bears the stamp of approval of inspired men who quote Malachi's words **ONLY** in this form, providing thus one more evidence for the conclusion we already knew from many other sources: "The coming of Christ is the coming of God."

11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Among them that are born of women, as Plummer (*Luke*, 205) has it, is "a solemn periphrase for the whole human race." (Cf. Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4) Who are the real giants of this world? Kings? Generals? Statesmen? Philosophers? How differently God measures the greatness of a man! History, too, gauges a man quite differently. Who would have ever heard of Herod today, had he not laid violent hands on John the Baptist. Pilate, too, would have been a non-entity, had he not been partially responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ. Further, had the Lord Himself polled His audience that day, seeking their responses to the one question, "Whom do you consider to be the greatest man who have ever lived?" the replies would have exhausted the pages of OT history: "Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel!" However significant a role those men may have played in the scenes of the history of God's revelation, God's Son places the laurel on another brow. His decision is final and inclusive: **There hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.** In the estimate of earth's Judge, John is the greatest of the race, greater even than the prophets ("more than a prophet") But in what sense?

1. Certainly not absolutely, since Jesus proceeds immediately to amend His seemingly universal declaration. And, if our interpretation of 11:12-15 be correct, then the Lord limits John's superiority to great men who lived before the Cross. Of those, then, he is relatively the greatest.
2. His personal character was positively noteworthy; humble, self-denying and courageous. God's interest in John is a specimen of real piety and practical zeal for righteousness indicates that He is not so much interested in counting men, as in finding men who will count! In seeking men who can be what John was, God might be paraphrased as saying, "I would that I had as many soldiers as I have men!" Though the Father is not willing that any should perish, and so is pleased with numbers of godly men, yet His heart is touched by the con-

centrated power of a singleminded individual whose whole life stands out in a wilderness of indifferentism, unbelief and doubt, and who is willing to spend his whole life in God's service, calling men back to God.

3. John's superiority also lay in the function he performed in the Messianic planning. His was the unique glory of being the immediate forerunner of the Messiah. Though a great prophet like Moses and Elijah, he not only prophesied, but lived to see and point out to others the Messiah of whom he had spoken.

Note how calmly Jesus waves aside all other judgments, all other pretenders to the claim of human greatness. A man would have to be God to dare pinpoint a decision so precise, so historically justifiable as this! Jesus' judgments are so much more striking, because He does not often append to them a bald, apologetic statement of His right to make them. He simply acts in character as earth's Judge, letting His signs identify to men His right to say what He does. (However, study John 5 where He outlines the evidence of His divine authority to judge.)

Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. This bewildering amendment, attached to the foregoing encomium, is a beautiful paradox and deliberately calculated to keep His audience seeking its meaning for a long time to come. Our vantage point on this side of the Cross, the empty Tomb and Pentecost not only removes the mystery in His apparent inconsistency, but also proves the truth of His assertion. Three major questions need clarification:

1. What phase of **the kingdom of heaven** is meant here?
 - a. If by the **kingdom of heaven** (or *of God*) we mean "the rule of God," then in no sense can John the Baptist be excluded from **the kingdom**, and it becomes nonsense to say that he was never in the kingdom, having died before its inception, for there never was a servant of God who more embodied the fundamental principle of humble service to God, upon which **the kingdom of heaven** was founded. But the antithesis of Jesus must be sought elsewhere than in this sense, because John's greatness is obviously contrasted with that of the most insignificant person **in the kingdom**, a contrast that cannot help but suggest that, in some special sense, John is not to be considered as being **in the kingdom**.

- b. The **kingdom of heaven**, of which Jesus here speaks, is metonymy on a grand scale, the cause put for the **effect**. The Church of Jesus Christ is the highest earthly expression of the Government of God, so that one might well say that, wherever the Church goes, there is the Kingdom of God in action. While no thoughtful person will confuse the Church for the Kingdom, yet there is this important, undeniable sense in which the whole program of Jesus Christ, otherwise known as His Church, may, indeed, must be called **the kingdom of heaven**. Since, in this sense, **the kingdom** was established on the Day of Pentecost (see notes on Mt. 16:18, 19, 28; cf. Lk. 19:11; 24:46-49; Ac. 1:3-8; 2:1-42; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Col. 1:13 etc.), then John would not, of course, have lived to participate in what would be the common privileges of anyone **in the kingdom**.
2. Who is **he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven**?
- a. Some have suggested that Jesus refers to Himself. Accordingly, He would be seen as describing Himself as someone who was then less important than John, but who would soon appear in His true glory, hence far more important than he, when He would have revealed Himself as the King. Objection to this view arises from the fact that at Jesus' baptism, John himself recognized the immeasurable superiority of the Lord by yielding to His requests. Further, John consistently proclaimed Jesus' Lordly preeminence. (Mt. 3:11, 12; Jn. 1:26-34; 3:28-36) Jesus' own position is not at issue here.
- b. Jesus is talking about His own disciples, those who would live to participate in the privileges and enjoy the joyous revelations that would be the common possession of any Christian.
3. How is it possible for John to be inferior to the humblest Christian?
- a. His inferiority is not calculated in reference to his personal confidence in Jesus or dependence upon God, as if he were to be thought of as a man of vacillating faith merely because of his impatient question sent to Jesus. The problem here centers not around his faith but upon his function, his position in the messianic scheme of things.

- b. Plummer (*Luke*, 205) states the principle of distinction best: "The lower members of a higher class are above the highest members of a lower class." The contrasts between the class to which John belongs and that of which Christians are members may be set forth thus;

John the Baptist:	Any Christian
—lived and died in the era of preparation for the coming of the Christ;	—Lives and dies in the era of realization of the prophets' messages in a present Christ;
—Lived as a servant of God; Was the Bridegroom's friend;	—Lives as a son of God; Is the Bride of Christ;
—For all his reflection, could not fathom truths hinted to him by prophetic insight;	—Grasps these truths as elementary knowledge and as part of being a Christian;
—Lived under the law and dispensation of Moses	—Lives under the reign of grace, superior spiritual privileges

So the interesting paradox is true: "He that is less than John is greater than John." John, though a prophet of the Almighty, hence, because of this office or function, would be more highly regarded than the common godly man, yet, because he was fated to surrender his life before the new era of the risen Christ, he would not be privileged to know the advantages of even the humblest Christian. It is as McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 283) has it: "The least born of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:12, 13; 3:5) is greater than the greatest born of women", who, for whatever hindering reason, does not know the most elementary principles of the Kingdom of God. All believers in Christ now know the great treasures of revelation given to them by God, because anyone who has lived this side of Pentecost knows of Jesus' great victories over disease, death, and the Devil. They know of His accession to the throne of God and coming in glory. Only in this sense may it be said that we have clearer comprehension of the Kingdom of God than any of the ancient prophets or even John himself. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 7) puts this succinctly:

What is it that the Christian has that John could never have? . . . John had never seen the Cross, and therefore

one thing John could never know was the full revelation of the love of God. The holiness of God he might know; the justice of God he might declare; but the love of God in all its fulness he could never know. . . . It is possible for us to know more about the heart of God than Isaiah or Jeremiah or any other of that godly company. The man who has seen the Cross has seen the heart of God in a way that no man who lived before the Cross could ever see it . . .

IV. CHRIST'S CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE KINGDOM

(11:12-15)

At this point in His sermon on John, Jesus turns slightly aside from defending John to make appropriate observations about the kingdom of heaven just mentioned (11:11). He seems to be answering the burning question: If John the Baptist is so important a prophet, being the very Herald of the Messiah and harbinger of the Kingdom of God, then how is the time-schedule proceeding with the actual establishment of the Kingdom? To this question Jesus responds, in general, that this is a turbulent period for God's Kingdom due to the violent misunderstanding of the true nature of the Kingdom and its King, but since the Messiah's forerunner has already appeared (see on 11:14), the Messiah Himself cannot be too far behind, and with Him the kingdom comes.

11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. Two views are generally held regarding Jesus' meaning:

1. In a good sense, only violent men could gain entrance to, or possession of the Kingdom of God, i.e., men who seek it with burning zeal and having found it, force their way into it. (Cf. Lk. 16:16; see Arndt-Gingrich, *biázō* for bibliography.) They give all they have to enter it, a struggle that is viewed favorably by the King.
 - a. On the phrase *hē basileia tōn ouranōn biázetai*, it should be remarked in favor of this view that the verb *biázomai*, when taken as a
 - (1) transitive passive verb, may be interpreted in a good sense to mean "the kingdom of heaven is sought with burning zeal." (Arndt-Gingrich, 140)
 - (2) intransitive verb, may be translated: "the kingdom makes its way with triumphant force." (Arndt-

Gingrich, 140) despite hindrances of every sort which are raised against it.

- b. Lenski (*Matthew*, 437) sees John and Jesus as the agents (*biastai*) who forcefully bring forward the Kingdom: The correspondence between *biāzetai* and *biastai* is obvious, being a play on words. The energy and the force with which the kingdom comes (or is brought) instills a similar energy and force in those whom the kingdom wins for itself. They are not 'forceful' by nature and thus better than others; but the kingdom itself with all its gifts, treasures and blessings puts power and courage into them 'to snatch' . . . it all . . . The trend of the entire discourse deals, not with violence against the kingdom, but with the indifference and the dis-satisfaction that hinder men from entering it with zest.

- 2. In a bad sense, the Kingdom actually suffers (undesireable) violence, is violently treated, contrary to the will or desires of the King.
 - a. This comes about through hindrances raised against its establishment and continuation. Jesus would be saying, "There will always be wicked men who struggle to seize control of and destroy my Kingdom through violence." (Cf. Mt. 16:18, 21; Jn. 16:1-4)
 - b. This comes about through the efforts of unauthorized persons who mistakenly imagined that its coming could be compelled by force, as, for example, the Zealots and all who ultimately sympathized with their philosophy of military overthrow and rule by the sword. (That the Zealots had many sympathizers is most clearly seen in the reasonable supposition that had not the Zealots represented such a strong popular undercurrent of political feeling they would not have been able to carry the nation with them in their last bid for political independence that so disastrously ended in the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Israel.) Although the Master could comprehend the impetuous, excited thronging about Him of multitudes full of preconceived ideas about the Messiah and His kingdom, and although He recognized in their eagerness as much unhealthy fanaticism as deep conviction, yet His under-

standing did not blind Him to the need to take steps to counteract the violence these impassioned disciples were doing to His Kingdom. Count the times He had to avoid the crowds and strictly forbade any publicity of His healings. (Cf. Mt. 8:4; 9:30; 14:22 with Jn. 6:15; Mk. 1:34, 37, 38, 45; 3:12; 6:43; 8:36, etc.) **The kingdom of God suffered violence when men of violence took it by force**, much as would a bud suffer at the hands of a person who in his eagerness to experience its fragrance tries with his fingers to force it to bloom. Was John the Baptist even now himself trying to force the Kingdom by means of his impatient question?

- c. This could come about by the efforts of men who try to effect an entrance into the Kingdom on their own terms, while ignoring the will of the King. (Cf. Jn. 10:1ff.) This is the perpetual attitude of men who, however unconscious, nevertheless in practice, say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." When Luke (16:16) quotes Jesus: "And every one enters it violently" (*kai pás eis autên biázetai*), the "everyone" (*pás*) cannot mean, contrary to Plummer (*Luke*, 389), everyone in contrast to Jewish exclusiveness. This is rather a hyperbole for the great majority of people who are deeply interested in the Kingdom for a multitude of wrong reasons. They are simply trying to fashion the kingdom after their own preconceived notions and create the King in their own image.

Perhaps it is neither important nor necessary to choose between these two views.

Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 9) attempts a harmony of these two concepts:

"Always my Kingdom will suffer violence; always savage men will try to break it up and snatch it away and destroy it; and therefore only the man who is desperately in earnest, only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter into it." It may well be that this saying of Jesus was originally at one and the same time a warning of violence to come and a challenge to produce a devotion which would be even stronger than the violence.

A. B. Bruce (*PHC*, XXII, 275ff.) extends his harmonic attempt even further:

The storming of the kingdom.—In employing words suggesting the idea of violence, Jesus, though certainly not intending to express personal disapproval, did mean to point at features of the new movement which made it an object of aversion, astonishment, or at least of doubt, to others. It may be well to particularize some aspects of the work of the kingdom which would, not unnaturally wear an aspect of violence to minds not able to regard them with Christ's eyes, though to Christ Himself they were the bright and hopeful side of an evil time.

- I. We may mention, *first*, that which most readily occurs to one's thoughts, viz. the passionate earnestness with which men sought to get into the kingdom, heralded by John and preached by Jesus; an earnestness not free from questionable elements, as few popular enthusiasms are; associated with misconceptions of the nature of the kingdom, and, in many cases, fervent rather than deep, therefore likely to prove transient — still a powerful, impressive, august movement of the human soul Godwards. (See Luke 16:16 RV)
- II. From the volcanic bursting forth of religious earnestness in the popular mind, we may naturally pass to speak of another respect in which the kingdom of heaven may be said to have suffered violence, viz. the kind of people that had most prominently to do with it.—Publicans, sinners, harlots, the moral scum and refuse of society, such were the persons, who in greatest numbers were pressing into the kingdom, to the astonishment and scandal of respectable, "righteous," religious, well-conducted, and self-respecting people. Why it was a *revolution*, society turned upside down, as great an overturn in principle, if not in extent, as when in France, in the eighteenth century, bishops, aristocrats, princes and kings were sent adrift, and sans-culottism reigned triumphant, believing itself to be in possession of a veritable kingdom of God. What wonder if wise and prudent ones looked on in wistful, doubting mood, and sanctimonious men held up their hands in pious horror, and exclaimed, Call you this a kingdom of God? Blasphemy!
- III. The kingdom of God as it actually showed itself in connection with the work of Christ, differed widely from,

did violence, we may say, to preconceived notions of what it would be.—Not a few of those who actually entered the kingdom, in so far as they understood its true character, had to do violence to their own prejudices before they took the step. There were conversions, not unaccompanied with inward pain, not merely from sin to righteousness, but from ideals mistaken to rectified notions of the kingdom of God, from political dreams, noble, but destined never to be fulfilled, to spiritual realities.

