

discipleship He lays down next, by their very nature, are absolutely indispensable, not only to a right understanding of salvation, but to our participation in it. We cannot be disciples of Jesus on any other terms!

Let him deny himself. (See Special Study: "The Cost of Our Salvation" after 16:28.) Here all that is Satanic in each disciple meets its Waterloo. Self-interest, self-promotion, self-preservation and self-complacency must forever die. (See notes on 5:5, Vol. I, p. 213.) This death to self is only possible where men have a clear understanding of absolute righteousness and recognize their failure to meet that exacting standard. (See notes on 5:48.) How can anyone seriously present himself before a gloriously holy and righteous God, garbed in filthy rags, all the while pretending that such "finery" could satisfy the most scrupulous examination? (Cf. Isa. 64:6; Rō. 3:9-20; 6:4-11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:22-24; Phil. 1:21; 2:1-8; 3:7-12; Col. 3:5-17; 2 Co. 5:14-19)

Take up his cross. Jesus' Galilean listeners well know what cross-bearing meant. In fact, Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, 10, 10; *Wars*, II, 5, 2) reports the crucifixion of 2000 insurgents by Varus shortly after the birth of Christ. They knew that His words could only mean the voluntary bearing up under any avoidable suffering, even martyrdom, that would come in the line of duty for anyone committed to Jesus. As he signs his own recruiting papers, each disciple must recognize that he is, at the same time, subscribing to his own death warrant. It is *his cross* he must bear for sake of Jesus. There is no merit or meaning in suffering for any other cause, nor for one's own wrong-doing. Rather, the fiery ordeal that tries each disciple's mettle must come only because he is a Christian and for doing right, conscious of God's will. (1 Pt. 2:19-25; 3:13-18; 4:12-19)

Even though each man must *take up his cross*, such a cross only has meaning as it admits the rightness of Jesus' having borne His. Why bear ours, if His were not part of God's plan? Therefore, the demand that we bear our cross is an implicit demand that we accept His. To the modern Christian, fully accustomed to glorying in the cross of Christ, this sounds backwards. But to those Hebrew disciples, unconvinced that Jesus' cross was an inevitable and integral element in God's planning, this demand is far from superfluous.

Conversely, however, to claim to follow Jesus without admitting His sacrificial death and proclaiming it as God's only plan to save humanity, is tantamount to refusal to bear one's own cross, the instrument by which we identify ourself with Him and His. But who

would dare minimize His cross? ANYONE is certainly trying it who supposes that social revolution or social service without proclamation of the bloody sacrifice at the cross can still communicate the total message of Jesus or the love of God. No one who understands the social expression of a relevant Christianity could ever deny that the building of hospitals or the feeding of the world's starving populations is a natural fruit of Christ's spirit. But to substitute these for the demand that men not only acknowledge the cross of Christ as the only means of their salvation, but that they also immediately and willingly shoulder their own cross, is to deny the Lord who expects us to do both.

Bearing our cross identifies us with Jesus' understanding of God's program and plan. In effect, this means that, in our own personal experience, we identify with Him by generously giving ourselves in sacrificial service to others, however humiliating or painful this turns out to be for us. (Ro. 8:36; 12:1, 2; 1 Co. 15:31; Heb. 13:13-16; 1 Jn. 3:14-18) Even as He lived out the implications of the cross every day of His life, even before the actual, historical crucifixion, so we too must bear our cross DAILY (Lk. 9:23). What is this challenge but His invitation to every disciple to share in His mission, His method, His experience? Jesus not only assumes upon Himself the responsibility to be the suffering Savior of men, but He also calls into existence a group of self-sacrificing disciples willing to share His work, extending it throughout the world. In this sense, this body of followers will be but the extension of His thoughts, the continuance of His own mission—in short, His body. (Eph. 1:22; 4:12ff) The real test of our belonging to the Church, then, is not merely intellectual orthodoxy, or the ability to give the correct answers, but readiness to serve and follow Jesus whatever it costs. Bales (*Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 54, italics his) describes the psychological soundness of this challenge:

It will cost to be a Christian. And yet, there is *the heroic in man* which responds to such a challenge. For a cause which he considers worthy, man is willing to sacrifice. . . . To some the Christian life has been presented as a sissified type of thing that demands nothing and brings little. Such is a perversion of Christ's teaching. Men need to understand that although the blessings of the Christian life far outweigh its costs, yet one is called to a life of service. The real tough guy is the guy who has the moral fiber to stand up and do right regardless of what others may think. Such conduct really takes strength of character, but any weakling can drift with the tide and do what the crowd does.

In this sense, then, what seems too rigorous and extreme a requirement, is real wisdom, for Jesus knows that it is the only way to produce His own character in us and actually equip us for the mission on which He sends us.

And follow me. (1 Pt. 2:21ff) Psychologically, this death to self is possible only if men make an intensely personal commitment to Jesus. People are far less ready to give themselves to an impersonal cause. Jesus knows that the psychological power to rise to the high sacrifice of self can come only as each person feels the compelling warmth of His own personal challenge. Notice His emphatically personal invitation to "come after ME . . . follow ME . . . lose life for MY sake . . . ashamed of ME (Mk. 8:38), the Son of man (= "I") shall be ashamed of him also . . . for the Son of man ("I") is to come . . . HE will repay everyone for what he has done." (Study the implications of Jn. 12:26. Beyond the servant's sharing in Jesus' glory after the judgment, how does the servant share with his Lord now? Where is Jesus at work on this earth in our time? This is where we at His side must busy ourselves in thoughtful, useful service among those in our ken who have any need of our [His] service.) This challenge is but the working out of His own principle: "A servant is not above his Master." (Mt. 10:24f) We must understand that Phil. 2:5-10 was not written to inform theologians about the incarnation and atonement, but to teach all of us that we too must die to self and not have our own way! (Phil. 2:1-4)

This extraordinary invitation must not be misunderstood as a doctrine applicable only to a certain, critical era fortunately different from our own, or applicable only to those willing to live dangerously in prominent roles as unwelcome prophetic leaders who publicly denounce the world's sins, or, simply, as a doctrine too demanding for ordinary people. No, the cutting edge of Jesus' requirements must not be dulled, since their imperative character reflects the will of God for each of us. We must identify ourselves with them by obeying, because these very demands identify us with, and justify, His determination to cooperate with the purpose of God: "The Son of man must . . ." (16:21) Thus, our identification with His cross must identify us with God's purpose for our lives, and, as Morgan (*Matthew*, 219) expresses it: "whether it be laughter or crying, sorrowing or sighing, the secret of life is to follow Him on the pathway of loyalty to the Divine Will."

16:25 For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. Because the terms of service

in Jesus' discipleship are so exacting, Jesus mercifully submits three persuasive reasons to make acceptance easier, each of which argues that the disciple who obeys is actually acting in his own best interest.

1. Because only the loss of self in Christ's service leads to true life. (16:25)
2. Because he who loses himself in self-interested choices, loses everything. (16:26)
3. Because Jesus will reward everyone on the basis of his own free choices. (16:27)

The hub around which Jesus' paradoxical declarations turn is every man's decision about what constitutes *his life* (*tèn psuchèn autoû*). Implicit in His words is an understanding of life that includes both earthly, temporal life and eternal life hereafter. But, for those whose view of reality includes only the here and now, Jesus is talking absolute nonsense. This statement immediately tests everyone's view of reality: whose world is real, Jesus' or his own? The critical importance of this pronouncement lies in its ability to test our own view even of our own life: what is our *life* (*psuché*)? Luke (9:25) furnishes a precious key to understand to what Jesus refers. Instead of Matthew's "gain the whole world but forfeits his life" (16:26a), Luke says: "gain the whole world and lose HIMSELF." Thus, Jesus is talking about man's own being, his soul, his ego, his person, which he possesses in this life and could lose or keep for eternity. (Cf. Jn. 12:25, not parallel) Paraphrased, this becomes: "Whoever decides to protect all that contributes to and constitutes his personal happiness, shall lose everything. Whoever surrenders all this for my sake, shall find that he has really preserved it best!" In context, Jesus will clearly illustrate this attempt to save oneself: "For whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed when he comes . . . then he will repay every man for what he has done." (Mk. 8:38; Mt. 16:27b) Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 656ff) is right to teach that the great contrast in life choices here is between love and selfishness. In fact, the person *who would save his life* seeks to promote his own predominantly selfish interests. He relies upon what he has made himself. He must subordinate every choice, every relationship to the preservation of whatever good he sees in himself, because this latter is of absolute value and importance to him. His first concern is for his own well-being, popularity, position and possessions. Accordingly, the person who is anxious to save his own skin, will abandon truth and righteousness

and Jesus. Cowardly withdrawing from the pressure and avoiding the hatred inevitably directed toward true disciples of the Lord, he retreats to a temporarily safe position. This instinctive selfishness, however, is self-defeating and will be inevitably frustrated. Despite his gaining a few years of ease and tranquility in this way, such a person will die after all, only to face the Christ he had so miserably denied in the name of prudence. All that he had hoped to save by his caution, prudence and evasions, is forever lost. So, "the prudent" are damned!

Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. This is the man who loves, whose whole existence is bound up in out-going sharing with others for Christ's sake. He understands how Christ loved him and, because of that love, he responds by loving Him and anyone Jesus wants him to love, whatever that costs. Love is what makes *life* all that it is meant to be, because self-giving love brings real usefulness to the world and personal satisfaction in successful help rendered others. (Cf. 1 Co. 13; 2 Co. 8:1-7; 9:6-15; Gal. 2:20) Real *life* is "to know that one is loved, and then to love in return, and in showing this love to recognize no boundaries among men beyond which love cannot go, that is life." (Hendriksen, *ibid.*) Ironically, the man who risks everything involved in Jesus' discipleship, and spurns the unreal "safe houses," those pseudo-refuges in this life, will actually protect his own best interests best. He places everything into the hands of a trustworthy guarantor, God. And even if he should temporarily lose family, possessions, economic security or even his own physical life, he joyfully suffers the sacking of his goods, because he sees Him who is the invisible Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. (Cf. Heb. 10:32-39; 11:6, 25-27, 35f)

Note the striking parallel: "If any man would . . ." and "*Who-soever* would . . ." (vv. 25, 26) Our discipleship and how we spend it, is left a matter of free choice. No man can shake his angry fist at God, blaming Him for his personal failure to find life. Further, the freedom to spend our life precisely as we wish (*thélei*), is unhampered by God. The crucial difference does not consist in whether anyone can really save his life or not, because the winners and the losers, after all, spend their whole lives, sacrificing all their powers and possibilities to arrive at what they consider their goals and for whatever they consider to be the right reasons. The crucial difference, rather, lies in the reason for which the life is spent. Only those who spend (*lose*) their life *for Jesus' sake* succeed in discovering life in all its fullest, best senses. (Cf. Mt. 19:29) To have sacrificed

everything—talents, power, opportunities, influence—all for the wrong reason, self, is really to lose everything that was real life. So, the conscious quest of happiness by taking the route of self-interest is the surest way of missing the happy life.

If there must be any concern for self, it must be our concern to be useful means to accomplish His purposes for us. Beyond this, however, the disciple, now absolutely unconcerned about personal glory or comfort; and practically careless about personal consequences, sees himself as having only relative value and only comparative importance, i.e. relative to the greater perspective from which he now views everything in which God and His will are biggest values in his whole scale and control everything else. This is why only an adequate concept of grace can prevent people from demanding their rights, even to life itself, if they need to surrender them for Jesus' sake. Here is where the settled conviction of one's own real damnation actually helps him. It saves him from defending the indefensible. Why would anyone attempt to *save his life*? Because he supposes himself to be worthy and justifiable **JUST AS HE IS**. But grace teaches that he cannot be justified **AS HE IS**, and must be forgiven **FOR WHAT HE IS**. (Romans 1:8; Tit. 2:11-14)

· **Lose his life for my sake** "and the sake of the gospel" (Mk. 8:35) means to give up self for all that Jesus is and stands for and is trying to get done through His body, the Church. The Gospel is but the good news about Jesus, and the implications of this message, hence the entire program of Christ, the success of the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Lk. 18:29f) So, for the worldlings, unconvinced or unsure of Jesus' credentials and true identity, Jesus' promise of life to those who bet everything on Him sound like a risky long shot in a game where the stakes are astronomical. So, the whole question boils down to the decision whether we really think He knows what He's talking about, or not. If He does, there is absolutely no risk! If He does not, we are wasting time with Him anyway. How can we be sure? Because God raised Him from the dead and named Him Judge of all and set the date for our trial. (Acts 17:30f)

16:26 For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? Consider Lk. 12:15-21 as commentary on this unanswered and unanswerable question. **Gain the whole world**, taken in the absolute sense, is the goal sought by only a few unrealistic dreamers. If they happen to be idealistic disciples of Jesus, then they probably see the Messianic Kingdom as the triumphal crushing the free choice of all

those who do not willingly submit to the Messiah. But this kind of world conquest leads only to the destruction of all the moral values Jesus came to establish. On the other hand, more modest goals constitute *the whole world* for the more realistic. The only distinction, however, lies in one's own definition of what, for him, constitutes *the world* to be conquered. But these are only relative differences without a real distinction, relative differences which make no real difference to Jesus. In fact, *forfeiture of one's life* is a price too high for the value received. The conquest of all that anyone wishes to consider his personal world to conquer, at the expense of the forfeiture of his own life, is worthless in the final balance. *Gaining the whole world*, therefore, is not merely a commercial transaction bargained for by a wealthy industrialist, or the battlefield conclusion of a victorious potentate. It is the arriving at one's goals by being "ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation"! (Mk. 8:38 = Lk. 9:26) This also expresses itself in being unconcerned about Jesus' words which would bless men by making them righteous, noble-spirited, holy people, giving them peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Spirit. Too often the highest practical goal of millions is to be "happy animals" oblivious to spiritual considerations. So, the proper investment of one's life is of absolute importance.

This rule applies as much to Jesus Himself as to the humblest disciple in His Kingdom. In fact, had Jesus acceded to Satan's offer to concede Him all the kingdoms of the world, in exchange for His homage, what could Jesus Himself yet offer to repurchase His own freedom from Satan's bondage? No, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Savor the whole context of Jn. 12:23-33!)

The cowardly disciple, the purpose of whose existence is to save his own neck at any price, will be bullied into denial of his discipleship by the powerful insistence of his own degenerate contemporaries. But because of this betrayal of all that is holy and precious to God, consistent with truth and justice, Jesus will be ashamed of him. (Mt. 10:32f; 2 Ti. 2:12)

Or, if the expression *forfeit his life* is synonymous with death, then, Jesus says: "What profit is there, if a man should arrive at his life's highest goals and gain all the greatest of earthly possessions, and then dies? His life has been spent. What could he possibly have of value to give in order to have his life back again?"

What shall a man give in exchange for his life? Does Jesus mean

this verse to contain two questions somewhat parallel, hence, synonymous, or, rather, two consecutive questions expressing a development in thought? If the latter, then in whose hands does Jesus see the man as having forfeited his life and to whom he must now give something in exchange for it to have it again?

1. To Satan? Having pawned his life to Satan for whatever Satan had offered to provide, in order to repurchase his own soul, what could impoverished man give in exchange for something so precious? From this standpoint, the doctrine of grace receives extra support, because the answer to this rhetorical question ("What shall a man give . . .?") must be that, without help from God who mercifully interposes the sacrifice of Christ as redemption of the pawned soul, man is absolutely penniless, hence unable to give anything of his own to buy back his forfeited soul.
2. To God? Having spent God's gift of life for himself, when man is called to face his Maker to commit his soul to God, what, of all the baubles collected and for which that life was misspent, what could he substitute for *his life*? What could have the same value as what God gave him, that he might return *in exchange for his life*?

This must have been an incredible concept, unimaginable by contemporary standards in Jesus' day, since it implies that all the materialistic goals and worldly gains, as these were envisioned for the Messianic Kingdom in standard Jewish thought, are grossly unsatisfactory and inadequate. Is it credible that the triumphalistic, materialistic golden age as they fancied it, should finally be so self-seeking in its aims as to cause everyone who had banked everything on its realization, *to forfeit his life?!*

Bruce (*Training*, 180), on the other hand, sees Jesus' meaning differently:

The two questions set forth the incomparable value of the soul on both sides of a commercial transaction. The soul, or life, in the true sense of the word, is too dear a price to pay even for the whole world, not to say for that small portion of it which falls to the lot of any one individual . . . The whole world is too small, yea, an utterly inadequate price, to pay for the ransom of the soul once lost . . . Mic. 6:6f.