IV. The kingdom of heaven may be said to have suffered violence in so far as its coming was promoted by the use of irregular methods and agencies.—In this respect John and Jesus were themselves stormers, though in different ways, to the scandalizing of a custom-ridden generation. Let us make one or two reflections, suggested by the saying we have been studying, concerning Him who uttered it.

1. It is very evident that the one who spoke thus had a very clear conception of the deep significance of the movement denoted by the phrase "the kingdom of heaven." Christ knew well that a new world was beginning to be.
2. How calmly He takes it all.
3. Yet how magnanimously He bears Himself towards the doubters. "Violence"—the very word is an excuse for their doubts.

If, without violence to Jesus' original thought, we may reverse the order of verses 12 and 13, and we have an interesting revelation:

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.

The justification for this reversal lies in Jesus' use of the word **for** which serves to introduce the rational basis for His previous assertion, hence, logically, comes first in His mind. Jesus reveals an important time-relationship here: "**until John . . . from the days of John until now.**" **Prophesied** means that the **Law and Prophets** spoke authoritatively for God, revealing His message to Israel. The era of the **Law and Prophets** finds its culmination and fulfillment in the ministry of John, the last of the great prophets, who prepares

the ground for a completely new, different age, that of the Messiah. Luke (16:16) on this same subject, wrote:

The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently.

Be this an exact parallel or not, this is the finest interpretation of our text. **The days of John the Baptist** are no longer a period of "prophesying" in the classical sense, i.e. predictive description of great events in the distant future, because John's appearance ushered in a transition period of announcement of the near arrival of the Kingdom of God itself. **Until John**, as a phrase describing the authoritative prophetic revelations of the mind of God, marks a definite end to this function, inasmuch as that for which **all the prophets and the law** had made preparation, has now begun to arrive. Luke's expression (Lk. 16:16) must mean, then, that John's revelations and Jesus' preaching (prior to His ascension) were intended to be a description of the nature and citizenship of the Kingdom and the identification of the King, since the actual ascension to the throne of God did not take place during Jesus' earthly sojourn. Throughout the ministry of Jesus we will notice various occasions on which Jesus made drastic, far-reaching changes in fundamental concepts that were integral parts of Mosaic Law. (See on 9:14-17; 12:1-14; cf. Mk. 7:19; Jn. 4:21-24) Further, when He fulfilled the predictions of the prophets, He took all the uncertainty from their meaning, and removed all of the expectancy created by their searching the future. All their shadowy references, when concentrated in Him who is their entire fulfillment, need be heeded no further as if some other Christ should come, identical to Jesus. So, with the fulfillment of the great purposes and predictions of **all the prophets and the law** came to a brilliant, successful conclusion their ministry as the (until then) unique revealers of God. Nevertheless, their functions did overlap with the ministry of Jesus and early life of the Church for two important reasons:

1. Jesus' establishment of the new rule of God, the Kingdom of God, the Church, did not take place until the coming of the Holy Spirit. (See Mt. 28:19, 20; Lk. 24:46-47; Ac. 1:3-8; and the special study "The Coming of the Son of Man" after Matthew 10) Therefore His own ministry took place during the last days of the old era.
2. Even after the clear revelation of Jesus' coronation and the vindication of His rule, still many did not grasp the reality that the old system of the Law and the accrued traditions

were completely done away. The Epistles bear witness to this confusion in the mind of many people both within and outside the Church.

This "change in administration" from that of the Law and prophets to that of the Messiah Himself is not so surprising, since such a change would have been expected by the Jews, even though they would have visualized this change in terms of Jewish categories, even as we expect heaven to reflect the limited knowledge represented in our Christian categories. This Jewish expectation is reflected in the nature of the argument Jesus offers next.

G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 114) makes the interesting suggestion that this expression (11:13) is intended as further explication of the superior greatness of the least in the kingdom of God. The prophets and the law, including John's ministry, represented a ministry of anticipation, not one of personal experience of the things prophesied. Just five minutes of real experience of the thing awaited is worth so much more than all the centuries of anticipating it. So it is that anyone, even the most hesitant beginner in the Kingdom walks in more actual light that was available in all the long centuries before Jesus completed His revelation. There were facts that the Law, prophets and John could not know, methods they could not fathom, primarily due to their individual position in the progress of the revelation up to their time.

11:14 And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. In this seemingly obscure verse, lying half-hidden among so much more famous material, rests the most fundamental issue of real religion and, ultimately, the judgment of the race: **if you are willing to receive it.** The willingness to be taught is the key of this entire chapter, the crux of John's problem, (11:1-6) the failure of the Jewish people in general (11:16-19) and the favored cities in particular (11:20), and finally, the only way to grasp God's revelation (11:25-30). Teachableness is not a matter of the understanding as though the meaning of the revelation were unclear, but a question of the will. (Jn. 5:40; 7:17; Mt. 23:37; Rev. 22:17d) **If ye are willing** cannot mean that Jesus' audience could take His revelation or leave it without serious consequences, as if this declaration did not much matter. Jesus merely challenges their willingness to face the truth hereby introduced. Many would be most unwilling. But the Lord did not force them to acknowledge these truths against their will. But He warns them against neglecting this manifest fulfillment of prophecy, for, having made their choice they must then

face the consequences thereof. So, it matters very much how they decide, as 11:15 demonstrates.

This is Elijah, that is to come. Reference here is Malachi's prediction (3:1; 4:5, 6) that, in a period destitute of faith and true fear of Jehovah, God would raise up a prophet who would lead the ungodly generation back to the God of the fathers. The appearance of this great prophet must shortly precede some "great and terrible day of the Lord" who will come with terrible judgment upon the nation. But Malachi named that great messenger "Elijah the prophet." It was at this point that the Jewish interpreter's problem arose: does Malachi mean that Elijah himself, who had been caught up to heaven, would personally reappear on earth, or that someone else who because of his power and energy with which that future prophet would labor, would call to mind the vigorous old Tishbite? Is Malachi speaking literally or metaphorically? ("That coming prophet will be another 'Elijah.'") Most of the rabbis had apparently opted for the literal interpretation. (Cf. Jn. 1:21; Mt. 17:10) For a rapid survey of rabbinic traditions about Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, see Edersheim's *Life*, Vol. II, Appendix VIII, 706ff. The apologetic nature of Edersheim's article renders it extremely valuable in that he shows the wide divergence between the commonly held Jewish views about the coming Elijah, and the actual Christian Elijah seen in John the Baptist. This divergency of theory and reality once more demonstrates the fundamental difference between Judaism and the true origins of the message and views of Christ. Though Christianity was born in the bosom of Judaism, the secret of her life lay in her divine message from God, not in the perfection here and there of rabbinic views. But that the literal view was not necessary, is illustrated by Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 471ff.):

But this view is proved to be erroneous by such passages as Hosea 3:5; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24, and Jer. 30:9, where the sending of David the king as the true shepherd of Israel is promised. Just as in these passages we cannot think of the return or resurrection of the David who had long been dead; but a king is meant who will reign over the nation of God in the mind and spirit of David; so the Elijah to be sent can only be a prophet with the spirit or power of Elijah the Tishbite. The second David was indeed to spring from the family of David, because to the seed of David there had been promised the eternal possession of the throne. The prophetic calling, on the other hand, was not hereditary in the

prophet's house, but rested solely upon divine choice and endowment with the Spirit of God; and consequently by Elijah we are not to understand a lineal descendent of the Tishbite, but simply a prophet in whom the spirit and power of Elijah are revived.

Keil's argument is not conclusive, since he argues from analogy, but the value of an argument from analogy is that it shows the possible existence of what seems to be a parallel case, which, in turn, should have teased Jewish minds into looking for other, different evidence that would prove the figurative nature of the great Elijah prophecy.

In all fairness to the Jews it must be remembered that God might not have given any other evidence that would have solved the quandry before its actual fulfillment with the appearance of John. Also, if the rabbinic representatives from Jerusalem knew John the Baptist's personal name to be "John," then why did they ask him if he were "Elijah"? (Cf. Jn. 1:21) Did they suppose him to have two names, the one commonly known to all, the other to be revealed at some future moment? Their question, as interpreted by John himself, cannot be construed as a concession to the figurative view, since he obviously understands them to mean, "Are you Elijah in person come back to earth in the flesh?" and answers them accordingly.

He is Elijah (*autòs estin Elías*), not literally, but indeed the person intended by Malachi. The angel who announced John's conception promised: "He will go before (the Lord their God) in the spirit and power of Elijah." (Lk. 1:17) With this dramatic assertion Jesus intends to say two things:

1. Malachi's prediction has been fulfilled. Any argument that Jesus could not be the Messiah, based on the assumption that Elijah must first come before the appearance of the Christ and that he had not done so, is hereby rendered invalid. The long-awaited Elijah had indeed come in the person and ministry of John the Baptist.
2. As a necessary consequence of this fulfillment of the great Elijah prophecy by John, the Kingdom of God must shortly appear in the person of the Christ Himself who would usher in the Messianic age. Further, since John's great question had centered around **the identity and mission of the Messiah** and Jesus' answer clustered together proofs of His divine identity

in the works of the Messiah, Jesus' audience should have been able to conclude, without His asserting it, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, and should therefore be believed for what He says about the Kingdom.

So it was that the coming of John presaged the conclusion of the OT era, since the Messiah was sure to be right behind the appearance of the coming "Elijah."

But to take John seriously by recognizing him as the Elijah predicted by Malachi would mean that people would have to admit John's right to preach his unwelcome truth. Not only had he demanded repentance and conduct consistent with it, not only had he denied that physical descent from Abraham could give special rights to admission into God's Kingdom, but he had distinctly pointed out Jesus as God's Son, God's Lamb to take away the world's sin. So, to take John seriously demands of the multitudes that they take Jesus seriously.

11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. This exclamation implies the willful guilt of people whose ears were made to hear and understand what Jesus had been saying, but were deliberately inattentive. Sensing how much would instantly be lost through inattention and how much trouble afterwards the Jews would bring upon themselves by not having listened to Him, the Lord pleads with them to fix these ideas firmly in mind. This psychological attention-getter is good oratory, but more than this, it is a passionate cry for a hearing, arising as it does in the breast of Israel's truest Son. He sees not only the immediate information drain that their neglect of His revelation would foster. He could discern the outcome that only the final judgment would reveal.

This is amply demonstrated by the fact that Luke (7:29, 30) inserts here the following theological comment:

When they heard *this* all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Two small problems of interpretation arise:

1. Is this a parenthetical remark by the Evangelist himself, inserted into the middle of Christ's words without any indication that it is a comment of Luke's own, or is this a part of Christ's message on John? The remark itself seems to begin as a mere historical notice, but almost instantly becomes highly theological, too theological, in fact, to be merely a historical allusion

reported by Luke. Further, there is no possible way of excising it from Jesus' own words, inasmuch as Luke uses no device so to distinguish it. Because of its meaning, it fits admirably into Jesus' own argument.

2. What is the exact historical allusion here? What was it that the people heard? When did they hear it? And when did they justify God? In answer it should be noticed that in Luke's Greek sentence, no object is specified (*kai pás ho laòs akoúsas kai hoi telónai edikaïōsan . . .*), being left to be supplied by seeing what caused the people to act as they did. The question as to the time when they heard it is also relative to their obedience by which they justified God, i.e. when they were baptized by John.

All the people, the tax collectors, the harlots (see Mt. 21:31, 32) on the one hand, the Pharisees and the lawyers on the other—all had heard the preaching of the Baptist. For the former, their accepting John's message and his baptism meant their acknowledgement of God's justice in making these claims upon them. For the latter, their haughty refusal to repent meant the frustration of God's purpose to save them by granting them the opportunity to repent. God's counsel had been delivered by his humble servant John, but the proud Pharisees had, in their rejection of the servant, also rejected John's Lord and there would be no escaping His wrath. (Mt. 21:31, 32; 23:33)

This passage, while coming before the stated conclusion of this section ("Wisdom is justified by her deeds"), surely serves as a fitting illustration and commentary upon that principle. Those who had rejected John could justify themselves and their conduct by the slander that no thinking man would follow a mad-man like John. Likewise, they were able to dismiss Jesus, justifying themselves all the while. (Ironically, those who accepted God's messenger are described as "justifying God!") In each case they considered the results of their decisions to be satisfactory, since in neither case did they have to make any changes in their present conduct. Unfortunately, however, it is possible for the pragmatic test to fail badly, especially if one decides on the workability of a given conclusion before all the evidence is in. Worse yet, thinking that all the evidence has been weighed, when in reality one has seen only a small portion of it, will deceive one into relaxing, confident of his own wisdom. But the far-sighted Lord looks into the judgments of eternity and declares the final verdict on these choices made on earth: "The people, the tax collectors justified God;

the Pharisees and lawyers rejected and frustrated the purpose of God for themselves!" (Cf. Prov. 12:15; "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." In the long run, who were the wise here?) It is just better not to be so "wise in (our) own eyes" (Rom. 12:16b), i.e. so sure of our own conclusions that we no longer remain open to correction by the force of the evidence that is offered us to cause us to change. The so-called "ignorant masses," the notorious sinners admitted that God was right, knew that they needed whole-souled moral reformation and did what was necessary to begin it. They did not choke on their respectability and rationalizations, as did the learned doctors of the law. Jesus' observation merely puts into words John's experience (and that of any other experienced personal evangelist): "One just cannot save those who, determinedly unaware of their peril, refuse to be rescued."

V. CHRIST CONDEMNS THE CONTRARY CRITICS' CONTEMPTUOUS CARICATURES (11:16-19)

A master speaker, Jesus outlines this portion of His message on John thus: First, He describes a picture easily understood by any parent or child in His audience, making a brief parable of it by saying, "This generation is like this." Next, the Lord supplies two antithetic illustrations of the parable's meaning. Concluding this portion of His message, He enunciates a principle that not only rightly concludes the foregoing remarks, but also becomes a subtle warning to those who were guilty of repeating the very insults Jesus brings into the open here. The principle becomes also the test by which any man who has not yet decided about John and Jesus may come to a right conclusion.

A. A CAMEO (11:16, 17)

11:16 And whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places, who call unto their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn. The cameo-like quality of this illustration lies in the fact that Jesus drew the outline of the features clearly while leaving the details, depth and dimension somewhat unclear and puzzling. His meaning is clear: "You people are impossible to satisfy, since you do not recognize the divine wisdom under which John and I follow different manners of life and work, but in both cases our diverse methods of operation are certain to be justified by the end result of each." Interpreters have puzzled over which group of children represent the men of **this generation** and

which represent John and Jesus, as well as the resultant meaning of the refusal to play the games suggested. It is generally presumed that verses 18 and 19 are Jesus' own application of this germ-parable, since He begins the application with a conjunction used to express cause, inference, or to explain: *For* (*gàr*). But Jesus' order in those verses must be noticed, since He mentions John first and then Himself. Is the Lord Himself following a normal order, applying the first part of His parable, then the second, or is He, on the other hand, reversing the application hence, using a chiasmic order? Graphically, the problem is this:

REGULAR ORDER			
The story:		Application:	
The Jews pipe; John did not dance	→	John was ascetic; Jews re-	jected him
The Jews wailed; Jesus did not mourn	→	Jesus was normal; Jews re-	jected Him
CHIASTIC ORDER			
The story:		Application:	
The Jews did not dance; when Jesus piped	↗	John was ascetic; Jews re-	jected him
The Jews did not mourn; when John wailed	↘	Jesus was normal; Jews re-	jected Him

The problem is just when do we apply the chiasm to determine Jesus' meaning behind His story? Do we take His application and use it to interpret the parts of His story, even if it requires a chiasmic order? Or do we interpret first the story and then go on to Jesus' application? Or, to put the problem another way, who is doing the piping and to whom? who wails and to whom? There are two groups of children who try to suggest games to their playmates (Cf. Matthew's *tôis betérois* and Luke's *allélois*). Which children are here blamed by Jesus? Commentators suggest two ways:

1. Following the normal order of the text, the neighborhood children playing in the square, who pettishly criticize their companions, are the Jews. John had come to them with his severe mode of life and his stern call to repentance, but they demand that he drop his austerity and join them in the gait

of festive occasions. When it became clear that he refused to surrender his ascetic severity, they petulantly nag him: "We piped to you and you did not dance!" Accordingly, when Jesus appeared among them as a normal individual with a wholesome enjoyment of life, who could delight in a pleasant meal and relish the company of any person, the Jews contended that He ought to be playing at funerals, i.e. fasting (cf. 9:14), rigorous Sabbath observance (cf. 12:1-14; Jn. 5:1-18), etc. But when He maintained His own course, they howl: "We wailed and you did not mourn!"

a. This interpretation offers two advantages:

- (1) It sees **the men of this generation** (cf. Lk. 7:31), i.e. the Jews, as the fickle children who complain and are not satisfied to let others follow their own chosen course.
- (2) It also lists the two objections in chronological order, not only in order of Jesus' application (11:18, 19), but also in order of John's and Jesus' actual appearance on the scene in Israel.

b. But this interpretation ignores the fact that "ye" and "you" in the mouth of the children is plural, hence, out of place when directed only at John alone and then at Jesus alone, unless the children's plural "ye" refers to John and Jesus as a group of two, while the specific complaints refer first to the one and then the other. Consider Edersheim's (*Life*, I, 670) comment:

The children of that generation expected quite another Elijah and quite another Christ, and disbelieved and complained, because the real Elijah and Christ did not meet their foolish thoughts. . . . 'We have expected Messianic glory and national exaltation, and ye have not responded ('we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced'); we have looked for deliverance from our national sufferings, and they stirred not your sympathies nor brought your help ('we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented.')

Or, if we may not read so much into the children's expressions as Edersheim feels to be there, at least we may hear them complaining to God's messengers as a group,

first to John and then to Jesus. This would allow the plural to stand.

2. Following the chiasmic order (i.e. applying first what came second in the story, and what came first, second, thus forming an "X" or Greek *Chi*, rather than parallels), we see the children, who suggest to the others to play with them first joyously and also at mournful games, stand for Jesus and John. Their fellows, who contrarily resist becoming involved in either game are the Jews who follow the lead of their own religious hierarchy. (Cf. Lk. 7:29, 30) The quoted words then become those of John and Jesus, taken as a committee of two, representing God's call to righteousness: "Whatever our approach—whether deep-felt sorrow for sin or the joyous freedom of the Gospel—you refused both."

a. This interpretation has

- (1) the advantage of harmonizing more satisfactorily the plural pronouns, *we* and *you*, since they much more suitably describe two well-defined groups, whereas the other view tries to apply these plurals to individuals.
- (2) the advantage of reflecting the historic facts involved. It is McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 285) who notes that it was

God in His messengers—His prophets and His Son—who came to set the world right. It was these messengers who took the initiative and who demanded the changes. It was the people who sulked and refused to comply with the divine overtures. The whole tenor of Christ's teaching—the parables of the suppers, etc.—represents the Jews as being invited and refusing the invitation. It was John and Jesus who preached repentance, but there is no instance where any called on them to (change) . . .

- (3) Though the story does not follow the chronological appearance of first John, and then Jesus, as does the application in either view (11:18, 19), it may be urged that chronological order might not have been uppermost in Jesus' mind anyway. Thus, He presented Himself first in the story, but second in the application, placing John second in the story but first

application. The reason for this emphasis on Himself is to be found in the fact that the question of the day is "Are you the Christ—or do we expect another?" and "Blessed is he who is not offended in me." Jesus will conclude this message by drawing maximum attention to Himself, to His identity and ministry to the whole race.

- b. The disadvantage of this view is that, while it has been astutely argued by McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 285) that "Jesus means that the men of this generation are like the *entire picture* presented and does not intend that they shall be taken as the subjects of the leading verbs of the sentence," yet this is not what Luke wrote. The version of Luke clearly asserts that "they (the men of this generation) are like children seated in the agora." (Lk. 7:32) Is it proper under this latter view to exclude John and Jesus from that comprehensive phrase "the men of this generation"? To include them in the meaning of this phrase would indeed free the true meaning of this story from appearing to be at variance with its opening words. Under either view, Jesus and John are two of the "children seated in the agora." Even McGarvey admits that Jesus and John were the children who urged their companions to join them first in dances and then in dirges. Since it is highly unlikely that Jesus would have included Himself and John among the men of **this generation**, in light of His usual condemnation of this group (cf. Mt. 12:39, 41, 45; 16:4; 17:17; [23:36; 24:34?]; Mk. 8:38; 9:19; Lk. 9:41; 11:29-32; 17:25; see also Ac. 2:40; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10), one would wonder how it be justifiable to think of His having included Himself here. The answer may be that the **men of this generation** create the same sort of situation as that faced by children playing in the marketplace who scold their fickle playmates.

Despite the tortuous attempt at getting at the proper interpretation of Jesus' parable, its meaning is evident. It is a picture of that selfish stubbornness, or stubborn selfishness, that always wants its own way. The Pharisees, scribes and their followers were fundamentally unwilling to act upon the ideas and leadership of another. They wanted to rule, not surrender the government of their lives. This is the basic explanation for their exterior fickleness and is the cause of it. They could

not be satisfied with what was offered, not because of the character of the game suggested, but because they were determined to make no response. When this is the case, people sit sullenly and obstinately unresponsive, regardless of what offer is made them. Barclay reminds us that

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person and the same institution from quite opposite grounds and reasons.

The fault of the people's dissatisfaction lay, not in the fact that Jesus or John offered questionable alternatives, but in the fact that anything that varied from the preconceived notions of their detractors was suspect. Thus it was easy to question whether John be a real prophet of God, or whether Jesus be the Christ, since neither neatly fit into the common prejudices.

This simple illustration brilliantly demonstrates how shrewd a grasp Jesus had of His age. The smiling, applauding crowds did not deceive Him. Although He did not intentionally annoy them by refusing to go along with their wishes, He knew that these fickle crowds would ultimately oppose Him, because He would not merely please, entertain and feed them indefinitely.

This bright little picture of **children sitting in the village square** makes us ask how often had Jesus Himself played these children's games as a boy? This is probably not just a good illustration, but an experience lived by this keen Observer of children. Jesus had time to stop to watch children's play. Had He heard these same complaints uttered by His brothers and sisters?

B. A CONTRAST IN CARICATURES (11:18, 19)

Here Jesus exposes their fickleness by showing how they required of John what they condemned in Him and demanded of Him what they had condemned in John.

11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon. Luke (7:33) has "eating no bread and drinking no wine." Since these items were the common food of common people, these who object to John are complaining about his abstinence from things entirely normal and legitimate. **Eating no bread** but only what he could scrounge from the wilderness itself, **nor drinking** any normal beverage, just water. (See on Mt. 3:1, 4) But this ascetic way of life was John's sagacious adaptation of himself

to his particular mission to bring repentance to Israel. Before Jesus' revelation of the compatibility between deep-felt repentance and carrying on a normal life, perhaps the popular mind in Israel would not have been willing to accept John's stern message from a man who, himself, were a person living a normal life, eating common food. This very striking difference, to which Jesus had alluded earlier, had caught and held the nation's attention. And for a short while, John too had been the idol of the populace. In those days his hardy life, his simple, course garments and his desert fare had not at all hurt his public image; rather, it would have tended to enhance it. Later, however, though people had streamed to him in droves, they slunk away rather than repent. Their comment: "Too strait-laced for us!"

He has a demon. (cf. Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 49; 10:20 later said of Jesus) This violent slander is what is necessary to justify those who utter it to cover their rejection of God's counsel. It is not too likely that anyone really thought John to be actually possessed by a demon. This vilification probably only means to discredit John as a crank or a fanatic. One of the master strokes of Jesus' style is to state the accusation in its most blatant form. He does not even try to offer any defense against so infamous a charge. The lives of both John and Jesus were so above reproach that these low vilifications were doomed to topple of their own weight.

11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. The psychological impact of this application of Jesus' parable of the playing children lies in the fact that it ends with Jewish rejection of Jesus, for this is the real issue. Although their repudiation of John held a menace to their ultimate salvation, since they were likely to reject John's God-inspired testimony to Jesus, still the final judgment is decided, not on "What will you do with John the Baptist?", but "What will you do with Jesus?" Putting Himself last in the application, the Savior leaves this latter question in the mind of His audience, stabbing their conscience.

Eating and drinking could be taken two ways, depending upon the mentality of those who laid this objection to Jesus:

1. From the standpoint of the extremely ascetic themselves, or of those whose view of piety would have been affected by them, the fact that Jesus ate normal food ("bread and wine" of verse 18; cf. Lk. 7:33) would be offensive, since piety, in their view, must express itself in frequent fasts. (Cf. Mt. 9:9-17 and parallels)

2. From the point of view of those living a normal life themselves, i.e. eating normal food, going to feasts and associating with common people, this accusation labels the Lord as a constant party-goer, known by the company He keeps.

During the entire course of His earthly mission, Jesus is recorded as having gone to a number of banquets, parties, and private meals. (Cf. The Cana wedding, Jn. 2:1-11; Matthew's farewell, Mt. 9:10-13; Lk. 5:29; The Pharisee Simon's house, Lk. 7:36ff.; Another Pharisee, Lk. 11:37ff.; A Pharisee Ruler, Lk. 14:1-24; Zacchaeus, Lk. 19:1-10) Even if these are merely a few of His many social contacts, He is damned by the carping detractors for not being "holy" enough.

Ironically, there was just enough truth in the sneers of the crowds to make these insults plausible: the libel lay in the exaggeration each phrase represents:

1. **gluttonous man.** (*phágos*) As indicated above, Jesus ate normal food and appreciated a pleasant meal. Since His mission was aimed at not one area of human life, but addressed to all aspects, Jesus could not follow habits peculiar to only one area. Rather, His manner of life reflected an even balance in all things, including His food and drink.
2. **winebibber.** (*oinopótes*) Did Jesus drink wine? He says He did. This is no great surprise. The greater surprise, especially in THIS context, would be to learn that He did NOT drink! The conduct of Jesus is thrown into deliberate contrast with that of a man who, for religious reasons, deliberately abstained from this very thing. The very affirmation, that the Son of man has come eating (bread) and drinking (wine), is found in a context where His moderation is neatly placed half-way between both extremes,—with teetotal abstinence in John's case, and with excess in the slander that He was a wino among other things. (See special study: "Should Jesus Drink Wine?")

Should anyone object that any "wine" that Jesus might have drunk would have been a non-alcoholic drink made of water mixed with cooked grape syrup, then the objector must explain the accusation of Jesus' critics. While it is true that the most unreasonable charges can be levelled against a man who has no dealings at all with that on which the charges are supposedly based, yet there has to be some shred of truth (however badly distorted) that makes the

charge even credible. If the "wine" here referred to is merely a non-alcoholic beverage, then what is the point of calling Jesus "a soft-drink man"? After all, the *oinos* of Lk. 7:33, which Jesus says He drinks, and the *oinos* of *oinopōtēs* in Mt. 11:19, of which the slanderers say He takes too much, is the same *oinos*.