The whole point is that, apart from God's grace, the lost soul has no market price, although the damned would wish it so.

How poignantly was this very reality played out in Peter's later denial of his Master in order to save his own skin! What if Peter had truly escaped conviction for being a disciple of the Nazarene, only to live on for 50-60 more years, relatively undisturbed under the leaky umbrella of the powers that be on earth? What would he have gained? What would he have lost! And Peter had just now been ashamed of Jesus' revelation of His approaching suffering!

16:27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. See the discussion of this coming of Jesus in the Special Study; "The Coming of the Son of Man," (Vol. II, pp. 430ff) That this coming of the Son of man is His personal second coming, is proven by the following factors:

1. His coming would be surrounded *with the glory of the Father*. Whether He means that His appearance would be enwrapped in that glory that is usually associated with the Father, or accompanied by a glorious manifestation of the Father Himself in person with Jesus, there is no denying the public character and magnitude of such an appearance. But for Him to be in a position to share *in the glory of His Father* must mean that He will have been fully vindicated and glorified, His death notwithstanding. Although He affirms His deity by speaking to "His Father" in the unshared sense of unique Son of God, He too would be punished for such presumption, unless this claim be vindicated too.
2. His appearance will be attended by his *holy angels*. (Cf. 2 Th. 1:7; Mt. 25:31)
3. His stated purpose is *to render unto every man according to his deeds*. He affirms His right to judge all nations. (Cf. Jn. 5:29; 2 Cor. 11:15; Rev. 2:23; 1 Cor. 3:13f; Psalms 62:12; Proverbs 24:12)

These considerations may not be weakened by appeal to the Greek original, as if Jesus mistakenly believed that the date of His return were soon. While it is true that *méllei gàr ho huiòs toû anthrópou érchesthai* can be rendered: "The Son of man is about to come," nevertheless, the verb *méllei* may also be rendered in the following manners: a. "to be about to, to have in mind to, to plan to, to want to." b. "to be established that, to be in the circumstance to," thus, ordinarily: "I may or I must," as by the force of the will of others or by the events. This is even weakened sometimes to a mere possibility: "I can perhaps, I must perhaps." c. "To hesitate, to put off, to delay,

to defer to." 4. Sometimes *méllei* serves as a simple paraphrase for the future tense, substituting for future tense forms that were disappearing from common use. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, § 338, 3; 350; 356; Arndt-Gingrich, 502; Rocci, 1203) This latter usage is the more likely and preferable, especially in light of the definiteness and certainty with which Jesus' second coming is taught elsewhere.

The reasons for His mentioning His coming in judgment upon the world are multiple:

1. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4, etc.) When men tremble in terror of men's threats, they must be shaken by the realization that they do not stand before human tribunals, but before the Judge of all the earth! (Mt. 10:28, 33) Only a proper fear of displeasing our Lord will be sufficient to hold us faithful against the provocations to protect ourselves at all costs. G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 220) said it well:

The Judge will be the Lord whose cross you will not share today. To whom will you appeal from His verdict? The last throne is His throne, and at the final assize He presides. If you save your life today, how will you buy it back, for the Man for Whom you will not suffer is the Man coming to reign in His glory.

In effect, Jesus warns: "You will see my glory and face my judgment. I will judge you on the basis of your loyalty to me!" Unless He can cause His disciples to be sensitive to His displeasure more than to their own self-protective instincts, He will have failed to convert them at their most fundamental psychological level.

2. Beyond fear to displease the Lord Jesus, Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 658) notes another excellent connection: "Do not seek to possess the whole world. That will mean loss. Leave the matter of receiving a reward to the Son of man. He at his coming will reward every man according to his deeds." (See Special Study "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewards for Righteousness," Vol. I, 198ff) Jesus' words here are two-edged: they promise and threaten at the same time, the difference in application being merely what each person intends to do about his own discipleship. Does our discipleship become less ethical, merely because we desire the crown of righteousness and fear eternal contempt? Some would

grade Jesus down for establishing such categorical alternatives that influence our present choices on the basis of the prospects of future destiny, as well as for encouraging right choices by hope of reward, rather than teaching virtue for its own sake. Bruce (*Training*, 181) answers such cavils correctly:

. . . an alternative is involved in any earnest doctrine of moral distinctions or of human freedom and responsibility. . . . Christians need not be afraid of degenerating into moral vulgarity in Christ's company. There is no vulgarity or impurity in the virtue that is sustained by the hope of eternal life.

Those who would object to Jesus' offering repayment or reward to His disciples make just one more example of people who enjoy informing God about His privileges and duty!

3. The fitting climax to Jesus' discourse on the necessity of entering into the glorious Messianic life through suffering and death to self, is the truth implied in Jesus' promise: "Although I must suffer, I will arrive at the glory that is rightly mine, because I will return in my Father's splendor, with His obvious approval and exalted glory." The confused disciples had seen nothing until now, but humiliation, affliction and execution. Now they must admit the truth of His promise of victory ("and rise again the third day" 16:21). He forces them to face the heavenly glory. Luke expresses this threefold glory far more emphatically: "he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and (the glory) of the holy angels" (Lk. 9:26). To disciples, heart-broken at the news of His humiliation, He says that the same *Son of man* who must suffer soon and who now calls men to shoulder their crosses, *shall come in glory!* It is only through the cross that men arrive at the crown, through the grave they arrive in glory, through death they arrive at dominion. (Cf. 2 Ti. 4:8; 1 Co. 15:42f; Rev. 2:10, 26f; 3:21; consider Mt. 16:27 as the affirmation of Daniel 7:9-18, 22, 27) Jesus, too, will be rewarded only after enduring the cross and despising the shame. (Heb. 12:2f) The disciple is not above the Master. Must the servant have his reward before, or even without, the shame and contempt?

What is the resplendent *glory* with which Jesus will be surrounded? Is it only the blazing brilliance of light? Yes, at least this, but such visible splendor is but one aspect of a spiritual God. The glory of Jesus is also His praiseworthiness for what He will then have accomplished on the spiritual plane too:

1. He will have brilliantly succeeded in removing the final scaffolding from a glorious Church, having fitted into place the final stone. Now He can reveal her in all her corporate beauty, notwithstanding the wide diversity of individual lives, gifts, personalities and ministries, He will have then succeeded in gathering into one glorious harmony all these varied personalities submitted to His direction. (Cf. Eph. 3:10, 21)
2. He will have accomplished to the full all the things of God upon which He had fixed His heart and mind all the time He was a Man! This is implicit in His encouragement aimed to bolster the sagging faith of disciples whose confidence in His ability to succeed has been shaken.

Only a cosmic, long-range view of His total mission and victory would suffice to provide the motivation for our willingness to bear reproach for Him. But because of His resurrection, we can be certain that He is able to carry out the remainder of His promises. The only question is whether we believe it or not.

16:28 Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. (Cf. the Spécial Study "The Coming of the Son of Man," Vol. II, pp. 430ff, esp. 437ff.) The coming of the Son of man, intended in this verse, is clearly distinct from that intended in the preceding verse, unless, with some modern scholars, we are ready to attribute a gross error to Jesus. They would hold that He Himself expected to return during the lifetime of His Twelve. While He confessed not to know the time of "that day and that hour" (Mt. 24:36), He affirmed nothing about not knowing perfectly every other detail thereabout. In 16:27, rather, He shows that He does know these details. As with other prophecies, so also this one must be interpreted in the light of its undoubted fulfilment. Jesus did not return personally in the lifetime of His Apostles. Therefore, He did not intend to promise that here. Rather, Jesus did establish His Kingdom during the lifetime of these disciples, therefore that is the coming He had in mind. (Study Acts 1 and 2 as the beginning of the fulfilment of this prophecy.)

Had Jesus meant to refer to His own second coming in this verse, then it would be assumed by the reader that, after some would have seen the coming of the Son of man in His kingdom, then they would experience death. But the very final defeat of death at the final judgment precludes this possibility. (Cf. 1 Co. 15:25, 26) Therefore,

when the Lord affirmed that **some would not die until** they should **see Him coming in His Kingdom**, He really leaves open the possibility that, after that event, they could really die. In light of the Church's beginning on Pentecost, an event witnessed by every Apostle (except the suicide, Judas, Mt. 27:3-5), we must affirm that this verse refers at least to that event, and maybe to much more in the life of the early Church. Today, however, the Apostles are all dead, and Jesus has not yet personally returned in His glory and royal dignity. What has occurred in verses 27, 28 has been correctly analyzed by Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 659). Jesus shows the Apostles His entire glorification as one unitary concept embracing all the events from His exaltation and vindication at Pentecost and the period following clear up to His second coming. Verse 27 outlines His final victory; verse 28 describes its beginning.

A careful harmonization of all that Jesus said reveals His full intention:

MATTHEW:

There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

MARK:

There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

LUKE:

There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

The differences in reporting Jesus' words may be resolved in the following manner: "You will live to see the beginning of my Kingdom surrounded with power. The arrival of the Kingdom of God is equal to and contemporaneous with the beginning of my reign as King." The fulfilment of this promise was only understood by faith, since Jesus did not personally appear in Jerusalem at Pentecost, nor even visibly above Jerusalem, exalted at the right hand of God. Not even then did Jesus perform stupendous personal signs, other than those actually recorded as performed by the Holy Spirit, to convince men of His reign. But what was done was evidence enough that He had indeed begun to rule the Kingdom of God with power. (Cf. Ac. 2:32, 33, 36) That the post-crucifixion, post-Pentecost events are evidence of Jesus' coming in His Kingdom is clear from the following observations:

1. The disciples saw Jesus ascend to the Father's right hand. (Ac. 1:6-11; Lk. 24:50-52)

2. They beheld the Spirit's coming to bring charismatic power, help and illumination. (Ac. 2:1ff)
3. They witnessed the birth of the Church among the Hebrew people despite the helpless rage of His enemies. (Ac. 4:24-33; 8:4; 21:20!) They thought of this as "the Kingdom." (Ac. 1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Ro. 14:17; 1 Co. 4:20; Col. 1:13; 1 Th. 2:12; Heb. 1:8; 12:28; Rev. 1:9)
4. They participated personally in the vigorous, rapid, world-wide expansion of the Church among the Gentiles. Ac. 10; 11:19-26; 13-28
5. They labored for and witnessed the maturing of the Church's love, boldness and oneness.
6. Some of the Apostles, notably John, witnessed the fall of national Judaism with its temple, priesthood and sacrifices, and the triumph of the Gospel proclaimed in every part of the Roman empire.

These all provide evidence of Christ's royal reign in and through the ministry of His people, the Christians. These momentous events, from the world's point of view, could be described as "filling all Jerusalem with your teaching" (Ac. 5:28) and as "turning the world upside down" (Ac. 17:6) But from the Christian point of view, however, it was evidence of Christ's glory and reign. (Col. 1:13)

And so ends Matthew's chapter 16, as orderly as a tax-collector's record, but as incisive as an Apostle's sermon. In effect, Matthew says to his reader: "The signs are conclusive that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son. Although many did not acknowledge Him, many did, and became part of His new, invincible, immortal assembly. Death would not stop Him, nor any who follow Him. However, He demands total loyalty and complete self-submission of His servants. A high price, but the world's best bargain, since everything else is even more expensive and not worth the price paid for it. Jesus will return to judge everyone on the basis of what they will have decided and done? Dear reader, what is your choice?"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What incidents took place immediately preceding this journey Jesus took to Caesarea Philippi, and where did they occur?
2. Locate Caesarea Philippi on the map, describing its location in relation to Capernaum. Tell something of its history and importance.

3. Since the King James Version speaks of "the coasts of Caesarea," explain what is meant by "coasts." Where exactly were Jesus and the Twelve during the conversation recorded in this section?
4. Which Gospel writer notices that Jesus was praying at this time? What relation would there be between this prayer and what follows?
5. Why did Jesus ask two questions of His disciples, when possibly only the second one was what He really wanted to know?
6. At what stage in His ministry was Jesus when He quizzed His followers in this way?
7. How many times and on what occasions had the Apostles made similar confessions of the unique identity of Jesus? What is the specific importance, then, of this particular confession in the growth of faith and understanding of the Twelve? How does it differ from those other, however similar, confessions?
8. In what way is Jesus' question as to His identity important (a) to the disciples; (b) to the multitudes; (c) to us?
9. Cite all the passages in Matthew, Mark and Luke which, up to this point, show the deity of Jesus or indicate His unique relationship to the Father, and which, because of this, become reasons Peter and others could confess Jesus as Christ and Son of God.
10. Where did the multitudes get such misconceptions about Jesus as to think of Him as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the ancient prophets?
11. What is the full significance of Peter's answer? What meaning would his words have to these Apostles conversant with the Old Testament? What is meant by "the Christ"? What is it to confess Him as "Son of God"?
12. What literal truth is meant by each of the following figures of speech?
 - a. "flesh and blood"
 - b. "gates of Hades"
 - c. "keys of the kingdom of heaven"
 - d. "binding" and "loosing"
 - e. "take up one's cross"
 - f. "upon this rock"
 - g. "taste of death"
13. What does "Bar-Jonah" mean? Does this prove that Jesus was speaking Aramaic in this incident? If so, what would this prove about the contention of some that in Aramaic He would have said, "You are *Cephas* and upon this *cepha* I will build my church?" If not, what is this Aramaic expression doing in the middle of a Greek sentence?
14. Explain how God revealed to Peter the truth he had confessed.

Did Peter know this truth before he spoke, or did he speak by immediate inspiration? Is Jesus' own ministry the thing referred to by the expression, "flesh and blood"? Did not Jesus have a flesh-and-blood body in which He lived and worked? Did Jesus have anything to do with revealing His real identity to Peter? But, if so, how can He say that "my Father who is in heaven (has revealed this to you)"?

15. Explain Jesus' remark about building His Church. What is an *ekklesia*, and what is its significance in helping us to understand what a "church" is? In what sense, then, is it to be His Church?
16. Identify the "rock" on which Jesus built His Church and prove that your identification is the only one correct, showing the weaknesses of the other explanations offered for "this rock."
17. In what sense(s) is it true that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"? What is it that they shall not prevail against? Why does the King James Version say "gates of Hell"?
18. When Jesus gave the Apostles and Peter (Mt. 16:19; 18:18) the power of binding and loosing, He said, "Whatever you bind (or loose) on earth, shall be bound (or loosed) in heaven." Now, did He mean that anything that the Apostles required or permitted during their earthly ministry would later be supported, or ratified, by God? If so, in what sense? Or did He intend to say that in the future they would require or permit nothing that God had not already required or permitted from eternity? How could you know this? In other words, which comes first in the historical sequence: (a) what the Apostles require or permit? or (b) what God requires or permits? What historical facts help us to answer this question?
19. Why did Peter begin to rebuke Jesus? Why did Jesus rebuke Peter? How was Peter a "Satan" and a "stumbling block" to Jesus?
20. Quote and explain what Jesus said and meant about the high cost of discipleship, i.e. the exacting requirements for following Him.
21. What effective threat did Jesus place before those who would be tempted to be cowards in the face of grave difficulties so frightening as to be ashamed of Him?
22. Affirm or deny: according to our text Jesus taught and sincerely believed that His second coming should have taken place during the lifetime of some of His disciples present on the day that this discussion took place. Explain your reasons for the position you take.

APPLICATIONS

"DAMNING CHRIST WITH FAINT PRAISE"

16:14-16

Today, as in first-century Palestine, men continue to underevaluate Jesus of Nazareth, and so "damn Him with faint praise," because their esteem or praise so badly mirrors the reality. They hold Him to be far less than what He really is:

1. Some admit Him to be *the best of men* that ever lived, but *not the Sovereign Lord* who wisely and perfectly administers His Kingdom.
 - a. As long as they can approve of Jesus' doctrine, judging it by the criteria of a generous humanism, so long will Jesus enjoy their esteem.
 - b. However, should Jesus, at some point, contradict their idea of God or their vision of man and what man needs to better his lot, then at this very point, they do not hesitate to dissent.
 - c. For such people, Jesus' methods are too slow. The emphasis He places upon the conversion of the individual is, for them, an unrealistic scheme, incapable of changing the course of humanity.
 - d. Ironically, Jesus cannot be even the best of men, or even considered good, if His "unprovable, unacceptable" claims to be divine are to be taken seriously and rejected as untrue. But, if He really is divine, then no amount of human dissent can detract one iota of the wisdom of His sovereign rule!