3. **friend of publicans and sinners.** The slanderers insinuated that "a man is known by the company he keeps." But what the opposition intended as detraction, Jesus transformed into one of His most glorious titles. Because Jesus is, in the highest and best sense, "the friend of publicans and sinners," He is able to help untold millions of us publicans and sinners! (See notes on Mt. 9:12, 13)

C. A CONFIDENT CONCLUSION (11:19b)

And wisdom is justified by her works. (Lk 7:35: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.") Without seeking an allegory behind these words, whereby Wisdom is seen as a divine mother who produces children which, in turn, represent the faithful minority who have welcomed the Baptist and the Christ, or even these two themselves, it is much simpler to see Jesus as applying the pragmatic test to the ministries both of John and of Himself. He is saying, then, "The wisdom of any course of action is tested and approved, or justified, by the results it produces, the deeds issuing from it, its natural fruit or offspring." While there were critics enough who stood around ready to sneer at the different approaches used by John and Jesus, the Lord is willing to submit both to the judgment of ultimate results and final fruits. Thoughtful men over the centuries have recognized the real wisdom behind the differing, but inwardly harmonious, courses of action followed by Jesus and John, so harshly and, ultimately, foolishly, censured by their contemporaries. The very number of transformed lives, because John had been willing to be nothing but a "Voice crying in the wilderness," and because Jesus was "the friend of sinners," justifies beyond a shadow of a doubt the wisdom of their chosen course. But the natural result of this pragmatic success of the separate ministries of John and Jesus is the conclusion that they who rejected them are fools! Men of real wisdom justify the two great men of God. Feel the real tragedy of Jn. 1:11-13, as well as its triumph.

is justified. Lenski (*Matthew*, 444) feels that, because this verb is aorist (*edikaiōthē*), Jesus refers to actions performed in the

past, John's career now ended and Jesus' deeds now slandered. However, though the verb is aorist passive, it need not be taken merely as a past tense, since it can be interpreted as a gnomic aorist, stating a general truth: "Wisdom is (and always will be) vindicated by her deeds, works, outcome, results, etc." The same view is arrived at, following the approach of Plummer, (*Matthew*, 163): "It is *certain* to be justified . . . the event is regarded as so sure to happen that it is spoken of as past." The pragmatic success of John and Jesus is noted by Barclay, (*Matthew*, II, 11):

The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved men's hearts to God as they had not moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in Him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

While the pragmatic test is not a final one whereby men, limited as they are by time and space, may know the truth or falsity of philosophy, since they cannot know ALL the long-range effects of the theory, yet, given all other evidences for the validity of a theory, it is of no use whatever unless it also works! Jesus is not pinning the ultimate truthfulness of His entire message on its workability, since its authenticity is proved by His signs, or miracles. (See on 11:4, 5) But if "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," then the real significance of Jesus' ministry lies in His ability really to make men over. Should it be possible that His miracles identified His message as divine and yet that message fail to give men transforming power, of what use would the miracles be? Worse still, His message would be suspect, worse than useless. But the best part about the ministry of John who prepared the way, and that of Jesus, is that they did not merely flash their divine authority to speak, but actually produced the results that they were sent to accomplish. John actually brought men to repentance and to Jesus. Jesus actually brought men to forgiveness and the new birth, and made them fit for the presence of God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. How did John in prison learn about the deeds of Jesus?
2. According to Matthew, about what, exactly, did John hear? the works of _____.
3. In what general context does Luke place this incident? What were some of the deeds of Jesus to which Luke thus alludes? Why, then,

does Matthew place this incident in some other context? Harmonize this apparent contradiction in fact.

4. State the exact point of John's question to Jesus. Affirm or deny the following proposition and tell why: "John in prison was weakening in faith in Jesus as the Messiah."
5. State the reasons why John may have propounded such a question to Jesus.
6. State and explain the answer that Jesus sent back to John. Show how Jesus' answer fulfills prophecies regarding the Christ, hence identifies Jesus as the Messiah to all who had eyes to see it.
7. State the evidence that Jesus gave John. Was this evidence different in kind from the evidence Jesus provided other people? What does your answer to this question indicate about the nature of the evidence that God gives to help all people believe Him?
8. What Old Testament prophet did Jesus cite in reference to John?
9. Give specific illustrations of Jesus' miracles to which He made reference in His answer to John. For example, name some of the dead raised to life prior to the arrival of John's question.
10. Explain the traits of character referred to in the figurative expressions: "a reed shaken with the wind", "a man clothed in soft raiment".
11. What is meant by the phrase: "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force"? Are there other possible translations of this expression, that would affect the interpretation? What are the problems of interpretation? Write the sentence in such a way as to show which way you interpret and apply what Jesus meant.
12. Explain how John the Baptist both *was* and *was not* the Elijah who was to come. (See Lk. 1:17; Jn. 1:21)
13. In Jesus' illustration of His generation, to what games of children does He make reference? What is the exact point of comparison in the illustration to which He draws attention?
14. Explain how "wisdom is justified by her works (or children)." To whose wisdom does Jesus refer: His own, John's, or that of the Jews of His day?
15. What two outstanding proclaimers of God's Kingdom suffered violence during their life and ministry and whose lives ended in violent death?
16. What did the Jews of Jesus' day do with the message of John and Jesus? Be careful, they did not all do the same thing.
17. Did Jesus "eat bread and drink wine", like any other Jew of His

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time? Some object to the idea that Jesus drank wine. What does this passage say regarding Jesus' personal practice, if anything? State what you know of Jewish customs of that period that might help answer this question.

SPECIAL STUDY: SHOULD JESUS DRINK WINE?

Without hesitation many Christians respond in the negative without examining the reasons for their conclusion. If pushed for a reason, they might reply, "The Bible forbids its use." To this a skeptic might raise the challenge: "Always? Unconditionally?" At this point the teetotaler might object, "But Jesus is my example, and I KNOW that He would not drink. For me, His example is conclusive."

But is the presupposition on which this conclusion is drawn a correct one? That is, is it true that "Jesus would not drink"? Instead of supposing what a person might or might not have done, is it not better to ask the person himself, to learn what his practice really was? Why not ask Jesus, "Lord, what is your personal practice regarding wine? How does your practice compare with that of your contemporaries, or how does it differ?"

To this, Jesus made reply: "John the Baptist came eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has an evil spirit.' The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look! A greedy fellow and a drinker, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' Yet wisdom is proved right by all her children." (Luke 7:33-35)

The life-style of Jesus revealed in this text is probably quite different from that expected of Him by ascetics of every age. Yet what this text actually says proves that their desire to use the Son of man as a champion for the cause of total abstinence on the question of alcohol is based on other considerations and not on the example of Jesus. Note the importance of this text as it relates to this question:

1. *Jesus affirmed that He normally and habitually drank wine.*

This is not a conclusion drawn by scholars or the consensus of critics, but the unabashed statement of the Lord Himself as He comments on His own way of life. The question at issue in this context is the immediate contrast between the fundamental wisdom behind the way of life practiced by John the Baptist and Jesus, and the fundamental folly of

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those who perversely refused to accept the life, message, ministry and mission of either. However, it is worthy of note that Jesus did not change His life-style merely because it laid Him open to the criticism of being a "glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

2. Jesus affirmed that He habitually drank wine *and said so in a context where His meaning is clear, His practice being sharply contrasted with that of the abstainers on the one hand, and that of the drunkards on the other.*
 - a. Jesus was not an abstainer, as evidenced by the contrast with the life-long habits of John the Baptist whose well-known asceticism was common knowledge and the basis for the baseless criticism of him by fickle people.
 - b. Jesus was no drunkard or glutton, since He Himself borrows these slanders from the mouth of His detractors, not from those who objectively try to describe His real manner of life. His matchless life and sinless character unmask these vilifications for what they are.
 - c. Therefore, Jesus' practice, by His own statement, clarified by His stated antitheses, stands exactly halfway between both extremes. His is neither the teetotaler's abstinence nor the drunkard's excess, but the moderate's evenness of balance in all things.
3. Jesus affirmed that He habitually drank wine, *saying so to a people accustomed to think of wine as a blessing.*
 - a. That the Jews knew wine and other strong drink to be a dangerous curse, goes without saying, as many texts testify. (Cf. Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:10, 21; 23:29-35, etc.)
 - b. But the Jews knew wine to be the generous blessing from the Lord. (Gen. 27:28; Psa. 104:15; Isa. 55:1; Hos. 2:8, 9, 22; Joel 2:19-24; Amos 9:13, 14)
 - (1) They spoke of bread and wine as the staple articles of diet. (Gen. 27:25, 37; Dt. 11:14; Num. 6:20; Judg. 19:19-21; 2 Sam. 16:1, 2; 2 Chron. 11:11, etc.)
 - (2) Consequently, they were required to put wine on the grocery list of provisions for the priesthood (Num. 18:12; Dt. 18:4; 1 Chron. 9:29, etc.)
 - (3) Wine appeared as a normal expression of ordinary hospitality. (Gen. 14:18; Judg. 19:19-21; 1 Sam. 16:20; 25:18; 1 Chron. 12:40; Jn. 2:3-10)

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- (4) Wine was commanded as a drink offering to God (Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5, 7, 10), probably because it was in common use and therefore had practical value to the Jews. This made it a proper thing that could be offered in sacrifice to God.
- (5) Wine was consumed by the Israelites even at their religious festivals. (Dt. 14:22-26; 12:17, 18; Isa. 62:8, 9)
- (6) The Jews knew of its value as an anesthetic (Prov. 31:6, 7; Lk. 10:34) as well as its necessity in case of bad water or stomach infirmities (1 Tim 5:23)
- c. So, for Jesus to confess to eating bread and drinking wine to a Jewish audience, is no more than to confess to living a quite normal life. As an accurate reading of the circumstances in this text (Luke 7:33-35 and Mt. 11:18, 19) will show, it was this very normalness about Jesus' conduct that drew fire from the cynics. In collision with the popular view as to what a "holy man" should be, Jesus wore no hair shirt, fasted so secretly that no one ever knew about it (if He ever did), ate common food, drank common drink and made no extraordinary effort to let His real holiness appear in a superficial manner. But His real character was so well attested, that He did not need to dignify the accusation of being a "winebibber and a glutton" by even bothering to answer it. The facts people knew about His life spoke for themselves.

So, the real question is not "Should Jesus drink wine?" as our tongue-in-cheek title would have it, for, as a matter of fact, He did. But this is not the point to be discussed with the modern Christian, disturbed by the excess in certain areas surrounding the use of wine or other forms of alcohol. The question is really "Should a Christian follow his Lord's example in drinking wine today?"

Although the apostolic doctrine is replete with stern denunciations of "drunkenness wherein is riot and excess," yet the Apostles do not enjoin unconditional and perpetual abstinence as the way around over-indulgence. Theirs too is the route of habitual moderation in all things (1 Co. 9:25), since they are suspicious of any doctrine that promotes rigor of devotion, self-abasement and severity to the body through negative regulations that God did not give. Such

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prohibitions might have an appearance of wisdom, but are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:16-23)

Beyond his disparaging of drunkenness and other forms of excess connected with the attitudes and activities under the influence of alcohol, the Apostle Paul, for instance, can find no rational basis for abstaining either from meat or wine in normal practice, since he knows that all God's gifts (the context is food) are to be received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim. 4:1-5) However, under special circumstances Paul could conceivably dispense with ANY given food, for instance, if it caused a brother to stumble. (Ro. 14:21) But contextually, it is obvious that the Apostle viewed this abstinence only as necessary in reference to the weaker Christian who had some scruple against that particular food. (See Ro. 14:1—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12-20; 8 all; 10:23-33) This is a necessary conclusion, since Paul could delineate no objective or absolute principle whereby wine or any food should be proscribed under any and all circumstances.

Further, in seeking qualified personnel for the highest tasks in the Church, the Apostle demanded that no excessive drinkers be tolerated in the eldership or in the diaconate. (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Tit. 1:7) In giving directions for producing Christlike piety in the Church, he only urges Titus (2:3) to bid older women not to be slaves to drink. However, in neither case does he suggest abstinence as a necessary quality. Rather, when he felt called upon to give his advice to a young abstainer, Paul counselled Timothy specifically in favor of wine, as opposed to water. (1 Tim. 5:23)

"Should Jesus Drink Wine?" may be an amusing question, but it will stand for serious reflection. Jesus was a Jew living in first-century Palestine. Out of proper moral consideration for the needs and views of His people, He ate and drank the food common to His people. It is a fair question whether He would follow His first-century practice while living, say, among twentieth-century Americans, whose history and attitudes toward alcohol may well be quite different than that of first-century Jews. But here it may be objected that twentieth-century Americans may need instruction by the Son of God, so that their (mistaken?) conscience be edified, i.e. formed along entirely different lines.

"WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS"?

Lest some, caught up in the confusing currents of a relativistic

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age and maddened by the spineless morality of situation ethics, mistake this position taken here to be the same drivel, let it be vigorously denied that situation ethics has anything to do with Christianity.

The assertions made earlier that Jesus did in fact drink wine in His own situation in the first century, primarily because He chose to conform His practice with that of His own people, the Jews, cannot be construed in any fashion to justify the character-rotting influence of that immorality passing under the current name of "situation ethics." "Situation ethics," as I understand the phrase in its popular use, refers to a life guided by NO ABSOLUTE moral principle. There is no absolute morality, that is, except for the pervasive rule of thumb that each situation must be dealt with as a separate entity without any necessary reference to any other situation. According to its various practitioners, each moral decision must be made without reference to the (im)moral standard of reference of the individuals involved, be it hedonism, opportunism or whatever.

There is a chasmic contrast between this view of ethical decisions and that practiced by Jesus of Nazareth and expected of His disciples. Whereas "situation ethics" has no fixed code of absolutes within the sphere of which ethical judgments are made, Christ's doctrine proclaims a rigid standard of inflexible righteousness. This standard outlines clearly what is meant by drunkenness, fornication, theft, lying, etc. By forbidding these and commanding their ethical opposites, i.e. temperance, purity, integrity, etc., Jesus unveiled a code of absolutes as demanding as the very character of God Himself! (See "Jesus' Purpose For Preaching This Sermon", notes on the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, 188ff.) What is NOT spelled out in regard to these standards is how they are to be applied in every case. To a certain degree every situation faced by Jesus' disciple will be different from every other. So, instead of writing new rules of conduct for each new situation, Jesus placed into the hands of His disciple a few simple directives by which he may decide how to act ethically in each situation. (There directives may be gleaned from great blocks of Scripture on this subject, such as Ro. 14:1—15:7; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; chap. 8; 10:23-33; 16:14; 1 Jn. 3, etc.)

Thus it is that the Christ and His disciples are armed, not with some self-seeking, self-serving philosophy, but girded with the revelations of the living God in an enlightened conscience, face each situation and decide what each must do (1) to please the Father, and (2) to serve his fellow man best in that situation, and (3) what will achieve his own highest goal.

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Now to return: should Jesus (or His disciple) drink wine? But to ask this question is to see another: what other moral considerations were weighed into His decision which brought Him to act as He did in that given situation? If we fail to see these, we should badly interpret why He pursued that course, and, as a natural consequence, we would misapply His example in our own period.

He drank wine in an age that knew no automobiles racing along a narrow ribbon of concrete within a cubit of oncoming traffic. He drank wine in a society not yet pressed for time, where the need for ready reflexes to operate fast-moving machinery was small. He lived in an age that moved in terms of the sun, not the timeclock. His was an era of walkers, not riders, to whom sedentary living was less a problem. But He also lived in an age as profligate as any other, an age that sought its amusements in the arms of Bacchus, an age when many a party devolved into revelry. Even so, Jesus could trace a clear line of godly conduct between asceticism and excess. In our own highly industrialized machine age, common sense considerations of safety may cause the Lord to counsel against alcohol in any situation where consideration for others and one's own safety is compromised by slower reflexes.

In light of Jesus' practice, another interesting, if unsolvable, puzzle is the question why the Lord did not concern Himself greatly with the long-term effect of alcohol on the brain about which modern research has so much to say. Is it possible that Jesus' answer to this query might be: "Do not drink to excess, and you need not fear the adverse effects of alcohol on your brain"? After all, is not His practice somewhat indicative of the conclusion that a moderate use of alcohol by a God-oriented man need not fear long-range negative effects on any part of his body, presuming that this man eats, sleeps and exercises normally? Or to state the problem differently, would not Jesus, Revealer of God and Creator of man, surely have revealed something of the lethal danger of drinking what is held to be a poison? Is it too much to argue that His silence on the subject and His personal practice, taken together, argue that our body chemistry can absorb and profitably use a certain amount of alcohol?

IS ALCOHOLISM A SICKNESS?

Another ramification of the conclusion that Jesus Himself drank wine, though never to excess (a conclusion drawn from His unanswerable denunciation of drunkenness as sin and from His own unimpeach-

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able character, Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15), is the dilemma: should we consider the alcoholic a sinner or a sick man? To put the question in other terms: did Jesus escape alcoholism by righteousness (moderation), by maintaining a healthy body, or both?

While modern research has tended to demonstrate the direct connection between long-term embibing and many mental and physical debilities, sicknesses to which both psychological and medical cures must be applied, what is the meaning of the statement: "The alcoholic is a sick man"? This declaration, while declaring an objective reality, is often made with emotional overtones that suggest that the alcoholic can no more be charged with the responsibility for his condition than would a child suffering from measles. On the other hand, some religionists talk as if the alcoholic could be transformed into a proper citizen simply by immediate and permanent swearing off of alcohol, without any recourse to medical or psychological help to repair the damage that has been done to his body, mind, life, as if correcting the alcoholic's responsibility for his weakened condition were the whole of his rehabilitation.

Before we hasten to decide whether the alcoholic is *either* a sick *or* a sinful man, let us remember that some dilemmas are badly stated, including this one. There is a third alternative: the alcoholic may be *both* a sick *and* a sinful man. His sin has made him a sick man. Forgiveness of his sin will not make him a well man. Making him a well man in body and mind, insofar as modern science is able to effect this, will not make him acceptable to God. He must be both saved and healed. His rehabilitation in both these respects may require much time and may witness many set-backs, but it must take place in both areas, i.e. healing of the body and purifying the conscience and reinforcing the will, if the whole man is to be brought back to normalcy.

There is one sad, tragic fact that may face the alcoholic which, repent as he might, he cannot change: damage to his body as the natural consequence of alcohol's ruinous effects. A man may repent a thousand times of his carelessness in handling a powersaw, but his tears and his undoubted change for the good cannot give him back his right arm sawn away in the accident. If this analogy applies to the alcoholic in any way, it becomes a stern warning to any who drink, that alcohol is capable of bringing upon him a blight that no amount of repentance can correct.

Numerous are the instances where Jesus performed this very healing of both body and soul by curing the body and forgiving the

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sin. He not only purified the conscience but also provided the Gospel whereby the whole man can be transformed into a strong, stable character. What is most remarkable is that Jesus held all sinners responsible for the mess into which they get themselves (Cf. Jn. 5:14; Mt. 12:45), especially drunkards (Lk. 21:34; Ro. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). Accordingly, if people were merely sick due to some physical weakness related to causes not dependent upon their choice, then, presumably, Jesus could not justly hold them responsible for the bad results of their actions. So, the fact that He judges men responsible for their drunkenness, lays the charge for failure, not merely upon constitutional weaknesses, but upon the quality of the heart of the individual. Rather than become a scientist or a doctor to heal all mankind by giving out useful remedies or advice on physical health, He dealt with man's fundamental problem: his relation with God and man. If THIS problem be not solved, physical or mental healing if only to live a few more years in constant danger of being corrupted again, solves nothing.

HOW DID JESUS ESCAPE BECOMING AN ALCOHOLIC?

As completely out of place as this query may seem, yet to answer it may lead us to grasp something of the answer to our other question, "Should Jesus' disciple drink wine?" How is it possible to harmonize the potentially catastrophic danger that alcohol represents both to the individual and to society, with Jesus' practice of taking wine? The secret lies in being guided by all the moral directives that prompted Jesus. By taking His view of the world, by having a conscience molded by the will of God and by showing the same forthright obedience to the Father as did He, by knowing no other dependence than upon the daily provision of the Father, one will be pleased to learn that he is not troubled by those diseases that excess and indulgence bring in their wake.

Section 25

JESUS CONDEMNS UNBELIEVING CITIES AND INVITES "BABES" TO COME TO HIM

I. HEARTBROKEN CONDEMNATION

20. Then began he to unbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.
21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
22. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.
23. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down into Hades; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day.
24. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

II. HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY

25. At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes:
26. yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.
27. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him*.

II. HEARTFELT COMPASSION

28. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did God "reveal things" to babes and "hide" them from the wise? If God hides truth from anybody, is that not partiality? Prove your answer.
- b. How is Jesus' yoke easy?

- c. What kind of labor and burdens do you think Jesus was promising to relieve?
- d. Why and how will it be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum?
- e. What do you think Jesus expected of the people in Capernaum to do, that they did not do, which, in turn, moved Him to upbraid them for not repenting?
- f. What is repentance?
- g. Have you ever wished that you could have been personally present with Jesus during His ministry in those happy, golden days in Capernaum along the shores of blue Galilee? What grand illusions does this particular section shatter, bringing such dreaming back to reality and prepares us for eternity and judgment?
- h. Do you think that this section teaches us to believe that there will be degrees of punishment for the wicked? On what basis do you answer as you do? If you say yes, then does that not picture God as showing favoritism in judgment, using one standard for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom while requiring another of the privileged cities of Galilee? If you say no, then how do you interpret the words "more tolerable"?
- i. Should we revise our theology and our hymns that teach us, "Jesus never fails". It appears that Jesus has clearly failed to win these famous Galilean cities for God's Kingdom, even though most of His time and work had been spent within their precincts. How do you explain this failure?
- j. Is Jesus meaning to say that not a single soul in these three cities had repented? Give proof for the answer you give.
- k. In what way can a city or a people be "exalted to heaven"? In what way can they be "brought down to Hades"? Where is "Hades"?
- l. Jesus thanks God for hiding important truth from the "wise and understanding". It would seem to some that this is putting a premium on ignorance and degrading the advancement in knowledge and culture. This is a long-held charge laid against Christianity. How would you interpret these words of Jesus in such a way as would show that, in reality, Jesus actually holds no brief for ignorance and unwillingness to seek truth?
- m. Even though a man may be very well-developed intellectually, when he views God's way of saving the world as nonsense, what then should we say about him and his wisdom? Should we reject all the truth that he knows, even though he rejects the gospel we

know? Is he a fool for rejecting the gospel? If so, how far has he lost the key to truth, i.e. can he continue learning truth about nature? Will he be hampered in learning the fundamental truth about himself and human nature? How far will he err or fail to grasp the fundamental truths of psychology or sociology?

- n. Do you think that Jesus accepts the possibility that the people He describes as "wise and understanding" really are wise and understanding? What makes you say that?
- o. What is there so praiseworthy about people whom Jesus describes as "babes"?
- p. Should we get excited or be upset by the attacks upon Christianity launched by the intelligentsia of our day? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
- q. What fundamental attitude is Jesus requiring before participation in His Kingdom is even possible?
- r. Why should Jesus be thankful to God that some folks are actually unable to see the truth ("I thank you that you have hidden these things from the wise.")? How can any sane person be thankful for this?
- s. If Jesus be only a mere man, what must we conclude about the grandiloquent claims He is making for Himself in this section? If Jesus be God come in the flesh, what must we do about the claims He makes upon us in this section?
- t. After reading the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' other sermons on the high cost of discipleship (for example, Luke 14:26-33), can we still take Him seriously, when He claims that His yoke is the easy one, HIS burden the light one? If so, how?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus began then to censure those cities where He had done most of His miracles, simply because they remained apathetic and unrepentant. "How sorry I am for you, Chorazin! You too are to be pitied, Bethsaida! For if the wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon, had seen the miracles performed to demonstrate God's authority that you have seen, their people would have turned to God long ago, wearing the sackcloth of shame and with ashes on their head to show their humility. But let me tell you that it is going to go easier on judgment day for those wicked cities than for you!

"And you, Capernaum, do you suppose that I will exalt you to a position of imminence, power and importance, simply because I have preached in your midst? No! As a city you shall die! Had the

miracles taken place in the vilest city you can think of—even Sodom, that I have performed in your streets, yes, even Sodom would still be standing today! But I can assure you that it will go much easier for the whole land of Sodom than for you!”

At that time Jesus prayed, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who suppose themselves to be learned and wise, and for showing it to humble, teachable people. Yes, Father, I thank you that you were pleased to do it that way.

“My Father has turned everything over to me. No one really knows me, except the Father, and no one really knows God but me! And I am willing to reveal God to anyone I want to. So, come to me, all you who are worn-out and loaded down with impossible burdens. I will give you real rest. Here: wear my yoke: let me teach you. You will find me gentle with you and genuinely humble. You will actually find the soul refreshment you are seeking. Last but not best, in the final analysis, you will find that, of all the yokes you will ever know, my yoke is the easy one; my burden is really the light one.”

SUMMARY

Jesus denounced those privileged cities where He had spent the major part of His earthly ministry, because they remained undecided and unwilling to turn to God after all His efforts and evidences given to convince them. Wicked cities with less opportunity will not be so severely condemned as those reasonably good cities that had refused to take a positive stand for Jesus. Then, in rapid-fire order, Jesus expresses the rigorous judgment of the Judge Himself, His exultation over the Father's choice of method. Next He makes the highest possible claim to the knowledge of God by excluding all others. Upon the basis of this claim, He makes the deepest, most sympathetic invitation to the whole human race, while asserting the most incredible humility. He concludes by making the astounding claim that, after all, His way is best.

NOTES

11:20 **Then began he.** Luke (10:13-16) records this same denunciation pronounced upon the three Galilean cities, however with several noteworthy differences, in connection with the mission of the Seventy. Because of this fact, the chronological unity of Matthew's

chapter has been doubted. That is, is this condemnation of these cities situated in its proper chronological place? While it is true that Matthew often links together in the same chapter harmoniously organized material from different situations, weaving them into one closely-woven whole, the following suggestions tend to argue that in this case he did not do so:

1. Matthew's version of the denunciation is given in some loose connection with Jesus' Galilean ministry, while Luke makes it clear that the Mission of the Seventy, and the instructions given in connection with it, were given after Jesus had definitely left Galilee for Jerusalem. (Cf. Lk. 9:51, 52; 10:1 "after this")
2. In the commission of the Seventy, the significant omission of the injunction not to enter either Gentile or Samaritan territory (cf. Mt. 10:5, 6) may point to the evangelization of an area containing mixed populations, such as Perea with its Decapolis, without excluding Judea. If this is, in fact, the case, then a different audience for Jesus' remarks, especially this denunciation in Lk. 10:13-15, would naturally permit Jesus to repeat what He had said earlier (Mt. 11:20-24)
3. The fact that Jesus' actual commission of the Seventy includes Luke 10:16, shows that Luke intended to include the denunciation as an integral part of that commission. This is all the more significant in light of the fact that Lk. 10:16 was also said to the Twelve before their mission in Galilee (Mt. 10:40), a fact that tends to confirm the conclusion that Matthew and Luke record similar words spoken on two separate occasions.
4. That they are similar, but not identical expressions, will be seen from the following arrangements:

Matthew:

- a. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- b. Capernaum and Sodom: facts and fate compared.

Luke:

- a. Sodom and any city rejecting the Apostles; fate not connected in any way with Capernaum.
- b. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- c. Capernaum's fate, not compared with that of Sodom.

Therefore, this condemnation of the unrepentant cities is in its chronological places both here in the Sermon of Matthew 11 as well as in the commission of the Seventy in Luke 10. In that place it is in order for two important reasons:

1. Since His great Galilean ministry would already have been concluded, His words become a warning to any other cities in the virgin territory to which He would send the Seventy, that to reject Jesus or any of His messengers is to invite the same dreadful judgment pending for the Galilean cities that had remained impenitent.
2. Precisely because Jesus would not be permitted the leisure to develop the same friendly rapport with other cities in Palestine, as He had with Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, the people of other cities might be tempted to feel themselves particularly neglected and, hence, at a great disadvantage because they would not be able to witness so many miracles at first hand. So, by uttering, both in Galilee and elsewhere, this fiery judgment upon those privileged towns, Jesus serves notice both to the privileged and underprivileged cities alike that no amount of first-hand acquaintance with Him can take the place of genuine repentance! The miracles, and the proof of them, are important, but not at the expense of the real point of Christ's mission: God was in Christ endeavoring to bring men to their knees in surrender of their lives.

But even having said that this condemnation was uttered in Galilee within earshot of some of the inhabitants of the very cities in question, does not also argue that this chapter is one continuous sermon, since **then began he** may be taken, not as a note of time ("the very next thing Jesus said was . . ."), but could well be Matthew's means of transition from one subject to another. ("Then another thing Jesus said in this same general connection was . . .")

I. INVINCIBLE UNBELIEF (11:20-24)

A. IMPENITANCE = UNBELIEF (11:20)

Then began he to upbraid (*oneidizein*, "to reproach justifiably," Arndt-Gingrich, 573). **Upbraid** means to rebuke, censure, blame; to charge, accuse or reprove reproachfully. But why would the usually quiet, gentle Jesus be so disturbed? We must feel the ironic contrast in Matthew's introduction: God's part in seeking to save these cities had been **mighty works** done by Jesus. Men's reaction: **they repented not!** Whose conscience would not be

deeply indignant at this obstinate refusal of divine mercy! In Jonah's ministry to Ninevah, the warning of imminent total disaster and the terrifying judgment of God was sufficient to bring vicious pagans like those Assyrians to tremble on their knees before God. By contrast, even the "riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience," by which Jesus' message of mercy and ministry of generous helpfulness were intended to encourage men to change their lives, could not move God's own people! Jesus scolds them, because He knows that a refusal to repent constitutes defiance of the living God! (Cf. Ro. 2:3-6) They were so very unforgivable, for they rejected evidence that would have persuaded some of the wickedest cities in the world! Whereas this same gentle Jesus had spoken many precious promises and would yet offer many yearning invitations to these people, they must now hear the other side of the question: the fiery condemnation and the fearful warnings. They must face what Lenski calls "the mighty and terrible Jesus."