Others would consider Him to be *the perfect man*, but *not the God-man*.

- a. Great, popular theologians attempt to diminish the impact of the New Testament assertions of the divinity of Jesus. But these Biblical affirmations involve the validity of His most marvelous claims. They also demonstrate that all that He requires of all men is absolutely essential, because His words are the words of God.
- b. These scholars attempt to reduce the force of Jesus' claims, because, if what He says should prove true, then some principle of theirs is seen to be false, though they have always defended it and reasoned on the basis of it. Woe to anyone who would

disturb their well-established, sacrosanct presuppositions, because, according to them, they have been established on the basis of "the assured results of modern criticism with its scientific conclusions!" And yet these same scholars would hail Jesus as the Ideal Man.

- c. Ironically, Jesus cannot qualify to be the Perfect Man, if His moral and intellectual credentials are not in order, because He claims to be both divine and human, when, according to many unbelieving theories, He is not.
3. Or else men honor Him as a *Divine Savior*, but *not* a Savior qualified to be such *on the basis of His atoning sacrifice*.
 - a. Why should this concept offend men? Because, whereas men do feel the need of something or someone to deliver them from all their ills, yet it must *not* be done *at the expense of their pride*.
 - b. They want to arrive as far as possible in their own power, by their own intelligence, as autonomous men.
 - c. But the concept of a Jesus that offers Himself as a unique sacrifice eliminates all merit in human effort to justify oneself before God, and this is for them a grave offense. Jesus, by His all-sufficient sacrifice, says, "Without me, you can do nothing!" which means: "You cannot do it by yourself!" Thus, He condemns their self-sufficiency.
 - d. The doctrine of salvation by human submission and self-denial that denounces all self-justification before God, has always been offensive to many.
 - e. Ironically, however, it is impossible to have a Savior who saves from earth's pain, who does not also save from the sins that are its cause. Nor can such a Savior save from sins, unless He attack that malignant cancer that stands at the root of all other evil: human *pride*!
4. To the extent that men consider Jesus to be only a prophet, and not "the Christ, the Son of the living God," they can serenely search elsewhere for the realization of their messianic hopes:
 - a. If Jesus is no more than a John the Baptist, an Elijah, or Jeremiah, or just another undefinable prophet, then we may safely search elsewhere for our supreme Hero!
 - b. And people actually go looking for Him in science, philosophy, law, letters, music, social service, or elsewhere.
 - c. However, men of today who do not decide to follow Jesus as committed disciples of the supreme Prophet of God, automatically

align themselves with those who formally praise Him, but, in substance, they reject Him!

- d. This rejection, in the light of the sufficiency of the signs that validate all that He says of Himself, eliminates the claim to be an "honest doubter." There may remain many doubts, but they can no longer be called "honest."

CONCLUSION: Let us not praise Jesus superficially, pretending to say something important about Him, when we have no intention to go all the way with Him in sacrificial service. Let us praise Him, confessing Him for what He really is: the Christ, the Son of the living God, King of kings and Lord of lords!

But let us praise Him with a solid understanding of what we believe about Him! Our faith, if it is to be mature, must not be a sheltered house-plant, unaware of the options, untested by the winds of opposition from hostile opinions. We must be aware of these low views of Christ's essential identity and glory, we must test them and be prepared to be loyal to our convictions, despite the fact that we may remain a small minority in the world.

SPECIAL STUDY:

THE COST OF OUR SALVATION

During His ministry of approximately three years Jesus of Nazareth, with fiery words of eternal wisdom, set the skies ablaze over Judea and Galilee, announcing the most important news man was ever to hear! He raised no army, laid and collected no taxes, put on no robes of royalty. Yet, His sudden rise to the public eye was very little short of being as spectacular as that of any historic revolutionary. The common people heard Him gladly. At first, the leaders of Judaism listened with an interest which turned sour, first into disgust, then bitter hatred. Jesus stormed the capital of the Jews and wrought havoc right in the sacred precinct by raising embarrassing questions, exposing Pharisaic hypocrisy, and by claiming for Himself the nomenclature which was exclusively Messianic. Characteristically, He demonstrated His most magnificent claims by producing the most inescapable proof—"mighty works, wonders, and signs, which God did by Him in the midst" of those who most wanted to disclaim and destroy such proof. And yet, whether in the midst of the haranguing

in the Temple, or during the storm-tossed boating experiences on Lake Tiberias, or by intercepting the funeral procession at Nain, or in the midst of the popularity of the multitudes on many occasions, this Jesus proved Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God to those whose hearts made them willing. Later, Jesus was to die for all men of all times. In that death the punishment for sin was to be meted out upon the Son of God, although He had lived a pure life among sinners of every description!

At this mighty demonstration of God's living in human flesh we at first can only marvel. We are challenged by His words, awe-stricken by His works. Desiring to hear more of His lessons on the Kingdom of God, we join the crowds pressing around Him as He speaks to the great multitudes in Perea. Like everyone else in that vast audience, we listen breathlessly for some clue as to when He will accept our crown, march into Jerusalem, overthrow our oppressors, and establish God's Kingdom into which we can press. There have been reliable reports from Galilee, the Decapolis and northern Perea that Jesus fed more than 5,000 people on one occasion and upwards of 4,000 on another. At least some of the eyewitnesses of those events have suggested that the Nazarene could do this indefinitely, feeding our armies, reducing famines to a memory of the past, healing our sick and wounded,—even to the point of raising all our dead!

Quiet! He is seating Himself on that boulder to teach:

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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' (Lk. 14:26-30)

We stop listening, puzzled by His words as He goes on to speak of kings and salt. We listen as He gets through to us once more, "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Questions race through our minds: Do you mean to say, Master, that it costs something to be your disciple? Who pays this cost? What do you mean by "self-denial"? (I thought that you were going to provide what we did not have, and that we would get to keep what

is already ours!) How must we renounce all that we have? What is this "cross-bearing"? We heard John say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What does repentance have to do with it?

Here are some answers to our questions:

I. DISCIPLESHIP (and its end product, SALVATION) IS EXPENSIVE!

No expense has meaning except for those who must pay the cost. Therefore, to WHOM is the charge laid for the salvation of man?

A. It cost GOD THE FATHER AND CHRIST THE SON to purchase our salvation! The souls of men were up for sale on the world market and God in His love paid the highest price Heaven could afford to buy men back. Our redemption cost God many heartbreaks and bitter tears as He dealt patiently with a capricious nation, so He could raise up a family through which His Son could come. It cost Christ the humiliation of the death for sinners whom He had come to save. It cost God the best blood of earth—that of His prophets and apostles who laid down their lives in confirmation of their testimony to God's truth. It cost God countless billions of blessings to lead men by the goodness of His Providence. Yes, even before the world was formed, God counted the cost and cried out, "I will pay it!"

B. It cost the gracious HOLY SPIRIT Who strove with men before the flood, signified God's truth by means of the ancient prophets, and at the present works through the Word of God, which He Himself guaranteed. It costs Him to live in the often unclean temples of our bodies. But He too, agonizing with straying sheep, cried out, "I will pay it!"

C. It costs the WOULD-BE DISCIPLES also. Christ reads our hearts and foresees the future. He knows that we, the multitudes, will fall away from Him, and many would even cry out? "Crucify! Crucify! Away with Him!" And so He sifts the crowds by explaining in the boldest terms possible, that His salvation, His discipleship, His Kingdom, is going to cost the would-be disciple something too!

II. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP AND SALVATION STATED

What is the cost of salvation to us? Why does the Lord demand it? "I thought that salvation was to be a free gift!" someone would object. But is not the very nature of the grace of God its undeserved blessing at the cost only of the One who extends it? Paul emphasizes this, answering affirmatively:

But God's free gift is not at all to be compared with the offense. For if by one man's offence the whole race of men have died, to a much greater degree God's favor and His gift imparted by His favor through the one man Jesus Christ, has overflowed for the whole race of men. And the gift is not at all to be compared with the results of that one man's sin. For that sentence resulted from the offence of one man, and it meant condemnation; but the free gift resulted from the offenses of many, and it meant right standing. For if by one man's offense death reigned through that one, to a much greater degree will those who continue to receive the overflow of His unmerited favor and His gift of right standing with Himself, reign in real life through One, Jesus Christ.

(Romans 5:15-17, Williams' translation.)

God's gifts are described as free, truly enough. However, the main feature of God's free gift—a feature that is so often totally by-passed,—is that it is the free opportunity to extricate oneself by the power of Christ from the entangling alliances with sin. The opportunity is free, yet priceless! The laying hold of this opportunity is the expensive item to all concerned—this is the crux of the matter.

From what is this great salvation accomplished? SIN which finds its origin in the very person of man himself.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.

(Mark 7:21-23)

This harmonizes perfectly with Jesus' requirement: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself . . ." (Mt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23) Thus, Jesus is also placing before men a great paradox: a discipleship which leads to a priceless salvation to be received as a free, unearned gift, and, at the same time, He lays down the unmistakable terms at which that salvation may be had. The very consideration that our pure, righteous God would, and did, extend terms of surrender to a rebellious human-kind is the very summit definition

of grace!

What is this "self-denial" of which Jesus speaks: "If a man hate . . . not his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."? Let us first decide what "self-denial" is not, and so draw the circle to include only what Jesus meant.

1. Christ has not asked us to deny ourselves of this or that luxury, but to deny OURSELVES! Some early preacher described the deadly cancer of self as manifesting itself as:

- a. Self-will, the desire to be outside the law of obedience, i.e. above the responsibility to obey.
- b. Self-interest, the desire to be outside the law of sacrifice, i.e. free from the responsibility to sacrifice self for others.
- c. Self-sufficiency, the desire to be outside the law of fellowship, i.e. no sense of responsibility for others.

The whole scheme of redemption pictures the best love of man for himself as this is appropriately expressed in his willingness to save himself from the power, guilt and consequences of sin in himself. Man rightly cares for his own true, best life and wishes it to be developed and strengthened. (Eph. 5:28, 29; Mt. 22:39) Indeed, in the first gospel message, Peter urged the proper kind of self-preservation: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" (Ac. 2:40) This prevents us from misconstruing Jesus' words.

2. Similarly, Christ is not asking us to deny ourselves whatever is good and needful for strengthening of our spiritual or physical life. Jesus taught that fasting, for its own sake, was incompatible with the genius of the Kingdom of God, which "is not eating or drinking [or lack of it, HEF], but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17; also Mt. 9:14-17) All other forms of asceticism must bend to this same plan. (Col. 2:20-23) All real values are those which develop character and lead to eternal life. God let Solomon write from personal experience that all seeking after worldly ambitions, wealth, self-satisfactions of all kinds, including self-righteousness through severity to the body, is vanity. Life does not consist so much in what we live ON, as in the proper understanding of what we live FOR. Mere renunciation of the abundance of possessions, without renouncing the love of abundance, fails to understand the Lord. Denial of this love of possessions is the only proper preparation to use abundance appropriately as an administration assigned by the Lord.

3. Nor is it true "self-denial" what is done merely as self-denial.

True self-denial, like all other forms of Christ-likeness, is unconscious of self, "does not know that its face shines." We deny nothing when we give up certain foods on certain days, abstain from social dissipation during certain seasons, and many other useless and uncalled-for sacrifices. Can it be true self-denial for man to dictate to the Lord which sacrifices he shall make, merely because he supposes that some endeavor at renunciation is in order, whether or not the Lord has ordered it? Should the Master will that we join Him in the wedding joy of the new life, must we be anguished because pain and suffering are distant, and so invent self-inflicted abnegation, or "manufacture artificial crosses out of ascetic austerities"? (Bruce, *Training*, 179)

4. Nor is self-control—as the world understands it—equal to self-denial, for the former is the control of the lower elements of our being by the higher, whereas self-denial means that both higher and lower elements of our being are to be treated as elements of the former life to which we have died. It is here that Paul's paradox has significance:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Having seen what it is not, we must now ask: what is self-denial?

1. Self-denial is self stepping down from life's throne, laying crown and scepter at the Master's feet and thenceforth submitting the whole of life to His control. It is living out our life, not to please ourselves, but to please our Lord, not to advance our own personal interests, but to do His work. It is the glad making of any sacrifice that loyalty to Him requires. Self gives way altogether as the motive of life.

2. "As Peter said when he denied Christ, 'I know not the man,' so say thou of thyself, and act accordingly." (Bengel) We are instructed by the grace of God which brings salvation that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. . . ." (Titus 2:11f) "Worldly lusts" (*tàs kosmikàs epithumías* = "the earthly desires") need not be worse than the usual aspirations common to this earth, aspirations which become so all-important. It may be nothing worse than the animal instinct of self-preservation that thinks only of self-interest, but not of duty. There is no stronger normal human desire than to live, yet even this

too may be renounced in the line of duty, as Jesus so definitively proved. Jesus has not required abnegation of the self that loves God with the heart, soul, mind and strength, and serves its neighbor because of love "as yourself." Rather, what the Master demands is the total renunciation of that rebellion that brought sin into the world originally and still maintains it in all of its forms. Herein is the paradox true: "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." (Mt. 16:25; Lk. 9:24)

3. Self-denial is also the yielding of our right to choose anything but the will of Christ. Having accepted Jesus as the Lord of our conscience and will, emotions and intellect, we obey one law. His slightest wish is our highest command! When we became His slaves, we surrendered our right to a choice, although not our power to choose. (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:15)

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Lk. 16:13; Mt. 6:24)

Whatever self-denial must mean to the disciple, Christ has already shown us in one lasting, concrete example. (Ro. 15:3) Listen to His claims:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." (John 12:27f)

"Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, . . . 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,' " (Heb. 10:5-7)

"Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.' " (Jn. 7:16)

"And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." (Jn. 8:29)

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." (Jn. 17:4)

Peter shows how His self-denial is the model for ours:

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness . . .” (1 Pt. 2:21ff)

4. Self-denial is all that is implicit in obedience. For . . .

“Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)

There is also implied the overcoming faith in the One to whom the obedience is yielded and for whose sake self is renounced. Jesus calls us to take up His yoke upon us and learn of Him. (Mt. 11:29) When we have decided to wear His yoke, the question becomes, not what we shall choose, but, what is it that He has chosen for us? His yoke is His will for us, His rule, His discipline.

5. Self-denial is the crucifixion of self, “the old life with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24; Ro. 6:6) It is not merely the putting self off for a later date, but the immediate and total sacrifice of anything that stands between the disciple and totally-surrendered, loving service to his Lord.

6. Self-denial is the power behind repentance just as godly sorrow for sin and the desire to start a new life is the motivation. Self-denial, like repentance, must be in the present tense. To make up one’s mind that he will, in some undefined future time, deny himself, is not at all self-denial. What is this but a determination to continue in self-satisfaction still other days and years? Such a resolution is an indication of a deep-seated impenitence, since it agrees to the rectitude of Christ’s demands, but refuses obedience. It has been said that the way to Hell is paved with good intentions. This cannot be true, because good resolutions do not lead away from God, and a resolution to repent, or deny self, at a more convenient season,—but not now,—is not a good intention! If God should consent to any postponement of self-denial, He would become accessory to a sinful life.

Self-denial, like repentance, involves an abhorrence of all sin, especially the soul’s own personal sins. It involves a recognition of his personal guilt before God, and that he needs to repent! The soul acknowledges the justice of the divine law and its own condemnation

by it. It puts itself in the wrong and God in the right. It utters the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me—a SINNER!"

Self-denial, likewise, implies the renunciation of all sin. There can be no mental reservation, no "darling sins" not given up. It would be but an insult to God to make a catalogue of sins and say, "These I loath and renounce"; and compose another list and say, "These I cannot surrender; these, my dishonesty, my covetousness, my impurity, my wicked ambition, I love and will not forsake." To deny self with the purpose in mind to continue in sin, any sin, is impossible. To repent with the idea that it is only a formality in order to be forgiven, and so that a life of continued sin and continued repentance may finish in heaven, is but wicked self-deception. Such an intention is an abuse of the grace of repentance.