Surprisingly, as Jesus sounds these awesome warnings, we realize that we are standing in the presence of the very Messiah that John the Baptist had been seeking! This entire section (11:20-30) is Jesus' own claim to be the Judge Himself who would one day take up the winnowing shovel to separate the wheat from the chaff. The day would come when He would actually sieze the ax to cut down fruitless trees. And the first among the worthless to go down would be these very cities who had had the finest opportunities to know the truth of God and live by it! In this one stroke, Jesus justifies the OT predictions of the Messiah's justice, clarifies what John longed to see Jesus undertake now and gives us all fair warning, by asserting that He would bring this all to pass. But by His great invitation, He teaches us that the day of mercy and of God's long-suffering is still in effect.

Cities wherein most of his mighty works were done.

A phrase like this proves to us once more how very little we know of all that Jesus did. (Cf. Jn. 21:25) Even after a close examination of the recorded incidents in that tri-city area, we must admit that great selectivity has been exercised in eliminating all but the few stories we do have. And though the Evangelists' impression is that these narratives are representative of the rest, yet our knowledge of the samples does not permit us to presume we know all there is to know even about the earthly ministry of our Lord.

Most of his mighty works (*hai pleístai dunámeis autoú*). Though *pleístos* is superlative in form, yet in *koiné* Greek, as in

modern popular English, the superlative is used with a much more relative sense than the form suggests. It is used for emotional emphasis (elative use) where we would translate it "very," or "many." (See Robertson-Davis, *Short Grammar*, 206; Arndt-Gingrich, 696; Dana-Manley, 121) To get a quantitatively precise picture of the miracles wrought there and, at the same time, be faithful to *koiné* usage, we should translate it "many of His works." The word "most" however, carries its proper emotional impact and, simultaneously, vouches for the authenticity of Matthew's work. If he were inventing his story and altering to avoid possible mistakes, he would be unlikely to admit that most of the great miracles of his Messiah resulted in the failure to win those who witnessed them. Yet, if he did consciously say that the major part of Jesus' miracles produced no more than this, then we may rest assured that he is not counterfeiting, and his story true. We must search elsewhere for the explanation behind this admission (that Jesus' works failed to secure repentance in significant cases).

Jesus' ministry there was two-pronged, consisting of action and preaching. (Cf. Ac. 1:1: His "doing" came before his "teaching.") Jesus first established His right to say what He came to reveal, then He preached it.

1. Incidents in the tri-city area:

- a. Jesus moved there with His family and disciples. (Jn. 2:12)
- b. At Cana in the first year of His ministry, He healed the nobleman's son who was dying at Capernaum. (Jn. 4:46-54)
- c. Miraculous catch of fish, called four fishermen, healed many (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5).
- d. In Capernaum the man with the unclean demon liberated on the sabbath in the synagogue (Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- e. Peter's mother-in-law healed that afternoon (Mt. 8; Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- f. That evening, whole city gathered at door for healing.
- g. Paralytic borne by four men was cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 4).
- h. Centurion's servant healed (Mt. 8; Lk. 7).
- i. Stilling the tempest, with other little boats from cities also present on the lake with Jesus (Mt. 8; Mk. 4:36; Lk. 8).
- j. Jairus' daughter raised from dead (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8).

k. Woman with hemorrhage cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8). But mere mighty works alone cannot produce faith, if they are divorced from what the miracle Worker says of Himself. Jesus' miracles could be verified by these very townspeople, but they failed to see that these signs pointed to Jesus' identity. These **mighty works** were in themselves a word from God, saying, "This is my Son: listen to Him!"

2. Some of Jesus' greatest messages were delivered in this area:
 - a. Perhaps the Sermon on the Mount was preached close enough to these cities that at least some of the inhabitants could have heard it.
 - b. The Sermon on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:59).
 - c. Probably also the Message on Human Traditions (Mt. 15; Mk. 7).
 - d. The Sermon on True Greatness, Stumbling-blocks, Mis-treatment and Forgiveness (Mt. 18).

What is the connection between Jesus' miracles and the result He anticipated, i.e. the repentance of these Galileans? His miracles served to lead men to change their lives, by demonstrating Jesus' right to demand that they repent. Since His miracles were evidence of the nearness of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:28), the paradox was true: though the Kingdom of God had come nigh to them, yet they remained far from the Kingdom! (Cf. Lk. 10:9-12 with Mk. 12:34) Their continued impenitence, even in the presence of the best evidence of a divine break-through into human history, is the best answer for those who would insist upon the supreme necessity of miraculous manifestations today for convincing the impenitent skeptics. We must not depend upon **mighty works** to convince and convert men today, if the Gospel attested by Christ's own miracles was rejected by men of the same mentality in His day. To paraphrase Abraham's response to the tormented rich man: "No, if they hear not Christ and the Apostles, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead or work other marvelous miracles."

They repented not is a tragic epitaph! What could have been the motives that induced these privileged Galileans to justify their failure to repent? Some of the fatal assumptions may have been:

1. "Proximity to the Lord is as acceptable as faith." Physical nearness to Him did not guarantee their repentance nor strengthen their faith. The more distant ministry of John the Baptist had stirred multitudes throughout the nation, but not even Jesus' ministry right in their midst had been able to bring these cities to their knees. In fact, the sheer common-

ness of their fellowship with Him may have dulled their sensitivity to His message and to His mission on their behalf. It is foolish to think that faith would necessarily have been excited in us, or would be stronger than it is, had we been immediate neighbors of the Master and thus witnesses of His life and work. (Analogous cases: Jn. 11:47; 12:37) Here is the moral exception to the proverb: "Seeing is believing." This area had seen many wonders but did not believe the moral significance of them sufficiently to submit to the message based on them.

2. "Morality may be substituted for repentance." The relative morality of these cities seems to have been higher than that of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. They may have even been priding themselves on their relative respectability. Perhaps they even sneered at Jesus' demands that they bow with other common sinners, that they too be born again, repent deeply and sincerely seek the redemption and leadership He offered. They were generally good people; they at least did not try to stone or crucify Jesus. In fact, one could say that they accepted Jesus up to a point. But, for Jesus, that "certain point" cannot exist; He wants all or nothing. He teaches that the greatest sin man can commit is to refuse to believe in Him. And, as far as the so-called "good morality" is concerned, it is not really good after all. A person or a city that retains itself for itself and does not give itself to the Lord, is really wicked! They were too confident that they already pursued the proper course, with God. Their "good conscience" was their most blinding fault. Jesus was not trying to make people more or less good; He was endeavoring to lead them to trust Him to make them perfect! We too may shudder at the sins of others and at the punishment they have incurred, and yet be far more guilty ourselves of crime against God. We may not be violent, sensual people, ready to ridicule or oppose the work of Christ. And yet our own self-righteousness and complacency will cause us to be indifferent to Him, dulling the influence of His ministry, letting Him produce no change in us. Though externally our lives may be more eminently respectable than those whose conduct is openly disreputable, we may be ungodly in a far more deadly way.
3. "Education in godliness, or information, is as good as faith." These cities had enjoyed the distinct opportunity to be edu-

cated directly at the feet of the Master Himself, whom to know was to know the very mind of God! But the mere fact that they had heard many messages and were informed on the nature of God's plans did not release these Galileans from the necessity of trusting Jesus! For, according to the measure of light against which they sinned, so will their judgment be! They enjoyed the utmost opportunity. Now they must face the utmost in responsibility. They forgot the responsibilities of privilege.

4. They may even have supposed that sympathy with the Master's work were equal to repentance. Surely had they lacked some faith in His miraculous power or had they begrudged Him some understanding of His intentions, He would "have done no mighty works there." (Cf. Mt. 13:58; Mk. 5:6) But mere sympathy with His general program to the extent of rejoicing in the evidences of the blossoming of righteousness, or to the extent of agreeing that Jesus was on the right track in bringing God close to men, without submitting to the spiritual demands of His message, is to remain uncommitted, and, in Jesus' sight, ultimately against God. (Cf. 12:30) The sympathy that men show for Jesus' work and their agreement that His Gospel is the best view of life may help us to open their hearts to submit to His rule, but sympathy is not repentance.
5. "Failure to repent is as good as repentance." Christ was relegated to the realm of indifferent. They did not care enough about Him to react. Theirs was the sin of inaction. Many a man's defense before God is no more than this: "But I did not do anything!" But this may be his condemnation, for Jesus had outlined a plan of action. He blamed these favored cities **because they repented not.**

One cannot help wondering whether Jesus' piercing description of that last great Day were not most directly true of these cities: "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart for me, all you workers of iniquity!'" (Lk. 13:26, 27)

Because they repented not. To bring these cities to repentance was the Lord's grand desire and the practical goal of His labor. Even though He had lavished blessings upon them and caused much rejoicing, His toil appeared comparatively wasted, because He

could be satisfied with nothing short of repentance. He did not aim to leave His audiences merely richer, only better educated, perhaps more adequately adjusted socially, materially more comfortable. We must notice how little emphasis Jesus put upon the externals of religion. Even though great multitudes from these cities followed Him, they did not surrender their will to that of God. What great emphasis we tend to put on church buildings, budgets, numbers in attendance at worship, in short, mere trappings of religion, even though the people themselves, who are brought into contact with "our religion," do not feel the heavy burden of their responsibility for what they have had the opportunity to know of God! They must never be the same after hearing the voice of God speaking through Jesus! Do men actually hear this voice in our gospel proclamation? So, in our work for Him, we too must not rest content with results that did not please the Lord when He worked at the same task.

Implicit in His reproaches is the rigorous judgment pronounced by the Judge Himself:

1. By implication He claims to know the past more perfectly than any, by declaring what men of ancient cities **WOULD HAVE DONE** with better opportunities. Only omniscience could guarantee accuracy at this point.
2. By implication He claims to know with unshakeable certainty the outcome of the yet future judgment, an issue which only God could know.

And because these presuppositions are merely implied, not asserted or defended (as He does, in fact, do elsewhere, Jn. 5:22, 27; cf. Ac. 10:42; 17:31), the positive boldness with which Jesus speaks is the more awesome.

B. OPPORTUNITY = RESPONSIBILITY (11:21-24)

11:21 **Woe unto thee** (*ouai soi*) is an interjection denoting pain or displeasure (Arndt-Gingrich, 595), but in what sense does Jesus mean it here?

1. An expression of grief, as if the Master is pained to reveal the fate of so many friends? This makes excellent sense here, because of Jesus' sorrowing sympathy for these who stumble on in their wilful blindness with no real conception of their impending doom. This idea is perfectly in harmony with the known character of our Lord, who is merciful even to the hardest sinners whose wilful unbelief demands additional signs when so many had already been given. (Cf. 12:38-42) **Woe** may be so interpreted. (Cf. Mt. 24:19; 26:24; Rev.

8:13; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19) Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 13) is certainly in order to notice:

This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched (nor) of one who is blazingly angry because . . . insulted, (nor) a passion of hatred at men. It is the accent of sorrow, . . . of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and who saw it completely disregarded. (He is) watching a tragedy being played out and . . . is powerless to stop men rushing on to ruin.

2. In condemning judgment? Jesus hates sin, He cannot but expose it, even if it means scorching rebuke aimed at friends among whom He was a well-known and appreciated companion, for they had proudly refused God's grace. This suggestion is probably the right one, since, contextually, Jesus is clearly pronouncing the destiny of those who continued to reject His representation of God's mercy.

Chorazin is an otherwise unknown city probably located about two miles to the north of Capernaum, now utterly desolate, its very existence being yet attested by extensive ruins. (*ISBE*, 614a)

Bethsaida. Two cities bore this name and were both situated at the north end of the Sea of Galilee on opposite sides of the mouth of the Jordan River. A critical study of the following texts reveals them to be "Bethsaida in Galilee" (Jn. 12:21; Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17; near Capernaum) and "Bethsaida Julias" (Lk. 9:10; cf. Jn. 6:1 "on the other side of the Sea of Galilee" from Capernaum; Mk. 8:22, a blind man was healed there on "the other side," Mk. 8:13, after the discussion at Dalmanutha Magadan on the west bank, Mt. 15:39b; Mk. 8:10b) That two similarly-named cities, located so close together, should not be thought strange, since "Bethsaida," etymologically, may mean nothing more than "house of fishing" (*ISBE*, 451b), hence refer to the water-front fishing villages so-called from the occupation of their inhabitants.

The mighty works done in you. Although we have no record of miracles worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida (however, see notes on 8:14), yet in every part of the Gospel narratives are found evident summaries of much vaster extent of Jesus' labors. (Cf. Mt. 9:35; 4:23-25; Jn. 20:35; 21-25) Nevertheless, due to the proximity of these towns to Capernaum, the scene of much of Jesus' activity, as well as the headquarters of His Galilean campaigns, the many

miracles done in the city limits of Capernaum would have had repercussions in those other two adjoining communities located but a short walk away. On the other hand, if the "great day of miracles" (Mt. 8:14-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Lk. 4:31b-41) ended at Bethsaida in Galilee, rather than in Capernaum, then we have an excellent sample of **the mighty works done in Bethsaida**, since Peter and Andrew, at whose home that day was concluded, were originally from there and perhaps still lived there. (Jn. 1:44)

If . . . (they) had been done in Tyre and Sidon means that no such ministry of any of God's prophets had actually been carried out in those cities. While it is true that God's men had thundered against Tyre and Sidon time and again (cf. Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; Ezek. 26:1—28:26; Amos 1:9, 10; Zech. 9:2-4), yet apparently God sent no prophet to bear the warnings of their destined judgment. The case of Nineveh and Jonah seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. The above-mentioned prophecies were delivered, then, for "local consumption" among the Jews themselves, as God gave them evidence of His planning. By declaring His counsel prior to its execution, He provided written proof that He is the Lord of history and ruled nations. Nevertheless, it was not His purpose to do **mighty works** in those pagan cities. To the Jews, then, the mention of these two Phoenician cities called up the image of typical pagan cities, ignorant of God's revelations and, as a consequence, morally degraded. Tyre and Sidon were geographically close enough to Palestine for their notorious wickedness to be generally proverbial among the Jews.

Foster (SLC-1957, 49) submits the interesting suggestion that Jesus may not have been looking at the ancient pagan cities in their own historical context, but rather was alluding to the modern cities of His day. However, if the Lord intended a parallel between Tyre and Sidon on the one hand with Sodom (11:23) on the other, in approximately the same sense in which He mentioned Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin together, then it becomes evident that He had only the ancient cities in mind, since Sodom had never been rebuilt and was no longer existing in the time of Christ.

They would have repented long ago. This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, notwithstanding the possibility that anyone could have levelled this objection to Jesus' affirmation. His assertion remains above challenge, if we admit the identity of the One who asserts it. Only God's omniscience could comprehend in its scope all possible actions, as well as what people actually do. The Master does not

hesitate to reveal what the wicked ancients **would have** done, and, by so doing, reveals His own identity even further. This impression is made the more evident by the solemn introduction prefixed to His pronouncement: **But I say unto you.** This is the authoritative voice which will pronounce the sentence **on the day of judgment.** These words encourage the vilest sinner to believe that, if these cities might have escaped their horrible fate by thorough-going repentance, there is hope for him too if he but repent.

Repented in what sense?

1. Does Jesus mean that full conversion to God that was expected of the chosen people? That would depend upon the precise nature and requirements of the message those pagan cities would have received. If that preaching were equal to the message supported by **the mighty works done in** Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum, then the Master means nothing short of full transformation.
2. If, however, He meant a message geared to the actual degree of maturity (or lack of it) at which those ancients lived, then He probably refers to that leaving off of their more heinous sins for which they had grown notorious. In this case God would not have destroyed them, even as He tolerated the continued existence of other relatively ungodly cities, until the times were right to provide them more complete revelations. (Cf. Ac. 17:30) It may be safe to decide this, since, in light of Jesus' principle, responsibility is equal to one's opportunity. For if these cities had no special revelation on the basis of which they could be deeply transformed, as had the Jews, then it could not be expected of them that they produce that of which they were psychologically incapable. (Cf. Ro. 10:14)

Sackcloth and ashes. The wearing of a rough, prickly hair-shirt next to the skin and the covering of one's head with annoying ashes (or also sitting in them) was the ancient way of expressing extreme sorrow and genuine repentance. (Cf. Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3; Jonah 3:5-10; Esther 4:3; Rev. 11:3) This bodily discomfort harmonizes well with the contrite attitude of one's spirit. Because it was obvious to all, it became a public recognition of one's contrition.

11:22 More tolerable in the day of judgment than for you, does not mean that these ancient, corrupt cities will get off scot-free at the judgment, in the sense that they would not be punished, or that they would be assured a place in God's paradise. The rule

still stands: responsibility equals opportunity. (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; Jn. 15:22-24; 9:40, 41; Ro. 2:12-16; 3:23-25) So there is no favoritism with God here, as if the corrupt Gentile cities might be thought to be judged by one standard and the Jews by another. The one standard for all is that of opportunity to know the truth and act upon it. So a man is responsible not merely for what he actually knows, but for what it was possible for him to know, but he chose not to recognize. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-28) One of the most excruciating parts of Hell is the burning within the conscience which screams to the suffered how much opportunity he had to receive God's loving grace. (Cf. Lk. 16:25) As a consequence, Jesus is not teaching that all the unsaved will suffer punishment of the same severity, since the gravity of guiltiness will vary with the opportunity.

Who would have supposed that judgment would reveal such a reversal of popular standards and upset estimates so commonly held? The jarring surprise caused by Jesus' declaration could not have been greater! One would have thought that of all people, surely those good Galilean neighbors of the Lord would be first in the Kingdom. What a lesson: the relative degree of a sinner's guilt may not come to the fore here on earth, and should never be used as a standard for measuring the guilt of others. Only the judgment of God will reveal the depth of one's guilt, since only then will the facts be bared that show how much opportunity one had to know and do God's will.

This is a judgment upon an attitude toward Jesus' message, but not absolutely irrevocable in the case of individuals, since some of these very townsmen could yet be won. This solemn declaration, then, is a fearful warning of a fate too dreadful to be conceived, deliberately worded to shake the complacent back to a sense of reality, calling them to repent before the hour of opportunity had elapsed.

11:23 And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Is this a question or an affirmation?

1. Affirmation (KJV: "Thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven . . .") Capernaum would naturally feel honored as a city whose face would soar to the gates of heaven itself, inasmuch as she could consider God's Son her most illustrious citizen. But taken in juxtaposition with the following phrase, this affirmation becomes ironic, since her temporal fame is not matched by eternal glory.
2. Question (ASV, RSV). This suggests that Jesus was verbalizing Capernaum's self-estimate: "You did not suppose that my mere presence among you would guarantee your eternal

fame and glory, did you? Wait till you hear your sentence read!"

The problem lies in the reading of the manuscripts, since *E*, *G*, *phi* and other Greek MSS as well as *f* and *q* among the Latin, the Siniatic and Peshitta Syriac have "And you, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven," where *K*, *M*, and other Greek MSS and *b* Latin have a similar variant: "And you, Capernaum, the one which has been exalted unto heaven." But contrary to these two variant readings, *Aleph*, *B*, *D*, *W*, *Theta*, *C*, many Latin MSS, the Vulgate, the Curetonian Syriac, the Sahidic, Bohairic and many other ancient translations have: "And you, Capernaum, you will not be exalted to heaven, will you?" (*mé héōs ouranoû hypsōthēsē*). Since in the best judgment of the editors of the critical text, the latter reading has the best MSS support, this is a question expecting a negative answer.

Thou shalt go down into Hades. **Hades** most often refers to the unseen world of the dead, the tomb. Moreover it can also connote the fate of those dead whose punishment is sure, having been so destined by their passage beyond the realm of further opportunity to change. (Cf. Lk. 16:23) For this reason **Hades** may sometimes be used as a synonym for Hell. Which is it here, merely the obscurity of the grave and the oblivion in the dust of the centuries, or a fiery threat of eternal punishment?

1. The grave, historical oblivion.

ISBE, 1315b: "As in the OT Sheol is a figure for the greatest depths known (Dt. 32:22; Isa. 7:11; 57:9; Job 11:8; 26:6), this seems to be a figure for the extreme of humiliation to which that city was to be reduced in the course of history. It is true that ver. 24, with its mention of the day of judgment, might seem to favor an eschatological reference to the ultimate doom of the unbelieving inhabitants, but the usual restriction of Hades to the punishment of the intermediate state . . . is against this."

In this connection note also Isa. 14:13-15; Ezek. 26:20. So, without denying the threatened punishment of any who rejects Jesus, it may be possible to interpret figuratively **heaven** and **hades** in this verse, since in Jesus' mind they represent proper antitheses. Thus, in the same way that the

exaltation of Capernaum's citizens probably did not mean that they would all go to live in heaven, so their humiliation in hades need refer to no more than the material ruin of the city. Capernaum would lose her glory and privileges, falling to a level as far below other cities as she had been honored above them. The Jewish wars with Rome so thoroughly destroyed the city, that one might almost believe that those who overthrew it were bent on proving Jesus right.

2. Hell. Foster (SLC-1957, 50 argues that

The reference as to what will happen to Sodom in the day of judgment makes it plain that Jesus was not threatening Capernaum with a mere return of its fine buildings to rubble and its people to the grave. As a matter of fact, this was the fate of these cities within the scope of about a generation, but the warning of Jesus carried a more solemn import.

What would be the point in saying that unrepentant men shall be brought down to the grave? Where else would dying men go? The fate of these cities is determined by no other factor in this context than the obdurate indifference to repentance and faith. Temporal oblivion is too good for anyone who turns thumbs down on God's Son!

Go down into Hades. Though there is reasonably good manuscript evidence for the reading: "You shall be brought down to Hades" (*katabibasthēsē*), a reading which suggests the active punitive justice of God, the reading chosen for the text is well supported. It raises the instructive problem in what sense unrepentant cities **go down into Hades**. God's judgment is often passive in its function. When men would have expected Him to rain fire from heaven upon the wicked, thus giving a world-shaking indication of His justice, sometimes He gives no sign at all, almost as if He were happily unconcerned. Why is He silent? Since He did not destroy Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida for their refusal to repent, as He did in the case of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, how could He be just? Often He simply withdraws His blessing after men prove themselves disinclined to appreciate them, thus leaving them to fend for themselves. When He thus abandons men to the logical consequences of their own choices, He is actually delivering them up to their own damnation. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-32, esp. 24, 26, 28) Further, it may well be that in the very hour, in which God's patient silence is interpreted by rebels as a motive for relaxing in their false security, God is

mixing for them a cup of wrath. Either way, the apparent silence of the Judge is fully as ominous as if He had taken immediate action. Men must not confuse God's long-suffering for weakness or forgetfulness.

To what city does Jesus compare His adopted hometown? **Sodom**, with the opportunities offered Capernaum, **would have remained until this day**. Out of this affirmation arise four truths:

1. A reminder of the appalling end of those wicked cities of the Plain. (Cf. Gen. 19:24ff.; Mt. 10:15; Lk. 10:12; 17:29) The historical ruin of these metropoli naturally lent itself to their proverbial use as symbols of divine punishment. (Cf. Isa. 1:9; Ro. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7; Rev. 11:8)
2. A solemn affirmation of the dreadful doom awaiting the Sodomites at Judgment. If they thought their earthly punishment had been terrible, they miscalculated God! This future justice is not, as some suppose, because the Sodomites rejected the angels sent to them, for God did not send them to save Sodom, but to retrieve Lot and his house. Sodom had already been condemned for sinning against the knowledge of God and righteousness it possessed.
3. A divine announcement that with the same challenge to know the truth given to Capernaum, Sodom would have repented and so never would have been cremated alive. This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, given the divine superhuman knowledge of the One who declares it. He who read the hearts of the Sodomites, now reads the consciences of these Galileans.
4. An encouraging hope: if Sodom would have been spared, despite the heinousness of her sin, **there remains a chance** for the vilest sinner who accepts the very Gospel that would have saved Sodom!

11:24 It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. (See on 10:15) This proposition contains several other presuppositions that deserve consideration:

1. Though Sodom had been extinct for almost two millenia before His coming, Jesus points out yet another day on which Sodom must stand with Capernaum to give account before God.

2. Death itself is not, therefore, all the punishment an individual can expect for his sins. After death there is also a judgment.
3. Though cremated alive for their sins, the Sodomites await yet future judgment. This means that punitive judgment on earth for one's sin is not the final satisfaction of absolute justice. That kind of summary vengeance may only mean that God speeded up the time left until death, immediately thereby eliminating the opportunities to continue sinning with apparent impunity.
4. Though horribly punished with death on earth, the Sodomites were not thereby annihilated. They are yet alive somewhere facing the final vindication of God's righteousness and their final sentence.

The fearful instruction of this section (11:20-24) is that while men still breathe, they are the absolute masters of the citadel of their hearts—their emotions, their intellect, their conscience and their will. God Himself in Jesus Christ chose to leave men absolutely free to throw open the gates of the fortress and surrender, or resist divine mercy clear to the bitter end. This means, of course, that in the present, Jesus is willing to let each unbeliever's private kingdom remain invincible. This also means that in the light of time, Jesus appears to be beaten, since He refuses to force man's surrender. But the Master knows that the few pages, necessary to tell anyone's entire life story, do not include the final denouement, for every man, rebel or friend, will one day bow the knee to Jesus and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Phil. 2:9-11) Then it will be decided who was really invincible. Jesus can wait.

II. UNCONQUERABLE SUBMISSION (11:25-30)

A. JOYOUS THANKSGIVING (11:25, 26)

A superficial reading of the previous section, as suggested above, might tempt us to shake our heads in discouragement, since even the Son of God is apparently failing even to hold His own with the most favorable opportunities among the best contacts as He ministers among His own people. And if He fail there. . . ? But the Master is anything but beaten. Matthew leads us to a closer examination of what he himself learned to appreciate, i.e. how the Christ reacted to frustrating heart-crushing disappointments. Instead of flailing out or becoming bitter or accusing others of blundering and failure to evangelize properly, Jesus turns to God. The paradox is especially true of the Son of God: though invincibility and submission usually

mutually contradict each other, in Jesus they are nicely matched. He absolutely refuses to permit anything to hinder Him (here is His unconquerable spirit), turning Him aside from His responsibility to do exactly what His Father sent Him to do even if that means personal disappointments to Him (here is His real meekness and submission). Jesus knows that the secret of ultimate invincibility lies in submission—immediate, unhesitating, willing and continuous submission to the Father's desires. Would that we could learn that self-rule and invincibility are the real opposites!

11:25 **At that season** (*en ekeinō tō kairō*) is a most remarkable wording if Matthew is adhering to a strict chronological presentation in this chapter, for *kairos* ("season") often refers to a longer period of time than just a moment on the day when this discourse would have been presented. Further, Luke (10:21), in an almost exact parallel passage has "in that same hour" (*in autē tē hōrā*), as it were, to express the precise moment when Jesus prayed the very prayer here reported by Matthew in a loose general connection. Matthew knows how to be precise when the occasion calls for precision. (Mt. 8:13; 10:19; 18:1; 26:55) And He can speak loosely as necessary. (Mt. 12:1; 14:1; 11:25?) Perhaps the publican-Apostle has taken Jesus' prayer and observations from the Mission of the Seventy, which he does not intend to include, and uses it here because of its suitability to close this section in which he has illustrated the varying effects of the Lord's ministry upon those who came into contact with it.

Jesus answered and said, To whom or what is He making "answer"?