Self-denial involves the soul's seeing itself in the light of God's Word, seeing the nature of sin—the number, the heinousness, and the aggravation of HIS OWN sins. It involves seeing how his sin mars and pollutes his own soul, how it destroys and injures his fellow-man; how it defies God's authority, tramples on His love and compels the out-pouring of His wrath. This self-knowledge is exceedingly difficult to attain. It is unwelcome and painful. This knowledge tortures the soul, and we would rather be ignorant of it. Hence the memory comes reluctantly to its work and the past is imperfectly remembered. The law of God is obscured and misinterpreted, and the moral judgment is weakened and biased. Weak excuses are formed and the guilty soul seeks to hide itself behind a "refuge of lies." This is why denial of self must take place before intelligent approach to God is even possible.

It may even be unnecessary to differentiate between "repentance" and "self-denial." Further, Jesus spoke of "cross-bearing," a figure which seems to be but another facet of the diamond of total acceptance of Himself. What is "cross-bearing"? This is best answered by asking another question: what did it mean to Jesus? The occasions in Galilee when Jesus placed this challenge before His disciples were occasions on which Jesus had clearly predicted His own death. This expression must mean that the disciple must be as his Lord.

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

(Phil. 2:5-8)

Study the expressions Paul used: "emptied himself," "humbled himself," "obedient unto death," "death of the cross."

1. To Jesus, cross-bearing symbolized one thing: providing the needed sacrifice to save the individual sinner by undergoing whatever was necessary to do that. It meant His facing the mocking unbelief, the cruel jeering and the lashing of the scourge, the spitting, the injustice, and the separation from His Heavenly Father. It meant willingness to bear the pain that others' faults bring. It meant not pleasing Himself, but serving others. (Ro. 15:1-3)

2. To the individual sinner who aspires to discipleship "cross-bearing" means the positive identification of himself with the sufferings of Christ on his behalf. It was the Apostle's one desire to grow to "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Phil. 3:10f) Cross-bearing, to Paul, implied the dying daily to his own self-will: "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Co. 9:27)

3. Did Jesus ever speak of our heroically or sentimentally bearing His cross? No, because He bore *ours* in order to furnish us with sufficient motive and opportunity to bear our own! We are not, therefore, to manufacture artificial crosses for ourselves, but accept the cross which Christ has called us to bear and die upon it.

4. Cross-bearing means the willing, cheerful suffering of the loss of all things for "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:8) If that means the loss of "father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters" who stand as stumbling blocks to our feet, we must crucify that this-worldly affection, in favor of our heavenly loyalty to Christ. Obviously, cross-bearing in practice must mean different things to different people. Bruce (*Training*, 177) teaches:

For one the cross may be the calumnies of lying lips, "which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous"; for another, failure to attain the much-worshipped idol success in life, so often reached by unholy means not available for a man who has a conscience; for a third, mere isolation and solitariness of spirit amid uncongenial, unsympathetic neighbors, not minded to live soberly, righteously and godly, and not loving those who do so live.

How are "self-denial" and "cross-bearing" related to each other?

They are, respectively the negative and positive aspects of our total commitment to Christ. They are carefully linked by Paul:

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires . . . But far be it from me to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 5:24; 6:14)

III. THE REASONS FOR PAYING THIS COST

Having considered who pays this cost and the definitions of the cost, let us ask ourselves: why pay the cost of our salvation? God freely gives sinful man the gracious opportunity to become a disciple of Jesus and be saved by meeting the terms of discipleship. These terms, negatively and positively stated, are "self-denial" and "cross-bearing," and all that these involve. Historically, there have been very few who, having counted the cost, were willing to pay it. Jesus described such a state of affairs like this:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mt. 7:13f)

During His earthly ministry Jesus contacted one of the world's best prospects for discipleship. The young man was rich, ambitious, righteous by most standards, apparently humble and highly talented. The Master placed the cost of discipleship before him, but he turned it down! The question has probably already been asked: why, if so many who could mean so much to the Kingdom turn down Jesus' offer, does Jesus not make the cost lower, the "cross" lighter, the burden easier? Because, were the Lord to do so, He would be re-admitting to His household, into His Kingdom, the very element that exalted Satan, cursed mankind and turned the world into a cemetery in the first place: SELF! To make the demands less stringent, God would have to open the gates to allow mankind with all its sinful trappings of self-centeredness to pour into His promised land, reserved only for those who are willing to deny self and exalt Christ. Self-complacency, being the very heart and core of all sin, would, in this reversed case, require God to refuse to condemn any sin. But in all this, what would have become of the pure, righteous Creator

of all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? He would have become unjust Himself and not to be trusted to be right or the One to right the wrongs of earth. Vengeance would then belong to anybody who can take it! Law and order would no longer exist, save in those remnants of society still influenced by the ancient concepts of the justice and mercy of God.

But God is not a man that He should charge! And, since He has not, we are faced with the decision to count the cost and pay it and receive His proffered mercy, or face the consequences. Why pay the cost?

1. If we are unwilling to start the journey by the strait and narrow way, because of the call of our luxury or possessions, or because the desires of family, friends, social or business life must be satisfied before the Lord's desires, or for some other reason, we judge ourselves unworthy of His offered mercy. The ultimate end of such a course must be punishment. However high we may hold our heads, they shall at last be bowed before Jesus!

2. Why pay? Because, if one were to start the long, arduous journey of discipleship, but decide to give it up, he is just as lost as if he had never started. By the very nature of the case, this cost must be constantly and consistently paid. So subtle are the temptations to indulge self that every disciple must "watch and pray that they enter not into temptation." Consider these warnings:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not sit down and count the cost first, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.
(Lk. 14:28-32)

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.
(Lk. 8:13-15)

. . . No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk. 9:62)

These are tragic words! There is no disaster so great as that of a life started out on its course heavenward, only to see it sink beneath the waves of doubt and selfishness miles and years from the blest harbor!

3. Consider the psychological future of selfishness vs. selflessness:

Those who are selfish and who do only that which pleases their fancy, and who will not exert themselves for some high principle, will find that their range of dislikes will increase and their range of likes will decrease. As time goes on, life becomes more and more filled with disagreeable things until the selfish life becomes the doomed life. He who does things for Christ's sake is responding to something higher than his personal inclinations. This leads to a steady increase of one's "range of interests, likes, and success" and the fuller life is the reward of the giving up of a selfish life. "No discovery of modern psychology is, in my opinion, so important as its scientific proof of the necessity of self-sacrifice or discipline to self-realization and happiness."

(James Bales, *Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 40)

4. The biggest inducement to pay this expense is the realization that it leads to life eternal. But some who genuinely count the cost, studying the standards of the Kingdom, cry out, "It's too difficult! For fear of falling, I will not attempt to rise! I will not try!" But the tower must be built; the battle must be fought; the Kingdom of God must be sought at any price and above all. Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame," and we can too! Hear Him again as He challenges all men:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serve me, the Father will honor him. (Jn. 12:24ff)

. . . Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29f)

We are never better off than when we are completely ready to let God have the really great opportunity He wants. When we lay ourselves prostrate on our own cross, denying ourselves of all right to live, conscious of our total inability to save ourselves, then and only then are we in the best frame of mind to receive all that He has to offer. What a paradox: He takes away from us all things that He might truly give us all things!

IV. SELF-DENIAL AND CROSS-BEARING IN PRACTICE

Having seen something of the theory, we must ask ourselves how this works out in practice. Otherwise, what was intended for our daily growth in faith and likeness to Christ, will become a dead, useless concept, unconnected with our real way of thinking and acting.

In the general field of self-denial and cross-bearing there are actually two areas of application. On the one hand, there is death to self's desires that lead into sin in any and all of its forms. (Col. 3:5; Gal. 5:24) On the other, there is that renunciation of one's legitimate rights for love of another person. Since the reader is more likely to be familiar with the numerous examples of the former with which the New Testament is replete, let us examine a very few of the countless expressions of self-denial in the latter area.

A. JESUS IS OUR MODEL

He denied Himself by surrendering legitimate rights of His own free will for the sake of others. (Study Romans 15:3 in the context of Romans 14 and 15:1-7; Phil. 2:5-8 in the context of Phil. 2:1-4; Eph. 5:25 in the context of Eph. 5:21-33; cf. Heb. 3:1; 12:2, 3; note 1 Pt. 2:21ff in the context of 1 Pt. 2:18-20; 3:18 in the context of 3:13-22; 4:1-6; 4:13 in the context of 4:12-19) God, too, labored unsparingly for us! (Ro. 8:32)

B. APPROPRIATE CONCERN FOR OTHERS' NEEDS IS OUR STANDARD.

In order to take many NT exhortations seriously, we must deny ourself some other use of our time and energies in other perfectly

proper, completely justifiable Christian activities. Thousands of thoroughly enjoyable human pleasures, such as reading, listening to music, flower arrangement, keeping one's home in perfect order, painting and all hobbies, while innocent themselves, can—and, on certain occasions, must be—set aside, in order to have time to express our concern for others. These activities are perfectly legitimate within themselves, and the Christian need not fear God's frown upon them as they engage in them, since He Himself has left him free to choose his activities. However, the question of priorities asks the Christian: "Which comes *first now*: your neighbor's needs or your own comforts and hobbies?"

As every serious, busy pastor knows, counseling with people takes time. Solutions must be examined. People's problems do not respect clocks or follow schedules. This means that a Christian who would really be of help to his fellows must be available. But availability means being "on call" at any time, and, as any doctor or ambulance driver knows, self-denial is the order of the day. Doctors cannot say, "I'm sorry that I cannot respond to your emergency, because I'm listening to Beethoven!" Rather, they deny their right to enjoy Beethoven and rush down to the emergency room. When Eutychus fell out of the third-story window, Paul did not insist on continuing his inspired speech, but rushed down with the others to do what he could for the lad. (Ac. 20:7-12)

C. HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

1. Consider the following encouragements to deny ourselves in order to be available to meet others' needs: Ro. 12:3-21; 14—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12—10:33; 11:33; 12:7, 25; 13:1-7; 14:all; 16:16; 1 Pt. 4:10.

2. All encouragements to be generous in giving to others' needs are incitements to spend for others what we have a right to spend on ourselves. See 2 Co. 8, 9; Gal. 6:6, 10; Eph. 4:28; 5:15f; Col. 4:5f; 1 Ti. 5:4, 8, 16; 6:18f.

3. All exhortations to love and serve one another require self-denial to carry them out. See Gal. 5:13f; 6:1-5; Eph. 5:21—6:9, 18; Phil. 2:1-4; 4:3; Col. 3:18—4:1; 1 Th. 2:8; 5:14f; 2 Th. 3:6-13; 1 Ti. 6:1f; Tit. 3:8, 14; 1 Pt. 2:18ff; 3:1-8; 1 Jn. 3:16-18.

4. Consider these examples that show us how it is done. Paul would have been willing even to sacrifice his own salvation, if this would accomplish the salvation of his fellow Hebrews. (Ro. 9:3) Remember

the Apostles' self-denial for their churches (1 Co. 4:8-13; 6:12—10:33; 2 Co. 4:2, 7-15; 5:13; 6:1-13; 11:7-11, 23-29; 12:14ff; 13:9; Phil. 1:23-26; 1 Th. 2:9-12; 3:10; 2 Th. 3:7-9; 2 Ti. 2:10. Remember the Apostles' letter-writing ministry; that took time to edify their readers!

5. Others devoted themselves to serve other Christians with needed refreshment: 1 Co. 16:15f; 2 Co. 8:1-5; 2 Ti. 1:16-18; Heb. 6:10; 13:1-3; 3 Jn. 5-8, 10b.

6. The rules governing Christian liberty require that we deny ourselves. (See Special Study: "How To Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" after 15:1-20, which discusses some of these rules.) Perhaps some narrow-souled Christian demands to know where in the Bible it says he must do some particular act of kindness that he does not want to, or do without some pleasure for the sake of someone else. The New Testament was not written to cater to such legalism, but to stimulate us to want to rise above the demands of mere, legal rules, to live a life guided by the Spirit of Christ, inwardly motivated to seek out practical, helpful kindnesses by which we can bless our neighbor. However, the New Testament guarantees our liberty to do this and guides our decisions concerning it. But the very principles that set us free from casuistic legal restrictions require that through love we become servants of one another. (Cf. Gal. 5:13; Ro. 14—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12—10:33; Jas. 1:25-27; 2:8, 12; 1 Pt. 2:16; 3:8; 4:8-10; 5:5)

7. Christian exhortation and teaching takes time, energy and dedication! If time is money, then denying ourselves the use of our time as our own, in order to bring back a sinner from the error of his way, is the same sort of sacrifice Jesus made. It takes time to care enough to go teach someone what he must know in order to please God. (Cf. Heb. 3:13; 10:24f; Gal. 6:1f; Jas. 5:19f; 1 Th. 5:11, 14; 2:11; Jude 22f. It takes self-denial to be gentle and forbearing with one's opponents who are what they are because they need to repent and because they are certain they know the truth better than the Christian servant. (2 Ti. 2:24-26) It takes self-denial to care about truth and falsity in life and doctrine. (Cf. Ro. 16:17-20; Eph. 5:11; 4:25; 2 Th. 2:11-15; 2 Ti. 1:14; 1 Ti. 4:16; 6:12, 20; Rev. 2:2, 3) It takes self-denial to refuse to make use of what appeals to human pride, in order to proclaim the truth, and hold to the truth despite the powerful temptations to trust human wisdom to be more certain. (Cf. 1 Co. 1:18-31; 2:1-5; 3:18-23)

8. Tremendous self-discipline is required to be able to submit to

persecution of any sort, whether through public abuse or loss of possessions or family. But this willingness to suffer the loss of all things comes through the self-denial that admits that everything we are and have came from God, and, because of this recognition, turns it all over to God. This way, whatever happens to our possessions, our relationships, or to us, we are confident that everything is in good hands: *HIS!* Self-denial, thus, is the secret behind the ability to rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances. (Cf. Phil. 4:4-7, 10-13; 1 Th. 5:18) No matter what evil is done to us, self-denial keeps us from paying back evil for evil. (1 Th. 5:15; 1 Co. 6:7) Even our "vengeance belongs to the Lord" (Cf. Ro. 12:17-21).

9. Submission to our own Christian leaders requires self-denial. (Cf. 1 Pt. 5:5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Th. 5:12f; 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6, 14; 1 Co. 11:2) Submission to the decision of others requires no little self-denial. (Cf. 1 Co. 6:1-6)

10. The kind of praying that needs to be done for our world, our Church and ourselves requires discipline and the time that only self-denial can furnish. (Cf. 1 Ti. 2:1, 2, 8; 1 Th. 5:17f; Eph. 6:18, etc.)