1. Is He responding to His own reflections upon the ignorance, unbelief and rejection found in the most favored cities. Only if these two parts of this section (i.e. 11:20-24 and 11:25-30) are chronologically connected.
2. Or is His answer a grateful response to the deep confidence in Him manifested by many humble disciples who were willing to come to Him, confessing, "Lord, you know everything I need to know. Teach me"? In this case, chronological connection is not so important, since the Lord is viewed as responding to a general situation. Matthew, then, sees the Lord as expressing His own answer to the climate of unbelief all around Him, contrasted with some evidences of simple trust.
3. Or, is it merely an introductory formula "common in Hebrew

narrative as an enlarged equivalent for 'said'?" (Plummer, *Matthew*, 165; cf. 17:4; 28:5; Deut. 21:7; Job 3:2; Isa. 21:9 in ASV)

I thank thee (*exomologoûmai soi*). Since the verb *exomologoûmai* means primarily "to confess, admit; acknowledge" and, the connotative meaning, "to praise" (See Arndt-Gingrich, 276), one might wonder why many English translations have it: "I thank thee." But when it is remembered that, by nature, our thanks is an acknowledgement of some favor or kindness received, a confession of our gratitude, this connection becomes more natural. Further, *exomologoûmai* in the LXX period had already begun to include the more general sense of *praise*. (Compare the following especially in the LXX; Gen. 29:35; 2 Sam 22:50; 1 Chron. 29:13; Psa. 86:12 [85:12 LXX]; 118:28 [117:28 LXX]; 18:49 [17:50 LXX]; 35:18 [34:18 LXX]; Sirach 51:1) In all of these passages the idea of giving thanks is easily substituted with the idea of praise and vice versa. Vine (*EDNTW*, IV, 122) has it "I make thankful confession" or "I make acknowledgement with praise." In our dealings with God, the dual force of this word (*exomologoûmai*) is most appropriate, since the nature of His gifts and loving care is such that we feel that we may *confess* our dependence upon him, *praise* Him for His graciousness and *thank* Him for His gifts almost all in one breath! It should not be surprising that pious Greek-speaking Hebrews should have found the one word that beautifully expresses all these ideas!

In addition, if Jesus feels the exuberant joy here, that is described by Luke, then it is more than psychologically credible that all these ideas be united in His mind. He is in high spirits, rejoicing as completely as if a great victory had just been won, even though He is realistically and frankly facing failure. The Lord has failed to win over those cities wherein most of His labor had been expended, and yet He gives thanks? Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 91ff.) senses this:

Jesus is frankly facing relative failure in His preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven to the people. Not that we are to suppose He was surprised, and in that sense, disappointed. The actual fact and experience of failure is, however, upon Him; and there is no prescience or preparation that can take away the grief and sting of failure to do the good to people to which one had devoted all his energy . . . Yet few would have agreed with Him that He was failing—probably not one would have agreed. He had never been more popular

... multitudes seek Him out on every opportunity, . . . They are ready to risk all and follow Him in revolt against all authority, religious and political . . .

Therein appears His superior insight. Here was for Him the mark of His failure. The people were missing the point of His appeal. They wanted a bread king. They wanted His miracle personality to perform in miracles of provision and protection, deliverance and defense while, unchanged in heart and life, they would enjoy a physical, a material Messianic reign. How it all wrung His soul and drove Him to prayer. He was calling them to repentance, they wished to follow Him to power. He wanted to get God into them, they wanted to get Him and God into their service. His soul is wrung in deep anguish, because of their deep need of repentance and their persistent unrepentance. He has tried so hard, so faithfully, unselfishly, so perfectly tried to give them God, and they have not seen it.

And yet, Jesus refuses to be downed by the failure implicit in His judgment of those cities. Instead He has a high heart and nothing but words of praise for God! What an exquisite expression of the very meekness He will shortly claim! This is no mere acquiescence: "I accept your wisdom, since I have no other alternative." There is no sorrowful, but dutiful, submission that whines, "I conform, because I feel that I should." Rather there is joy and satisfaction with God's plans: "I thank you—I praise you!" The depth of His meekness becomes evident when we examine who it is that stands here rejoicing, despite the heartaches in being so limited: the only One who truly knows God and is perfectly understood by God, the One to whom the Father entrusted everything! (Mt. 11:27) Despite these divine prerogatives that might have seemed to guarantee Him the right to expect better treatment and greater success, He accepts being limited this way as part of His mission and the most excellent course.

The things which cause the Lord Jesus to rejoice and give thanks, should give us reason to reflect upon what pleases us. His strange thanksgiving challenges us to inquire into our easy satisfaction with those irrelevant, superficial symbols of success: our great crowds, our spacious cathedrals, our tight schedules, many programs and multitudes of meetings. What does He have to be so triumphantly glad about?

1. God is His Father and universal Sovereign. No matter what issues the intermediate conflicts may have, the ultimate victory

is safely in His hand. There is an unquestionable stabilizing effect in knowing that **the Lord of heaven and earth** is also our **Father**. Temporary setbacks, however heartbreaking they be, cannot upset the confidence that is founded on the invincible God! (Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4; Psa. 112:7)

2. Jesus can be grateful that elementary justice is already being done, since the intellectual aristocracy, so proud of its superiority, would for that very reason, be hindered from knowing the eternal truths, whereas the intellectually humble believers would actually recognize the divine wisdom.
3. Jesus can rejoice in the width of the abyss that separates the supreme majesty of God from the vaunted "greatness" of earth's "wise and understanding," who dare pit their limited understanding and unlimited pride against His wisdom and revelations. This contrast merely proves that God's efforts to save man do not rest in any way upon human intellect. Rather, intellectual talents, instead of being necessary, often get in the way. Jesus can praise God for working out a means of salvation that leaves God completely autonomous and that demands that man surrender his pride in order to understand.
4. He praises God that He, to whom all heaven and earth owe submission, mercifully stoops to bless the nobodies, the rankest beginner, the babes! For whom does Jesus give thanks? Often we are tempted to thank God for the rich, the powerful, the learned, the "beautiful people in our congregations, who are capable of giving an air of success and prosperity to our efforts, whereas He is grateful for those in whom FAITH dwells. He praises God for the marvellous vitality of those humble followers who are willing to brave the world's scorn in order to do things God's way.

Paradoxically, Jesus' cause for gratitude is the very limitation which had produced His greatest disappointment. God's plan for saving the teachable was working, even though this means the loss of those who were, by their own choice, unteachable.

Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes. These things involves all that Jesus had been trying to reach. This, in effect is the Gospel whereby men can be saved by trusting God, rather than by accumulating their own merits or depending upon the (presumed) merits of others. While its fundamental concepts are relatively

simple and within the grasp of all, this message is not designed to appeal only to the ignorant, but rather to the humble. (cf. 1 Co. 2:6-16)

Who are **the wise and understanding**? They are the aristocratic intellectuals, as well as the common man on the street, who believe they know too much to permit themselves to be duped into committing their lives into the hands of an itinerate, unauthorized rabbi like Jesus of Nazareth. (Study Jn. 7:48, 49; 9:40) The scribes and Pharisees, whose entire life was dedicated to the proposition that the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers, taken together, constituted the consummate wisdom of the ages, were not open to any new truth that did not sanction and revere the old as they understood it. And, because they refused to humble themselves before the truth preached by the Nazarene, they became the worst of idolaters, satisfying themselves with the half-god of their own imagination: the sum total of their theological deductions and speculations. (Compare the pagan's decline: Ro. 1:21, 22, 25, 28, 32)

This, of course, involves a preconditioning of pride and arrogance in order to be able to shut one's eyes to evidence. It also forces **the wise and understanding** to create another view of the universe that explains away the force of the facts and proof that contradict their pet theories and traditions. (Study 12:22-24; 9:32-34) But, in so doing, they move away from reality (as represented by Jesus), thus creating for themselves a world of unreality in which they choose to live. But to set one's mind against truth—whether physical, cosmic or ethical truth—causes a fearful hardening of the heart which blinds to those realities the individual who does it. It causes Him to manipulate the truth to suit himself. He will even rearrange God, His Word and His universe in his mind, molding them according to the dictates of the system he is substituting for God's. So many care not at all for truth: they neither long for it nor care about falsity (unless falsity brings them some immediate discomfort!) They are controlled principally by desires. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:3, 10-19; 3:3; Jas. 1:6-8, 13-15; 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:2, 3) They live by wishful thinking in this denial of unwelcome reality presented by the Lord. Despite the temporary and apparent relief from responsibility to recognize and live with reality; the tendency to ignore a reality hardens one to it. Airport noise, glue factories, alarm clocks, etc., are no longer noticed, if ignored long enough. There are none so blind as those who will not see, true enough, but it produces even deeper darkness to say "We see," while remaining indifferent or openly hostile to

God's truth revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. (Cf. Jn. 9:39-41; 2 Co. 3:12—4:6)

It is also quite natural for **the wise and understanding** to band together. Because they like to think this way, they encourage others to join them in an elite club of the worldly wise. Those who are reluctant to relax their grip on reality (i.e. the world as God reveals it through Jesus) are cajoled, embarrassed, black-mailed and otherwise threatened. (Cf. Jn. 9:22-34; 7:45-52; 12:9-11) The result is but a conspiracy against God and His people. (Cf. Jn. 16:1-4; Ac. 4:23-31, etc.) Substitute theories are popularized and termed "scientific explanations". Even though contrary evidence is presented, it is scorned, suppressed, and its apologists persecuted, harassed, demoted or simply ignored.

Further, **the wise and understanding** naively believe their lives to be very much under control. Paradoxically, a man will not stop sinning until he admits that he cannot stop. This is why **the wise and understanding** will remain what they are until they are willing to admit that they have been ignorant, deceived and conceited, until they confess that their human wisdom was leading them even further from God's truth, until they see that man is not the center of the universe nor the measure of all things. So it is that, when a man admits that he cannot stop trusting his own understanding and comes to Jesus, saying, "Lord teach me," only then does he really find the power to depend upon the Lord's wisdom.

Thou . . . didst reveal them unto babes. Who are the **babes**? They are not merely those unlearned, common men who made up the large percentage of Jesus' disciples (cf. Ac. 4:13; Jn. 7:45-49), but those who are willing to consider themselves as such. (Mt. 18:3, 4; Lk. 18:17) **Babes** are those who are intelligent enough not to be so presumingly certain of their own conclusions, who are honest enough to admit the fine possibility that they do not know everything, even about the most common matters, whose general attitude is one of openness and willingness to learn. **Babes** are those who can learn from any and every one regardless of their own personal educational achievement, but who are critical enough themselves to be able to distinguish truth from error, good from bad advice, the precious from the worthless. **Babes** are those who are willing to judge the case on the weight of the evidence, rather than distort the evidence to suit their own preconceptions. **Babes** can see that, as sinners, their lives are unmanageable, out of control, that they have made a mess of them. In short, they are men who can

say with clear minds, but in deep revulsion of themselves, "I am a sinner—I have sinned." **Babes** are men whose minds are not so thoroughly jammed with false notions that have to be unlearned before divine truth can enter. The Lord can do a great deal with man whose thinking is relatively unencumbered with the educated nonsense expounded by the arrogant pseudo-intellectuals. But since most of us are troubled with the incompleteness and relative accuracy of much of our best information, Jesus is not so much concerned with the amount of true knowledge we have, but He is very much concerned with our attitude toward the truth that we think we possess.

How is it that God hides truth from **the wise and understanding**? Can He be just if He does this? How can He be justified in condemning those who do not see the truth which might have saved them? There are two sides to the answer:

1. Suppose we never arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question. It may well be difficult, by pondering and logic, to fathom how God is said to hide the truth from some men. We may never find out just how God could harden Pharaoh's heart (cf. Ex. 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:20; Ro. 9:14-18) or open Lydia's (Ac. 16:14). But even if so, until we do understand, we find ourselves before an excellent case of the necessity to trust God where our limited understanding fails to comprehend all parts of His plans or falls short of grasping the wisdom behind His choices. Were we to go no further, we could still answer the above questions by saying, "In terms of human understanding of justice, it may not seem right that God should hide the truth from some men and reveal it to others, but because I have learned to trust God on the basis of the evidence Jesus gives, I will also trust Him to be just and know what He is doing in this matter too."
2. But is the problem clearly stated? In the same way that particular predestination wrongly states its case elsewhere, so also here. Jesus is not referring to particular individuals who merely happen to be **wise and understanding**, but to classes of conceited people who, because of their vaunted culture and enlightenment, reject God's revelation. Any individual who overestimates the importance of his learning and experience and counts himself to be erudite and worldly wise in the sense rejected by Jesus, and puts himself into this class, will find himself strangely blinded and quite unable

to see any lasting significance in God's message. So, it is not true that God hides His life-giving truth from certain unfortunate individuals, thus predestining them to eternal damnation, while, at the same time, revealing His wisdom to other individuals, so saving them. Were "particular election" true, this entire passage could have no sense, since Jesus is lamenting the fate of people who could have chosen to repent. But if they could not have changed their personal, eternal destiny by repentance, according to the theory, God's Son had been wasting His efforts on them without knowing it!

Or, on the other hand, to state the problem differently, so as to get closer to its solution, has God set in motion certain natural, psychological laws, programmed into the human mind, whereby His truth can be assessed by EVERY mind? If all human brains operate in more or less the same way, then, seeing or failing to see God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ is not a question of the superior performance or functioning of the receiving equipment (the human intellect), nor the range of the transmitter (God), but of the willingness of the receiver's operator to turn on and tune his set. If all the radios operate more or less the same way and are so constructed as to pick up the frequency on which God is transmitting is it God's fault if some men turn Him off by dialing another frequency? The responsibility lies, then, with the hand that changes the dial.

But if this be the case, then how is it true that **"Thou didst hide these things?"** That is, if man himself hides the truth from his own eyes, how can it be said that God did this? As suggested above, because God created the human mind with its particular characteristics, He is responsible for knowing its limitations. Further it was He that chose to reveal truth that can only be received by humble, honest minds. He resolved that the Word of life shall not be broadcast so as to be intercepted on the channels of human wisdom, prudence or understanding. In a word, by limiting His broadcasting to this one frequency, God **hid these things from the wise and understanding**, because they are far too sure that all significant truth must come through human thought and discovery. Men were convinced that divine wisdom had to be announced by philosophers, sage rabbis, priests or kings, but when God sent a simple Galilean carpenter, this they could not accept. So, Jesus is discussing the inclination (or disinclination) to open one's mind to accept revelation, not the strength of that mind or one's intellectual gifts.

How does God **reveal** truth to babes? The word **reveal** is