11. Growth in godliness requires self-denial which furnishes time, energy, interest and activity that will make character growth possible. (Cf. Eph. 4:15f; Phil. 3:12-15; Heb. 5:11—6:12; 12:3-17; 1 Ti. 4:7b, 8; 2 Ti. 2:3-7, 15; 1 Pt. 1:13-17; 2 Pt. 1:3-11)

There are many, many more texts and illustrations in the Word that could be listed here. But a good rule of thumb might be this: if you see something to do that you should not, either for yourself or others, do not do it. That is self-denial. If you see something good to do for someone else, something that, to do it, takes time that you would have used otherwise for something you would rather have done for yourself, do it. That is self-denial. Self-denial and cross-bearing, seen from this practical standpoint, are indubitably the price we must pay to be saved from ourselves and our sins, and in order to be of any practical use to Jesus. The only law of Christianity, as anyone knows, is to love God with all we have and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Self-denial is but this love in action. (See Notes on 5:44, 48; 7:12, Vol. I, pp. 311ff, 318ff, 415ff)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN OUTLINES

- Section 42. Transfigured on High Mountain, Jesus Shows His Glory to Peter, James and John. (17:1-13)
- Section 43. At Base of Mountain Jesus Heals and Frees Demonized Boy. (17:14-21)
- Section 44. Jesus Makes Third Passion Prediction. (17:22, 23)
- Section 45. Jesus Quizzes Peter About Temple Tax. (17:24-27)

STUDY OUTLINE

- I. REVELATION OF DIVINE MAJESTY (17:1-13; Mk. 9:2-13; Lk. 9:28-36)
- A. The passive participants (Mt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2; Lk. 9:28, 32)
 - B. The private pageant at the peak: a glimpse of glory (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2b, 3; Lk. 9:29)
 - C. The part played by the prophetic pair from Paradise (Mt. 17:3; Mk. 9:4; Lk. 9:30f)
 - D. Peter's presumptuous perpetuation of a pernicious pantheon (Mt. 17:4; Mk. 9:5; Lk. 9:32f)
 - E. The Paternal pronouncement of the peerless pre-eminence of Christ (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:34f)
 - F. The prostrate, perplexed Apostles persuaded to promote their present Prince. (Mt. 17:6-8; Mk. 9:8; Lk. 9:36a)
 - G. The prohibition of premature publication because of pre-dominant preconceptions and prejudice (Mt. 17:9; Mk. 9:9f; Lk. 9:36)
 - H. The pondering of pivotal personality (Mt. 17:10-14; Mk. 9:11-13)
- II. REPROOF OF FAITHLESSNESS AND FAILURE (Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-29; Lk. 9:37-43a)
- A. The paralysis of power by preoccupations, pessimism and prayerlessness (Mt. 17:14; Mk. 9:14-16; Lk. 9:37)
 - B. The poignant plea of a pathetic predicament (Mt. 17:14b-17; Mk. 9:17-21; Lk. 9:38-42)
 - C. The pained but perceptive plea of the pressured parent (Mk. 9:21-24)
 - D. The piteous prisoner promptly purged of his perverse possessor

(Mt. 17:18; Mk. 9:25-27; Lk. 9:42b, 43)

E. The Apostles' puzzlement over their pitiful production (Mt. 17:19; Mk. 9:28)

1. The pollution of practical paganism (Mt. 17:20)

B. The purifying power of personal penitence and persistent prayer (Mt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29)

III. REPETITION OF THE PASSION PREDICTION (Mt. 17:22f; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45)

A. The perceptible pressure of popularity (Mt. 17:22a; Mk. 9:30; Lk. 9:43b)

B. The painfully precise plan of His passion (Mt. 17:22b, 23a; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44)

C. Perception prevented by persistent prejudice (Mt. 17:23b; Mk. 9:32; Lk. 9:45)

IV. READINESS TO BE SUBMISSIVE BEYOND DUTY (17:24-27)

A. The petty pestering for payment of the poll tax (17:24)

B. The precipitate parry by Peter (17:25a)

C. The privileged position of the Prince (17:25b)

1. The proper prerogative of a potentate's posterity (17:26)

2. The powers postponed by a practical pliability and a purpose to protect others (17:27a)

D. The praiseworthy performance of this principle of precedence (17:27b)

Section 42

TRANSFIGURED ON HIGH MOUNTAIN JESUS SHOWS HIS GLORY TO PETER, JAMES AND JOHN

(Parallels: Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

TEXT: 17:1-13

1 And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: 2 and he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light. 3 And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. 4 And

Peter answered, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. 5 While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, save Jesus only.

9 And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen from the dead. 10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? 11 And he answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things: 12 but I say unto you, that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they would. Even so shall the Son of man also suffer of them. 13 Then understood the disciples that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why would Jesus single out just three Apostles to witness the Transfiguration? Did not the others need to behold Jesus' glory? If so, why leave them out?
- b. Even though a week intervened after Peter's confession and Jesus' first plain prediction of His death and the conversation and teaching occasioned by this prophecy, is there a psychological connection between these events and the glorious vision of the Transfiguration? If so, what is that connection? If not, why do you deny such a link?
- c. How do you think Jesus was transfigured? What other NT texts would bear on the question?
- d. Do you think that the total Transfiguration-event was intended in any way for Jesus' benefit? If so, how could it strengthen Him?
- e. Of what special benefit would this benefit be to those Apostles who witnessed it? What would it teach them about Jesus' nature and mission? (Cf. Lk. 9:31)
- f. What do you think was the motive for selecting only Moses and Elijah, of all the OT characters, to appear with Jesus here?
- g. What does the appearance of these two OT worthies have to say, if anything, on the subject of resurrection, or on life beyond this life.

- h. Is their presence in this vision only part of the scenery, a phenomenon without any objective reality? How would you go about defending the factual, historic character of their appearance with Jesus during the Transfiguration? There are "scholars" who doubt it, you know.
- i. Do you think that the apostolic trio had fallen asleep and suddenly awoke to see the vision already in progress, or were merely oppressed by sleep while they were trying to stay awake? In other words, did they miss some of the vision by being asleep? What is important about this detail in relation to the general verification of the historical character of this narrative?
- j. What is so significant about the grim topic of conversation discussed with Jesus by Moses and Elijah? Was this important for Jesus alone, or the Apostles only, or both? Why?
- k. What was so wrong-headed about Peter's enthusiastic suggestion?
- l. Why did Peter propose to make three tents (booths or "tabernacles")? What purpose must he have had in mind for constructing these peculiar dwellings?
- m. Do you think God just made good use of the normal phenomenon that regularly appears on mountain peaks, when He spoke out of "a bright cloud"? If so, what?
- n. What is the significance of God's message from the bright cloud (1) for Jesus? (2) for Peter and the others? (3) for us?
- o. Why would Jesus tell the Apostles here to keep silent about the glorious vision and the heavenly Voice? Would it have helped anything to promote His mission had they proclaimed it abroad?
- p. Besides the fact that Jesus Himself had mentioned the resurrection as the terminus after which they could publicize the Transfiguration, why should the Apostles desire to dwell on the meaning of the "rising from the dead"? (Mk. 9:10)
- q. In answering their question about the proper interpretation of "the coming of Elijah," why should Jesus interweave the Old Testament's mention of the Messiah's sufferings? What good does that fact do toward helping them to understand about the promised "Elijah"? (Cf. Mk. 9:12f)
- r. From what clue could the Apostles arrive at the correct deduction that Jesus had been referring to John the Baptist?
- s. How did the Apostles recognize Moses and Elijah who had disappeared from the earth centuries before, probably leaving behind no reliable photographic likeness whereby these Apostles could have recognized them? What clues would have assured them that

the two men were really Moses and Elijah?

- t. Was the revelation of the lordship of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration more exalted than the revelation of the lordship of Jesus as He died on the cross? Why do you answer as you do?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

About a week after Peter's confession and Jesus' first plain prediction of His death, Jesus selected Peter, James and his brother, John, to accompany Him up into a high mountain where they could be by themselves for prayer. While He was praying, His entire appearance was changed, right in their presence. The appearance of His face was so altered that it shone like the sun. His clothing turned a glistening, intensely dazzling white—white as the light—so white, in fact, that no earthly bleaching agent could possibly make it any whiter.

Suddenly, there appeared two men conversing with Jesus. These were Moses and Elijah, seen in heavenly splendor. They were discussing His Exodus, i.e. His liberation of the New Israel of God, which He was soon to bring about in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Peter and the other two had been fighting sleep. They managed to stay awake, so they saw Jesus' heavenly splendor as well as the two men who stood with Him. It was just as these latter were leaving Jesus that Peter blurted out, "Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you wish, let's put up three festival booths right here: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!" However he did not know how to react nor did he realize what he was suggesting. In fact, they were terrified.

While he was still saying this, a bright cloud overshadowed them, causing them to be gripped with fear as it enveloped them. A voice from the cloud declared, "This is my own dear Son, my Chosen One: I am well pleased with Him, so listen to Him!" When the disciples heard this voice they fell on their faces in terror. Then Jesus walked over to them and touched them, saying as He did so, "Stand up and do not be afraid." All at once, when they raised their eyes and looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them, just Jesus Himself.

As they were descending from the mountain next day, Jesus ordered them, "Never mention to anyone the vision you have seen, until the Messiah be raised from the dead." So they kept quiet about it, and during that period told no one anything of what they had witnessed.

However, although they kept the matter to themselves, they began discussing with one another what this expression "rising from the dead" could mean.

Then the disciples put this question to Him: "Why, then, do the scholars claim that Elijah must appear on earth before the Messiah comes?"

This was His answer: "That's right, 'Elijah' is supposed to make his appearance first and bring about a spiritual restoration of men's hearts to God. And how does the Scripture describe the Messiah? It teaches that He is destined to endure great suffering and be treated with contempt. However, I can assure you that your 'Elijah' has already made his appearance and people failed to recognize him. They treated him just as they pleased, just like the Bible speaks of him. They will do the same thing to their Messiah too."

Then the disciples realized that He had been referring to John the Baptist.

SUMMARY

Jesus took His "inner circle" of disciples with Him to give them a glimpse of His glory. As God identifies His Son as His final, authoritative Prophet, the Law and the Prophets fade into proper perspective. To preclude misconceptions, Jesus enjoins the men to keep the vision to themselves until after the resurrection. They question Jesus about popular theological views about the "Elijah." Jesus affirms that the famous "Elijah" was none other than John the Baptist, whose rejection was symbolic of His own fate.

NOTES

I. REVELATION OF DIVINE MAJESTY

A. THE PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS

17:1 **After six days.** Because Luke affirms that there were "eight days," some would charge him or the other two Evangelists with contradiction. However, Luke affirms that it was "about eight" and there really are six days between his eight, so there is no contradiction. He merely counted the first and last days, whereas Matthew and

Mark counted only the ones intervening.

This event occurred during the final year of Jesus' ministry. The last date mentioned before this was the Passover at which He fed the 5000. (Jn. 6:4) Although exact computation of the time elapsed since that date is impossible, an examination of Jesus' ministry at Capernaum, in Phoenicia and in the Decapolis (Mt. 15, 16) and the nearness of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2) would lead us to conclude that the Transfiguration occurred at the end of the summer or in the early fall.

To grasp the significance of the Transfiguration, we must remember what had preceded it. Luke draws a tight connection between this event and the Good Confession and the subsequent Sermon on the Nature of True Discipleship. (Cf. Lk. 9:28: "Now about eight days after these sayings . . ." recorded in Mt. 16:13-28; Mk. 8:31—9:1; Lk. 9:22-27) This means that Jesus gave the disciples about a week's time to ponder deeply the shocking prediction of His tragic rejection and death, and especially the unexpected lecture they received when Peter tried to redirect Him. That must have been a sleepless week of furious, secretive arguments among the Apostles, a week of disappointment and discouragement, confusion and turmoil, a week of soul-wrenching torment. Now He would remove their despondency by balancing His earthly humiliation with His heavenly glory.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John. Why He chose only three Apostles, and only these three, becomes clearer only as the larger picture is seen. His reasons may have been some, or all, of the following:

1. To guarantee the necessary privacy, He chose three and no more. Any larger group would render silence more difficult to maintain. (17:9)
2. To guarantee that the Transfiguration would accomplish its purpose. Whereas it was desirable for all the Apostles to behold His glory, it was imperative that at least some have unquestionable proof of His triumphant glory. But such a vision could not be of value unless enough of them could testify to having seen it. Thus, the choice of three men is to provide witnesses sufficient in number to establish the reality of the fact in any court. (Cf. Dt. 19:15; Mt. 18:16; Jn. 8:17; Cf. Ac. 10:41)
3. To have men who could best interpret and make best use of the Transfiguration's impression on themselves. Jesus apparently

judged the rest of the group not to be qualified to witness it nor to hear of it afterwards. The three chosen were not necessarily elected because better loved by the Lord, but because qualified, in that they were more open, more ready to accept and obey Him.

4. These men, together with Andrew, Peter's brother, had been the earliest disciples of Jesus. (Cf. Jn. 1:35-51) Only they were allowed into the room with the parents to behold the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. (Mk. 5:37; Lk. 8:51) Only they were invited to share the Lord's sufferings in Gethsemane. (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33) They had been nearest longest and were most intimately linked to Jesus in heart and thought. In the Master's plan each was to become a pillar supporting the truth:
 - a. Peter was to swing wide the gates of the Kingdom of Christ to Jew (Ac. 2) and Gentile alike (Ac. 10) and record his eye-witness testimony to this pre-passion revelation of Jesus' glory before he too suffered martyrdom. (2 Pet. 1:16-18)
 - b. James would be the first Apostle to lay down his life rather than deny Jesus' resurrection. (Ac. 12:2)
 - c. John, also a pillar of the Jerusalem Church (Gal. 2:9), would probably be the last Apostle to die, having bridged the gap from the personal ministry of Christ on earth until the Church was well-established throughout the world. To him would be granted the privilege of relating the Messiah's triumphant glory seen in the visions of the Revelation. (Rev. 1:9)
5. Indirectly to bless the other Apostles who were not privileged to be present. The others would feel the changed attitude of these three, and because of their positive influence, the others would hold firmer to Jesus in their turmoil, even if they could not identify the source of what blessed them.

Whether these are the reasons Jesus chose them or not, is not clear. To choose these and no others was Jesus' right and was done in His wisdom.

For the Hebrew reader of Matthew's Gospel, the imagery of the event itself would far outweigh any problems connected with His choice. In fact, the imagery would lead the thoughtful Jewish reader to see allusions to events in Hebrew history, beginning with the ascent upon the high mountain, symbol of Sinai (Horeb) on which Moses and Elijah received revelations from God. (See on 17:3.)

And led them to a high mountain apart. The mountain intended must be *high* and within about a week's travel from the area of

Caesarea Philippi, scene of the confession of Peter. (Mt. 16:13-28) Since the next recorded event begins after a secret return through Galilee to Capernaum, the mountain cannot be located in that area. (Cf. Mk. 9:30, 33; Mt. 17:22, 24) None of the tall hills in Galilee or Gilead would qualify and none of the more populous areas of Galilee would permit Him the privacy. Mount Hermon, located just 25 km. (15 mi.) north of Caesarea Philippi and rising over 2814 m. (9232 ft.) and visible from much of Palestine, easily qualifies as the peak in question. Further, if we have rightly identified the time of the Transfiguration as sometime in late August or early September, the snow on Mt. Hermon would all be gone, making it possible for the Lord and His men to scale clear to the top. McGarvey enjoyed 22°C (71°F) weather at the peak, even with masses of unmelted snow in June. (*Lands of the Bible*, 548) W. Ewing (*ISBE*, 3006) opts for *Jebel Jermuk*, the loftiest mountain in Galilee, rising to 1208 m. (3834 ft.), reasoning as follows:

1. It is located in Palestine proper, whereas Mt. Hermon is located in heathen territory and the sacred associations with Hermon are pagan, not Jewish.
2. Jesus was met, upon His descent from the mountain, by a plainly Jewish crowd with "scribes" in evidence. (Mk. 9:14) Therefore, the mountain must have been in a district with a Jewish population.
3. Jebel Jermuk, located in Galilee, would be close enough to Caesarea Philippi to be reached within the week after Peter's confession. The distance is just 40 km. (25 mi.). Further, Matthew (17:22: "As they abode in Galilee") seems to imply that the healing of the demoniac boy at the foot of the mountain occurred in Galilee. Mark's "They went on from there and passed through Galilee," accordingly, need not mean that they were outside Galilee, but merely left the area of the mountain and traversed what remained of Galilee between them and their destination at Capernaum. (Mk. 9:30; Mt. 17:24)

But Ewing's arguments are not conclusive for the following reasons:

1. Nothing is affirmed about the particularly Jewish sacredness of the mountain in question. Peter just called it "the holy mountain" in connection with the Transfiguration. (2 Pt. 1:18)

Grollenberg (*Shorter Atlas*, 10) affirmed that majestic

Hermon's name is derived from *hrm*, a root meaning "sacred, unassailable," a fact noticed also by Davidson (*Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 275). Gesenius-Tregelles (*Lexicon*, 306) agrees that the stem means "devoted, sacred." Davis (*Dictionary of the Bible*, 301) interprets the name as "mountain peak or sacred mountain."

- Now, the Christian Apostle Peter, who would be less likely to sanctify certain places as peculiarly "holy," not even the mount of Transfiguration, nevertheless referred to this site as "the holy mountain." (2 Pt. 1:18) Could it be that the Apostle translated the Hebrew-Aramaic expression *Har-Hermon* into Greek as *τὸ ἁγίον ὄρει* ("the holy mountain"), and thus precisely located the Transfiguration as having occurred on Mt. Hermon? This hypothesis would eliminate the one place in the NT where an Apostle seemed to regard the site of some Christian event as especially "holy," as opposed to the whole earth which is holy.
2. The presence of Jews around Jesus' disciples, even in heathen territory, is not strange, nor is His dwelling in a house in pagan country. (Cf. Mt. 15:21-29; esp. Mk. 7:24!) Besides, the identification of the "house" into which Jesus entered upon rejoining the main group of disciples after the Transfiguration, is impossible. (Mk. 9:28; see on 17:19) The feeding of the 4000 occurred in the Decapolis. (Mt. 15:29-39; Mk. 7:31—8:10) Excited people had followed Jesus into isolated areas before. (Cf. Mt. 5:1; Lk. 6:12, 17ff; Mk. 4:36; Mt. 14:13; 15:29f; Mk. 8:34)
 3. Matthew's affirmation is textually not "as they abode in Galilee," but "as they were gathering in Galilee." (17:22 on which see notes) This may not be parallel with Mark's expression (Mk. 9:30). Therefore, Mt. 17:22 has nothing to do with Jesus' movements, and Mark's expression may well mean that they entered Galilee from the area around Mt. Hermon.
 4. As to the assertion that there is no hint that He had crossed the border of Palestine, is it absolutely certain that Mt. Hermon would have been considered OUTSIDE the borders of Israel, in the same way Tyre and Sidon are? (Cf. Dt. 3:8, 9; 4:48; Josh. 11:16f; 12:1, 5; 13:2-6, 11; 1 Chron. 5:23; Ps. 42:6)
 5. The argument based on the presence of the "scribes" completely underestimates the dogged determination of those theologians to pounce on even the slightest appearance of weakness in Jesus'

message, manners, mission or men, even to the extent of tracking Him and His understudies to great lengths. (Cf. Lk. 5:17 in context and Mt. 15:1)

6. Retreat to a quiet, semi-Gentile area would be especially appropriate for the private teaching needed during this period of Jesus' self-revelation. (Cf. Mk. 9:30f) Thus, Mt. Hermon in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, while not absolutely certain, is most likely.

B. THE PRIVATE PAGEANT AT THE PEAK

Jesus' stated purpose for ascending the mountain with His inner circle of trusting friends was "to pray." (Luke) The object of His prayers is not expressed, but, if we may judge from what occurred there, this would not be difficult to imagine:

1. He needed to be with the Father after the disciples' jarring rejection of His clear revelation of His death. It cost Him to tell them the unwelcome truth, but He must remain true to His mission, so He took refuge in the Father's presence. But what need had He to be transfigured for His own personal benefit? Jesus was not an angel, but a MAN! (Heb. 2:9, 14-18) He needed whatever encouragement the Father could give. (Cf. Jn. 12:27f in context.) He may have prayed that God would help Him to succeed in making His own glory more evident to His Apostles, and so defeat the discouragement He could not help but feel because of their obtuseness. The Transfiguration, whether desired or sought by Jesus or not, would serve to brace His courage to face the bitterness ahead in two ways:
 - a. The foretaste of the glory which would follow His suffering (Heb. 12:2) would be like being back home for just an instant, making His voluntary obedience even unto death (Phil. 2:5-11) to be seen, by comparison, as something to be despised.
 - b. The Father's loving voice, even speaking directly to the Apostles, would reaffirm His pleasure in His Son, warm His heart and encourage Him in His lonely mission among unsympathetic men. It is like the encouragement felt by an expert pilot flying through a storm-tossed night with no visible landmarks, when suddenly a voice comes over the radio, saying, "We've picked you up on radar, friend, and you're right on course!"

Peter testifies that "he received honor and glory from God the

Father." (2 Pt. 1:17)

2. His disciples needed further evidence of His true glory: could He not request the Father to grant them this, even in words similar to those in Jn. 17:1, 5? These men who believed the Good Confession which God had revealed to Peter (Mt. 16:17) did not accept the Messiah's mission to suffer (Mt. 16:22), although He had guaranteed them His vindication in glory (16:27). So they needed the direct teaching that a brief, but convincing, revelation of His divine majesty and a word from God would convey. The immediate and imperative significance of this Transfiguration before His status-seeking, materialistic Apostles is to give them a glimpse of a majesty they had never dreamed, a glory that would make all earthly grandeur and magnificence to fade away into insignificance. In perspective, the Transfiguration would confirm the program of Jesus in a moment when, according to every human prediction, He was headed for failure. (Cuminetti, *Matteo*, 233) Peter, interpreting this golden memory in his life, offered it as a supreme illustration and convincing proof of the deity of Christ, as well as the solid kind of evidence upon which we base our faith. (2 Pt. 1:16-19) The understanding of their discipleship depended upon their concept of His Lordship.

17:2 He was transfigured before them. The three Evangelists grasp for adequate terminology to communicate the grandeur of this transformation. They emphasize the splendor of the dazzling white light radiating from His entire being. Although His features retained their recognizably human form, everything else about Him took on a blinding light, blazing with sun-like glory. This is the incident which so marvelously encapsules what the Apostles meant when they said: "We have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn. 1:14), and "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pt. 1:16ff). This is something of that majestic dignity for which Jesus longed: ". . . the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." (Jn. 17:5) It is that unbearable, blinding splendor which shone above the brightness of the noonday sun on the Damascus road that convicted Saul of Tarsus that he lay prostrate in the presence of "Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord of glory" (Ac. 9:3; 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13; 1 Co. 2:8) This is a foretaste of that radiant beauty recognized by the elder Apostle when Jesus dictated the Revelation to him. (Rev. 1:9-19)

He was transfigured means that when people saw Jesus, they normally saw nothing different from a normal Galilean, like a

thousand others they could name. But for this brief, splendid moment the three disciples beheld "the glory of God in the face of Jesus" (2 Co. 4:6) **He was transfigured** (*metemorfóthe*) means that the "form of God" (*morfè theou*) shone through the "form of a servant." (*morfè doulou*) (See Phil. 2:6, 7; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 96.)

The effects on the reader would be at least two:

1. The common reader would see that here in the glory of Jesus is a suggestion of the awe-inspiring glory with which He would be surrounded as He began to reign at the right hand of the Father and in which He will return. (Mt. 16:27; Lk. 9:26) Is this a foretaste of the glory that one day we too shall share? (Cf. Phi. 3:20, 21; Col. 3:4; 1 Co. 15:35-58; 1 Jn. 3:2, 3)
2. If the Transfiguration reminded the Hebrew reader of the shining face of Moses after his conversations with God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:29ff), it would be a comparison by contrast. The luminousness of Moses' face was relatively so feeble that a veil easily concealed it. (Ex. 34:33-35; 2 Co. 3:12-18) Contrarily, the brilliance of the person of our Lord was such that every part of His entire being was radiant. A greater than Moses is here.

C. THE PART PLAYED BY THE PROPHETIC PAIR FROM PARADISE

17:3 And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. This is the second encouragement of Jesus. At last He is able to converse with men who really understand and share His aims. Just why, of all the illustrious giants of OT history, *Moses and Elijah* should have been distinguished for this appearance is not easily ascertained. Certain instructive factors stand out, however, to suggest a motive for their selection:

1. Their lives and ministry paralleled that of Jesus at precisely this point:

a. Moses was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God (Nu. 20:1-13).	a. Elijah was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God. (1 Kg. 19:1-10).	a. Jesus was discouraged by the faithlessness and perversity of the people of God. (Mt. 16:22ff; 17:17).
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JESUS SHOWS HIS GLORY TO PETER, JAMES AND JOHN 17:2, 3

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| <p>b. Moses talked with God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-19).</p> | <p>b. Elijah talked with God on Mount Sinai (Horeb) (1 Kg. 19:9-12).</p> | <p>b. Jesus talked with God on this mountain (Lk. 9:28; Mt. 17:5).</p> |
| <p>c. Moses was glorified. (Ex. 34:29-35)</p> | <p>c. Elijah was glorified. (2 Kg. 2:11ff)</p> | <p>c. Jesus was transfigured. (Mt. 17:2; 2 Pt. 1:17)</p> |
| <p>d. Moses led the Exodus from Egyptian bondage, mediated the Law and the Old Covenant.</p> | <p>d. Elijah turned Israel back to Javéh and restored true religion in Israel. (1 Kg. 18)</p> | <p>d. Jesus was to lead His Exodus from sin's bondage, mediate the New Covenant and God's new Law. (Lk. 9:31; Heb. 8:6)</p> |

2. Their departure from the world contrasted with His.

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| <p>a. The death of Moses was immediate and painless while he enjoyed undiminished vigor of health and God buried him. (Dt. 34:5-7)</p> | <p>b. Elijah was exempted from death by a triumphant departure in a chariot of fire directly to heaven. (2 Kg. 2:11)</p> | <p>c. Jesus would endure a painful, ignominious death. (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12) Only by suffering a bitter death would He enter into His glory. (Heb. 2:9; 12:2)</p> |
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3. Both men who had seemed too great to die had been victorious over death, and so would He.

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| <p>a. Moses had indeed died and was buried by God Himself, but now stood "in glory," evidence of his victory over death. (Lk. 9:31)</p> | <p>b. Elijah had not died, but thereby proved that death could be defeated by God's power. (Lk. 9:31)</p> | <p>c. Jesus, though He must truly suffer death, would defeat it by God's power. (Ac. 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; etc.)</p> |
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4. Another lesson from the appearance of the heavenly pair is that death, or removal from the earth, is not the final end of one's place in God's plan. Moses and Elijah, although separated in time by many centuries, are suddenly united and ushered into Jesus' presence for this specific mission. The dismayed disciples, horrified

at the thought of Jesus' abandoning them by voluntary death, are suddenly reminded that death does not bring man to an end, nor does it terminate his mission and service to God. Quite unexpectedly for these defeatist disciples, there appeared UNTO THEM Moses and Elijah and "in glory" too! (Lk. 9:31)

Does this latter expression mean that they too were transfigured, appearing in all their moral, heavenly glory that one day we too shall share, or does "in glory" refer to the sphere in which they were seen, i.e. they were surrounded with heavenly brightness? Luke seems to imply the latter: "they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him," i.e. Jesus was gloriously transfigured, but not necessarily those who "appeared in glory" with Him. (Lk. 9:32) The difference in terminology may be occasioned by the distinctions in glory: His was the essential glory of Deity, whereas theirs was that of righteous men made perfect. (Cf. Heb. 12:23) Their specific character or appearance should cause us no more difficulty than for that of angels.

As *Moses and Elijah* stood bodily before the Apostles in this vision, they were evidence that God can cause them to appear whenever and wherever needed, and that all who have departed this life really exist in God's presence and He can easily glorify them and again be served by them, even though they were once in the grave, especially His own Son.

Talking with him. They discussed His "departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (Lk. 9:31) This is the entire point of this personal appearance of the chief representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Whereas the Apostles refused Jesus' predictions of His death as an idea contradictory to the basic concepts of the Old Testament, here *Moses and Elijah* unhesitatingly discuss His death as perfectly in harmony with all they taught. Were they talking about His victory from their own point of view? After all, they too would have been redeemed by His suffering, and now that their Redeemer was nearing his final goal, His accomplishment of their salvation would undoubtedly have been on their minds and cause for their gratitude.

The "departure" (*éxodos*) was no unavoidable accident, but something He Himself was shortly to "fulfil," i.e. carry out of His own free choice. (Remember "must" [*deí*] of Mt. 16:21) But what, exactly, is this "departure" or *éxodos*?

1. *Exodos* can be a military term, referring to an expedition, a march, a sally or a sortie, a sudden issuing of troops from a defensive position to attack the enemy. (Rocci, 670) Does Luke mean Jesus was conferring with Moses and Elijah about the "breakthrough" which He would accomplish at Jerusalem? The plan of God, while holding Satan's forces at bay for millennia, had moved steadily forward in a defensive posture. Even God's Son had preached positively, limiting Himself merely to skirmishes with Satan. But at the battle of Jerusalem, Jesus would launch an all-out attack that would permanently destroy Satan's capacity to win. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 42:1-4) Since our Lord intended to win this battle in the only way it could be won, i.e. by giving His own innocent life for the life of the world, "the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God," the breakthrough must necessarily take place at the cross and the open tomb. (See also on 17:22.) This meaning of *éxodos* comes out at the same place as the one following:
2. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 176f, emphasis his) elaborates the picture thus:

Exodos is exactly the same word as the English word *exodus*. It is the word which is always used of the departure of the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, into the unknown way of the desert, which in the end was going to lead them to the Promised Land. The word *exodus* is the word which describes what we might well call the most adventurous journey in human history, a journey in which a whole people in utter trust in God went out into the unknown. *That is precisely what Jesus was going to do.* In utter trust in God He was going to set out on the tremendous adventure of that journey to Jerusalem, a journey beset with perils, a journey involving a cross, but a journey issuing in glory . . . It is as if the greatest figures of Israel's history came to Jesus, as He was setting out on the last and greatest adventure into the unknown, and told Him to go on . . . witnessed to Jesus that He was on the right way, and bade Him go out on His adventurous *exodus* to Jerusalem and to Calvary.

This way, Jesus stands at approximately the same place Moses stood on Mount Horeb reflecting upon his exodus which he would accomplish in Egypt. (Ex. 3, 4) The Son of God must go to His Egypt too, Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8). There He would become the new Deliverer to lead the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) out of their

bondage to sin. Thus, all that Jesus accomplished at Jerusalem, His death as the perfect Pascal Lamb of God, His burial, His resurrection and ascension to glory, was but the accomplishment of the actual departure. This is His praiseworthy victory, not over a defeated Pharaoh (Ex. 15:1-18), but over Satan himself. (Cf. Rev. 7:1-17; 14:1-5; 15:2-4) Then, the Mediator of a New Covenant would lead His people past Mount Zion, the new Sinai, where His new Law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Ro. 8:2) would be "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Heb. 13:18-24; Jude 3), and then on through the wilderness trek (Heb. 13:14), and right on into our Promised Land, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. The departure of Israel from Egypt was an exodus in triumph by the power of God, and so is "His exodus which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem!"

In short, the Apostles needed to return to their Bible and re-evaluate their own concepts, bringing them into harmony with what Moses in the Law and the prophets really believed and taught. What we have learned as a common characteristic of Matthew's Gospel, and not uncommon in the others, was a real revelation to these disciples: "EVERYTHING written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms MUST BE FULFILLED" (Lk. 24:44; see also Mt. 26:54, 56) If the prophets are not shaken at the thought of a crucified Messiah, why should the disciples? In fact, Peter later admitted: "The prophets prophesied . . . predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory." (1 Pt. 1:10f)

D. PETER'S PRESUMPTUOUS PERPETUATION OF A PERNICIOUS PANTHEON

17:4 Until this moment the disciples had been passive participants in the pageant. Now, however, Moses and Elijah began to take their departure. (Lk. 9:33) Peter suddenly came alive to try to capture the rapture of that precious moment. The fisherman's ecstatic outburst is marred by the following facts:

1. It is paralyzing: **Lord, it is good for us to be here.** Peter, the man of action, suggests a move that would stop all action, without even realizing the contradiction. Never one to be still for long and much preferring to be busy doing something, he, ironically, desires to prolong this exquisite moment of closeness to God and glory,

forgetting that the action of God is to take place, not merely on this mountain of golden splendor, but down in the valley of daily ministry and on redemption's cross. Does Peter's "good to be HERE" have as its anithesis: "bad to be down THERE among unbelieving, conniving Pharisees and other miserable wretches, enduring sinners' hostility and battling the myriads of evils that plague the earth"? Even ONE booth would be too many, if it meant to stay forever on the mount and ignore world need. Does Peter, in his thrill to keep the Feast with Moses and Elijah, forget the other Apostles, the waiting crowd and needy humanity? How long did he hope to prolong it all? Surely he did not intend to desert the world's needs. However, from this viewpoint, if God's Feast of Tabernacles has come, there would not be any needy humanity to worry about, for all would be supplied, all the world's ills healed.

2. It is perplexed. While both Mark and Luke affirm that Peter "did not know what to say," nor did he really "know what he said," nevertheless he apparently felt he must say something, and blurted out the first instinctive suggestion that came to mind. The very departure of these heavenly visitors may have triggered him to act to try to detain them. But it was unnecessary for him to react, since the entire Transfiguration was even then taking place to correct his own mistaken Christology. He was talking when he should have been listening and learning! **And Peter answered**, does not mean he was answering something addressed to him, but rather that he was responding to the marvelous experience in general and probably to detain the great OT worthies.
3. It perpetuates what must of necessity be temporary.

- a. It is presumptuous to suggest to the Lord of glory what is right and proper! True, he begins humbly: **If you wish**. Nevertheless, he did not realize the audacity and absurdity of his suggestion. The absurdity of his idea lies not so much in his providing material shelters from the mountain cold for the glorified Jesus and His heavenly guests, as in believing that God's great Feast of Tabernacles had come. (Cf. Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Zech. 14:16-19; Dt. 16:13-15; see also Edersheim, *Life*, II, 148-165 for descriptions of rabbinical views of this feast and its typical significance, as also of Jewish traditional observances.) If in the Messianic Kingdom the remnant of the nations would participate with Israel at the great Tabernacle Feast, symbol of God's bringing them out of this life's wanderings into the blessing of eternal peace, perhaps that moment has come! If so, Peter

would make **here three tabernacles**, forgetting that the Feast of Tabernacles lay in the near future (Jn. 7:2f, 10; Mt. 19:1; Mk. 10:1; Lk. 9:51), the proposal of Peter to construct the little huts of branches from trees or shrubs may have been prompted by the realization that they were even then approaching the season for it. The actual materials would have been near at hand on the mountain down at the timberline. Peter's natural, human desire to eternalize this breakthrough of glorious reality is understandable, but it reveals just one more time the fact that he did not comprehend the meaning of the event. This was not, as the Apostles were wishing, the beginning of the final and definitive, but merely a prophetic and fleeting anticipation of it. God's final day of rest had not yet arrived, nor could it until after His day of judgment. And there had been no day of mercy before the day of wrath! Peter presumptuously wanted to dispense with the cross of Christ and freeze history right at that moment, not dreaming that, were he to have his way, he would have been swept out of God's presence forever along with the rest of us!

- b. Not only does he desire to prolong the mountain-top experience, but in the very act of providing **THREE** temporary lodges and placing them at the same level with Jesus, he perpetuates the authority of spokesmen whose messages served their day well, but from this day forward must rightly fade into the background behind the more glorious final revelation of Jesus Christ. How can Peter, who had but recently confessed Jesus to be God's Son and Messiah, now consistently consider even such great and holy men as Moses and Elijah to be at the same level of importance with Him? Is Jesus, after all, really just "one of the prophets"?! (Cf. Mt. 16:14) What is this, but the creation of a pernicious pantheon of personages, in which the definitive revelation of Him who is the final word from the Father is relegated to the status of lesser prophets.

His thinking is still contaminated by his worldly Christology and by his lack of comprehension about how the Messianic mission must be carried out.

E. THE PATERNAL PRONOUNCEMENT OF THE PEERLESS PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

17:5 The correction of Peter's nonsense was instantaneous, even **while he was yet speaking. A bright cloud overshadowed them**, apparently enveloping them, because Luke mentions the disciples' fear "as they entered the cloud." (Lk. 9:34) Although sunny-bright clouds naturally form around a mountaintop like that of Hermon, the special characteristics of this one mark it as supernaturally produced: its brightness, the disciples' extraordinary fear, the Father's voice out of it, its sudden appearance and disappearance at the right moments, and, finally, its possible theological significance. This *cloud* radiated the characteristically celestial brilliance with which Jesus was invested. Like other symbols in this unworldly vision, this *cloud* was part of Israel's unique history. The radiant cloud was the classic symbol of God's presence among His people to lead and bless them. (Ex. 24:16f; 34:5; 40:34-38; Lev. 9:6, 23f; Dt. 5:22-24; 1 Kg. 8:10f; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 7:1-3; cf. Isa. 2:10, 19, 21; 4:5, 6; Ezek. 3:12; 8:4; 10:4, 18f; 11:22f; 43:2ff) However, more significantly for our context, God appeared to Israel in the luminous cloud to vindicate the mission and authority of His servants. (Ex. 16:10; Nu. 12:5, 10; 16:19, 42; 20:6) In exactly this same way God had appeared to Israel before to say, "This is my trusted servant, Moses: listen to him!" If the Almighty could not tolerate for an instant the neglect of His servants the prophets, how much less can the Father overlook even the well-meaning abasement of His Son! God's Good Confession, although directed to the disciples, would prove a third encouragement to Jesus.

Three distinct, meaningful messages were given, which, Peter affirms, conferred honor and glory from God the Father when the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory: (2 Pt. 1:17)

1. THE FATHER HERE IDENTIFIES JESUS AS HIS OWN SON: **This is my beloved Son.** By contrast, Moses and Elijah, highest exponents of the prophetic office in the economy of God, are but "servants in His house." (Cf. Heb. 3:1-5) Jesus, too, stands last and highest in the long line of God's prophets (Cf. Heb. 1:1ff; Mt. 21:11, 46; Mk. 6:15a; Lk. 7:16, 39; 13:33; 24:19; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17). Nevertheless, He is not to be classified as merely "one of the prophets" (Mt. 16:14), however honorable and holy they had been. He is the very fulfilment of the Law and the prophets. (Mt. 5:17; Lk. 24:44f) He is not just "God's Prophet"; He is God's SON, a

word expressing a relationship so exalted and intimate that no mere prophet ever reached this pinnacle of greatness.

In effect, this word from God says that Jesus is right on course existentially. Just as there is a father at the foot of this mountain pleading for his only begotten son (Lk. 9:38), so here at the summit the Father intercedes on behalf of His only Son, also suffering, not from disease, but from ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of His followers! He affirms that Jesus is really what He claims to be. Peter had earlier confessed Jesus to be God's Son, on the basis of God's revelations made through the words and works of His Son (See notes on 16:17.) Now the Father Himself confirms that conclusion by revealing it directly from heaven.

2. THE FATHER HERE IDENTIFIES THE PURPOSES AND PROGRAM OF JESUS AS HIS OWN: **in whom I am well pleased.** This divine verdict announces that Jesus is right on course morally and tactically. The mission of Jesus, however unworldly, impractical and seemingly unreasonable, however contradictory of human plans and aims, is well-pleasing to God! Jesus' manifestly waning popularity, approaching suffering and shameful death are not objective indicators of the ultimate failure of His mission. "He will continue to refuse to be a political Messiah of the Jews, He will stride into certain death by the hand of wicked men, He will be rejected and despised by the people, but **I am well pleased** with Him!" At Jesus' baptism the Father had expressed His approval of the Son's determination "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15, 17). Here, He repeats His expression of approval, now of the Son's determination to give Himself to death as humanity's Redeemer (Mt. 16:21-28)
3. NOW THE FATHER IDENTIFIES THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AS HIS OWN: **Hear ye Him!** God announces that Jesus is right on course theologically. This makes Jesus' "prophetic word more sure" too (cf. 2 Pt. 1:19), because God has identified Him as "the Prophet like Moses" to whom men must listen or be damned. (Dt. 18:15ff LXX where the verb form is almost identical: future indicative for present imperative) This order to listen to Jesus intends to be a deliberate and solemn endorsement of all that Jesus had taught, especially concerning His own humiliation and obedience unto death as well as the glory thereafter, and concerning the follower's obligation to bear his own cross. (Mt. 16:21-28) God means that everything Jesus says on this and any other subject is totally true and in harmony with God's eternal purpose. This command

represents the whole point of the Transfiguration. To miss it is to fail to comprehend the entire scene.

How badly the disciples needed to hear this voice! Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary* 1955, 420) describes these men:

They had been anxious to hear more of what Moses and Elijah had to say; they were commanded to concentrate their attention on Jesus and to yield implicit obedience to Him. The apostles must have been sore tempted in recent months to listen to the bewildering cross-currents of the conflicting desires and plans of the national leaders and the multitudes; they were now ordered to listen to Jesus and obey Him.

The exalted preeminence thus bestowed on Jesus and the transformation of His appearance to harmonize with dignity of His position, and the manner in which His divine majesty was displayed never before nor since witnessed on the earth,—all this would be needed as a steadying influence against the rapidly mounting opposition and conflicts with the hierarchy and political heads of the nation.

It is as if God were saying for all the world to hear: "Listen to Jesus, not Moses and Elijah nor the Law and the prophets as final, not the suggestions of Peter, not the pretensions of popery, not the spiritualistic experiences of mystics nor the rationalistic propositions of skeptics, but the voice of Jesus of Nazareth!" He is the final voice of God, so the fundamental attitude of the disciples is not creative theology, but listening and obedience! Man must give up trying to be the measure of truth and become the disciple and obedient servant of Him who is the Truth. Although every disciple, as a human being, has a right to his own personal opinion and free choice, the "Listen to Him!" urges each to deny himself in order to let Jesus lead and decide. Jesus is our only THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGIAN.

F. THE PROSTRATE, PERPLEXED APOSTLES PERSUADED TO PROMOTE THEIR PRESENT PRINCE

17:6 Although the disciples had been exceedingly afraid before (Mk. 9:6), especially as the cloud enveloped them (Lk. 9:34), they had been more or less passive spectators listening to a discussion that did not require their direct participation. But Peter's wrong-headed reaction brought them immediately into the picture, so God reacted instantly by addressing them directly. **And when the disciples**

heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. The voice of the Almighty so overawed them that their instinctive reaction, typically oriental, is to hurl themselves on their knees with their forehead touching the ground. God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Ti. 6:16), so, when He approaches man, His presence is unbearably terrifying. (Cf. Israel's reaction to the voice of God at Sinai. Ex. 20:18-20; Dt. 5:22-27) Sinful mortals have reason to tremble in the presence of the unmitigated brightness of the glorious holiness of the living God and in that of His messengers. (Cf. Gn. 3:10; Ex. 3:6; Dt. 9:19 = Heb. 12:21; Isa. 6:5; Dan. 8:17; 10:9-11; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 44:4; Rev. 1:17)

17:7 And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise and be not afraid. The touch of Jesus brought them back, not to reality, but back to the events of time and earth. (They testify to the vividness of the reality of all they had witnessed.) They had just seen a glimpse of the world of eternity and Paradise, and the program is now over. They must return to the equally real world of time and tribulation, the world into which Jesus Himself had come. He loved them, so He walked over to them, stooped to their level and tenderly laid His hands on their shoulders to encourage them to rise and have no fear. (Cf. Dan. 10:2-19; Rev. 1:17)

17:8 And lifting up their eyes means that they had remained in the prostrate position from the moment God spoke from heaven. This is the first time they dare raise their heads. Because Jesus had gently encouraged them, they did so. **They saw no one**, because they actually started "looking around" (Mk. 9:8) to see what had happened to Moses and Elijah. The result of this fruitless search is the more impressive because they had desired that Moses and Elijah remain forever present, and because God had ordered: "Listen to Jesus!" Now, literally in this symbolic vision, and later in theological reality, Moses and the prophets faded away as the final arbiters of human destiny, leaving *Jesus only*. The brusqueness with which the vision of Moses and Elijah faded serves to underline the fact that God has given to the disciples (hence to the Church) no other, no higher final authority than **Jesus only**. This is the final reality that must guide the life of the believers. The NT itself reflects this truth. In fact, from one end of the NT to the other, it is always about Him who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith, the Prophet, Priest and King of the new era of God's grace. If men miss this, they miss everything, for this is the one point of this entire event, that is more important than anything else of significance.

G. PROHIBITION OF PREMATURE PUBLICATION BECAUSE OF PREDOMINANT PRECONCEPTIONS AND PREJUDICE

17:9 **And as they were coming down from the mountain.** When they made their descent is not told, so we have no inkling about whether the Transfiguration occurred by day or night. Nor is it clear how soon after that event they started down. Not even Luke's note, "On the next day when they came down . . ." (Lk. 9:37), helps, because, before starting their descent, they may have camped on the mountain one more night after a daytime Transfiguration. The fatigue of the Apostles, evident during the event itself (Lk. 9:32), is no indication of night-time either, since they could have been worn out by the ascent up into the rarified air of the peak.

Jesus commanded them. This very order tests their readiness to "Hear ye Him!" Can they begin obeying instantly? How the other Apostles would have pumped them with questions, cajoling them to furnish information about that wonderful something which must have taken place on the mountain, which was visible in the changed attitude of the three Apostles upon their descent. The Three obeyed the Lord faithfully and "kept the saying to themselves." (Mk. 9:10; Lk. 9:36) By so doing, they proved their discipleship to be true, at least in this point. Others, ordered to silence, almost invariably disobeyed Jesus. (Mk. 1:44f) They probably justified themselves: "He just cannot really mean what He says!" These Apostles trusted Him to know best, and so obeyed. His order contains three elements:

1. The prohibitive limitation: **Tell . . . to no man.** While this is another case of Messianic reserve (cfr. 8:4; 12:16) whereby Jesus wisely restrained popular Messianic excitement by simply prohibiting its divulging, why should the inner circle of disciples not share information so essential to reinforce the faith in Him, for example, of a Judas Iscariot? Why *tell* absolutely *no man*? Luke's expression (9:36) implies that the Three understood Jesus to mean they were to maintain absolute silence. Jesus knew His men and He had granted the vision of His glory only to those three, among all His disciples, with whom He could trust the information. He well knew what the others would have done with this kind of information, so He simply withheld it by instructing the Three not to disclose it. In fact, the others proved only too clearly their unfitness by their faithlessness and failure at the mountain's base. (See on 17:14ff.) Further, as is likely, even the Three themselves

had not yet digested the full significance of this event and needed time to ponder it in the context of later teaching and events.

2. The content: *the vision*. With this convenient summarizing word Jesus intends to include every part of the disciples' mountaintop experience. But does this word tell us anything about the nature of the experience?
 - a. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 669) fears that to call a "vision" everything that the Apostles saw, would somehow render unhistorical the transfigured appearance of Jesus, except in the mind of the three Apostles. He urges that *tò hórama*, here rendered "the vision," be translated "what has been seen" or "what you have seen," finding confirmation in the verb forms of Mark (9:9) and Luke (9:36). He feels that the distinction between subjective and objective appearance would really make a significant difference for the history. We agree that the objectiveness of Jesus' personal transformation is a fact: "He was transfigured before them" (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2), "the appearance of his countenance was altered" (Lk. 9:29a), His garments became a glistening white. (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29) If this is so, then, by what criteria may we distinguish one part of the narrative as a "vision" from another part, calling it objective reality?
 - b. But the distinction between the subjective and the objective nature of *the vision* would not make a difference for the HISTORY; it would only make a difference for some of the HISTORIANS. After all, the eyewitnesses of this event are sufficient in number and their other well-known qualifications as inspired Apostles are sufficient and convincing that they can render impartial testimony. The real problem is not "visions" versus "real and historical," but a problem of prejudice in the reader who would deny the reality and importance of WHATEVER occurred during this event. Must we conclude that the "visions" given to Ananias (Ac. 9:10) or to Saul (Ac. 9:12) or to Cornelius (10:3) or to Peter (Ac. 10:17, 19; 11:5) or to Paul (Ac. 16:9, 10; 18:9), or Peter's impression (Ac. 12:9) were any less historical, because they were subjective rather than objective? Just because God projects a "vision" on the subjective consciousness of the viewer does not mean that He is not objectively revealing what they really see in this subjective way. We are dealing with historical fact either way.
 - c. To say that a vision cannot be collective, i.e. given to more than one person at a time (because such would smack of mass

hallucination), or to say that it would be seen by only one person, misses the point. In fact, when God gives visions He can render them visible to one or a thousand as He deems it necessary. Besides, our experience with the world of the spirit and visions is so limited as to disarm any dogmatism about whether any true experience of that world is "subjectively" or "objectively" experienced.

- d. "Vision" does not necessarily mean something unreal or artificially imagined and which became the subject of myth. The word *vision* here is a summary of what happened and is itself clarified by the narration of the event itself, and for this reason must not be used as a definition for that for which it is only a summary, especially where it is flexible enough to refer to "what they saw" (objective) as well as a subjective experience ("vision"). Peter, himself an eyewitness, forever distinguishes this event from even the slightest suspicion of fraud or invention: "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God . . . we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." (2 Pt. 1:16-19)
3. The terminus: **until the Son of man be risen from the dead.** The basic reason for this particular time limitation lies in its appropriateness:
 - a. It would have accomplished no immediate good to have publicized the event:
 - (1) If people believed it true, it would only have ignited misguided zeal and unfounded hopes, hindering the progress of understanding the true, spiritual aims of the King and His Kingdom.
 - (2) If they disbelieved it, they would have to doubt the truthfulness of the fishermen who told it, and the time is not yet come for their powerful, unique, independent witnessing. Later, He would empower them with their own supernatural deeds to serve as credentials to convince men to believe their testimony.
 - b. To keep it a secret would have pushed the eyewitnesses to meditate on its meaning, i.e. what is there about such a glorious event which occurred at such a time that, while crying to be told, must be kept confidential? Time is required to unlearn what is so deeply ingrained, so they must be silent in order to learn.

- c. The death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus to glory would explain the meaning of the Transfiguration. These evidences of Jesus' divine Lordship would be completed by His sending the Holy Spirit. (Ac. 2:33) His crucifixion was required to dash their misguided hopes and His resurrection would unveil His true glory. Despite all His explanations given prior to the actual occurrence of these facts, they still did not make the proper connections, because even now they are "questioning what the rising from the dead meant!" (Mk. 9:10) They understood resurrection as such, but could not mentally connect it in any rational way with the Son of man. Again, understanding is far easier after some unexpected event has taken place and is explained, than with all the explanations given prior to its taking place. The disciples' misconceptions are psychologically understandable, however, on the basis of their emotional rejection of any concept of His death. Resurrection, as a solution to death, would not interest anyone so completely convinced that his Master shall not die. Even now, when the Master alluded to His resurrection, it was as if He had introduced an absolutely foreign subject. Surely this Master of superb figurative language must mean "resurrection" in the metaphorical sense!
- d. Silence would also tend to keep them from boasting about the privileged intimacy with glory to which they had been admitted, lest they be too elated by the abundance of revelations. (Cf. 2 Co. 12:7) A man finds difficulty in bragging about something he cannot even talk about! Pride would be as serious a problem for these disciples as for the others. (Cf. Mk. 9:34 and notes on 18:1 and 20:20-28)

H. THE PONDERING OVER A PIVOTAL PERSONALITY

17:10 Having just heard the living voice of Elijah in glory, the disciples think they see a connection between that and another concept popular in Israel: **And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?** To the unaware, this question would appear to be a gross non sequitur, especially the word "then" which logically links this question with His prohibition to proclaim the Transfiguration until after His resurrection. But the connection is there, so intimate and so obvious to a Jewish reader that Matthew did not even need to express it. The disciples' perplexity

is composed of the following elements:

1. "What the rising from the dead meant" in reference to the Son of man. (Mk. 9:10; Mt. 17:9)
2. "Elijah must first come," or chronological order in God's timing.
3. Whether Messianic prophecy is fulfilled in the brief appearance of Elijah or not.
4. The inexplicable injunction to silence, if Elijah has truly come.
5. They ignored an alternative sequence, an "Elijah" already come who fulfilled the prophecy without being Elijah the Tishbite.

So, if the implications of the disciples' question had been inked in, their meaning would read something like this: "You just affirmed that you, the Son of man and our true Messiah, must rise from the dead, implying that you must die. This implies a time when death is possible. But the scholars teach that Elijah must come BEFORE the Messiah, in order to reform the world with its evil and death. Since we know you are God's Messiah ALREADY come, and since we just saw Elijah appear with you in glory AFTER your own appearance on earth, (1) on what basis do the scribes affirm that Elijah must come FIRST? (2) Does what we saw have anything to do with the fulfilment of the prophecy of Elijah's coming? (3) If so, why did he not remain to do the work expected of him, instead of disappearing almost immediately? (4) But if he must yet morally reform the world, eliminating man's rebellion against God, would this not eliminate any need, yes, even the possibility for you to die? What possible purpose could the death of the Messiah serve in a restored society? If it is restored, a Messianic death would be meaningless, since all murderous opposition to Him would have already ceased. (5) Last, why not speak openly about Elijah's appearance? After all, our testimony to having seen him is evidence that he has come and that you are, therefore, the Christ!"

The Apostles are not unaware of the Malachian prophecy (Mal. 4:5, 6), so their question does not mean: "Where did the scribes get their idea?" (See on 17:11, 12)

Just how widespread the knowledge of the "Elijah-prophecy" really was is illustrated by the fact that even courtiers of Herod Antipas knew of it! (Mk. 6:15) Priests and Levites from Jerusalem had interrogated John the Baptist himself whether he were Elijah or not. (Jn. 1:21)

Rather, they mean, "With what propriety do the scribes take such a

position on Malachi's prophecy?" **Elijah must first come** may have been the scribes' rebuttal to the disciples as the former argued that Jesus could not be the Messiah since the promised Elijah had not yet appeared.

17:11 **Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things.** Note the unsectarian fairness of Jesus: when the scribes represent truth correctly, as here, He is glad to recognize it. (Cf. Mt. 23:2, 3) He loves truth above party. (Cf. 1 Co. 13:6) They were correct in their analysis at these points:

1. The absolute certainty of Elijah's coming was based on God's ordering: **Elijah must come** (*Elian dei elthein*).
2. The sequence of the comings was correct: first that of Elijah and then that of the Messiah.
3. The purpose of Elijah's coming was correctly seen as restoration.
4. Their only mistake was in literalizing the prophecy, by expecting Elijah the Tishbite personally (See the LXX!), and by exaggerating, or completely missing, the spiritual, individual, voluntary character of the results of his mission.

Elijah is coming and shall restore. How is this future tense to be reconciled with the Lord's next statement that "Elijah has already come"? He means that their free quotation from Malachi's book and time, then yet future, is correct. However, what was future for Malachi has already had its fulfilment in John the Baptist who has come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17), even if he was not Elijah in person. (Jn. 1:21, 25) See my notes on 11:14 where this prophecy is discussed more fully.

And shall restore all things is a free, but good interpretation of Elijah's mission. In fact, *restore* (*apokatastései*) is the word used by the LXX translators. In Malachi's thought the *all things* is clearly moral renovation.

MALACHI HIMSELF IN HEBREW:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

(Mal. 4:5, 6)

MALACHI TRANSLATED BY LXX:

Behold I send you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and famous day of the Lord comes,

who will restore (a) heart of (a) father to (his) son and a man's heart to his neighbor, lest I come and smite the land completely.

(LXX = 3:22, 23)

GABRIEL'S INTERPRETATION:

He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

(Lk. 1:17)

The "fathers" in Malachi are the godly ancestors of the corrupt contemporaries of Malachi, as well as those of later times, "the children." Neither shares the same attitude toward God as the other. A common love for God which should have united them is missing. The mission of the great "Elijah" is to correct this by putting the godly heart of the fathers in the place of the degenerate heart of their descendents, and by leading the children to be like-minded with their godly ancestors and by turning the ungodly heart of the descendents toward what made their god-fearing ancestors what they were, lovers of God. Thus, the "Elijah" would prepare the way of the Lord to His people, that at His coming He might not have to smite the land with a curse. (Keil, *Minor Prophets*, II, 472)

The scribes with their hoary traditions and exaggerated notions about this text had been listening for the first whispers of an automatic, universal, almost mechanical renovation of the present order, a restoration with only superficial overtones, accomplished through the personal ministry of Elijah the Tishbite himself. (Cf. Sirach 48:10; see also Edersheim, *Life*, II, Appendix VIII, 706ff; Append. IX, 737 on Eccles. 48:10, 11 and relative references.) This, however, was not the purpose of Malachi's great "Elijah" nor the business of John the Baptist. For a people far from God and righteousness, the restoring of the original, physical aspects of their land, or even the returning of Israel to its home, are not of first importance. **Restoring all things** begins with getting men and women to repent and turn to God! Helping men to believe in Jesus Christ is fundamental to any attempts at **restoring all things**, and, until this is done, unregenerate men admitted to a restored Paradise will turn it into a hell on earth in five minutes. Repentance is the only real restoration of the proper state of things; nothing else even comes close! The only alternative God offered was destruction because of a refusal to repent. The entire message of Malachi was aimed at bringing men to an awareness that only in this condition of soul would men be ready to receive the Messiah, and that only in this spirit would they be ready to see in Him the realization of all God's promises and the hopes of their fathers. Repentance was the only way to avert destruction, not provoked by a world of nature out of joint, but by men who paid no attention to their God! But the materialistic, worldly-minded rabbis could not fathom this nor recognize the true realization of this kind of thinking when it was put into practice and preached by someone who restored men to fellowship with God like no one else had done for centuries. (See Jesus' sermon on John, Mt. 11) Ironically,

Jesus Himself was mistaken for "the Elijah" by His contemporaries, probably on the grounds of the marvellous moral reformation He was preaching. (Cf. Lk. 9:8, 19)

17:12 **But I say to you**, as I have already told you before (Mt. 11:14), Elijah is come already.

At this point, according to Mark (9:12b), Jesus made an interesting appeal to the prophecies: "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man? That he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt." (Note Tischendorf's punctuation which suggests that Jesus asked a question about the Messianic prophecies and then answered it.) Note the intentional parallelism in Mark: (9:12, 13)

12 How is it written of the Son of man? that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt (as it is written of Him)	13 Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.
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Was the persecution of the "Elijah" (John the Baptist) predicted in Scripture: "they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him"? Or does this phrase refer only generally to the coming "Elijah"? If this latter, then Jesus is only filling in the details of the fulfilment of the prophecy, while affirming that "Elijah has come . . . as it is written of him" (that he would). The fate of John is, then, a parenthetical remark, not specifically prophesied.

Some believe that what was written of the original Elijah, describing his rejection and suffering at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel, has had its historical repetition in the rejection and suffering of John at the hands of Herod and Herodias.

It is as if Jesus said, "Although the scribes do correctly tell you of the coming and restoration of Elijah, they do not tell you of the suffering of the Christ, but the SCRIPTURES DO. You have as much Scriptural reason to expect the despised and suffering Messiah as you do the coming Elijah, and should not lay so much emphasis on the one to the neglect of the other." While on the basis of Scripture the scribes were perfectly orthodox in insisting that **Elijah must first come**, they had totally missed its true, proper fulfilment in the person of John the Baptist. But these same theologians, so adamant in asserting that Jesus cannot be the Christ since Elijah had supposedly not

appeared to lay the necessary groundwork for the Messiah, need to re-examine other Bible prophecies concerning the humiliation and suffering of the Messiah, to see that their theological grasp of the Messiahship was faulty. A correct reading of the Messianic prophecies might lead to a truer understanding of the Elijah of Malachi, and vice versa.

Elijah is come already, and they knew him not. (Cf. Mt. 11:13f) **But they did to him whatever they pleased.** The ungodly in Israel laughed him off as a brassy-voiced revivalist or a religious crank. (Mt. 11:18; Lk. 7:30) Or they sent delegations to challenge his authority. (Jn. 1:19-25) Or else they cowardly surrendered his innocent head to the vengeful and immoral. (Mt. 14:1-12) **They knew him not!** If people could not recognize John the Baptist as the fulfilment of the great "Elijah" prophecy, what better results could be expected of them as they interpreted the great Messianic prophecies? And it was precisely such faulty interpretation as this that had misled the Apostles, and which had required that Jesus correct their false notions by being transfigured before them.

In answer to the Apostles' implied objection that Elijah's moral restoration would automatically obviate the monstrous death of the Messiah at the hands of the rulers of the elect people of God, Jesus responds, in effect, that not even the benefic ministry of the promised Elijah would eliminate or even compromise man's liberty. In fact, in the personal case of him who was "the Elijah," John the Baptist, **they did to him whatever they pleased.** Moral reformation does not mean universal destruction of human freedom to reject God's will or messengers. God has no intention of making people be good who do not want to, however much the theorizing scribes wished it. (See notes on 13:9; "Apologetic Value" after 13:43, esp. point 2. Also 13:10) In fact, even the prophecy of Malachi did not promise unqualified success: "Behold, I will send you Elijah . . . He will turn the hearts . . . lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Mal. 4:5, 6) What if the hearts refuse to turn "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes"? Some would hearken; most would not, so all that would be left for God to do was to smite Israel with the ban of utter destruction.

So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands, because they would not recognize Him either! John the Apostle, later, had to comment that Jesus "was in the world . . . yet the world knew him not. He came to His own home and His own people received Him not!" (Jn. 1:10, 11) Had the princes of this world recognized the

wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Co. 2:8) The fate already befallen John also lay in store for Jesus, as already intimated in 11:11-19. (See also on 14:1-13 Introduction.)

And as the prophet Elijah predicted by Malachi appeared in John the Baptist, so did the Lord come to His temple in the appearing of Jesus Christ. . . . Israel rejected its Savior, and was smitten with the ban at the destruction of Jerusalem in the Roman war. (Keil, *Minor Prophets*, II, 473f)

This second Passion Prediction mercilessly thrust the Apostles back into the fiery furnace of anxiety over Jesus' impending death, but the Transfiguration had now furnished them significant pieces in the puzzle whereby they could more readily grasp the paradoxical terms on which Jesus intended to be God's Messiah: the glorious Son of God and, at the same time, the suffering Servant of Javéh.

17:13 Then understood the disciples that he spake unto them of John the Baptist. Jesus had formally and publicly identified His forerunner as the coming "Elijah," but He did so with this premise: "If you are willing to receive it." (Mt. 11:14) Although they had probably heard Him say it, they obviously had not been open to receive it. The reticence to believe that John was really "the Elijah," while surprising in these ex-disciples of John (cf. Jn. 1:35-40 notes), is decidedly comprehensible. Since their vision of what the Elijah must restore had not matched the actual ministry of their former teacher, now that Jesus categorically declared the prophecy's fulfilment in John, they see that they had already missed the right interpretation as badly as did their scribes. Once more, in this humiliating way, they learn that the plan of God is different from their own schemes. Nevertheless, having beheld Jesus' glory, they now have strength to continue in His discipleship like never before. God Himself has convinced them that, everything else notwithstanding, they can trust Jesus to know what He is talking about and where He is leading them.

By pointing to its undoubted fulfilment Jesus has just authenticated Malachi 4:5, 6 as true prophecy and a trustworthy witness to God's will. Additional proof of the authority of that text is the proper, unshaken confidence of the Jewish scribes that divine necessity required that Malachi's words be fulfilled ("Elijah must first come"). This evidences Jewish acceptance of the prophecy and the book that contains it as backed by the authority of God.

The relative positions represented in this discussion may be

represented graphically as follows:

	MALACHI 4:5, 6	THE SCRIBES (and Apostles too)	JESUS
SEQUENCE	1. Elijah, "my messenger" (Mal. 3:1; 4:5f) 2. Messiah, "the Lord, the messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1-3)	1. Elijah comes first. Disciples imply: "Did Elijah come second, i.e. at Transfiguration?" 2. Messiah comes second. Disciples imply: "Did you come first before Elijah?"	1. Elijah already came first = John the Baptist. 2. Messiah = Jesus
MEANING	1. Elijah will come. 2. He will bring restoration of hearts. 3. Lest I smite the land with a curse.	1. "He will come personally." 2. "The restoration will be automatic, universal, mechanical and material." 3. "The curse is improbable, being rendered unnecessary by Elijah's success."	1. "One like Elijah" 2. "The restoration will be spiritual, hence voluntary, hence individual." 3. Death and suffering of the Messiah and His forerunner are still possible.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. The Transfiguration occurred "six days after" what event? How harmonize this with the fact that Luke 9:28 says "eight days"?
2. On what other occasions did Jesus select Peter, James and John for some special privilege to be the intimate observers of what occurred?
3. What information in the text helps us to decide up into what mountain Jesus went?
4. Describe the transfiguration itself by listing the ways the Synoptic writers tell about it.
5. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah respectively, that explains the propriety of their appearance with Jesus here?
6. What, according to Luke, was the topic of their conversation with Jesus?
7. Why did Peter propose to make three tents, rather than one only, or perhaps six (one each for the three Apostles, Jesus, Moses and Elijah)? Does Peter mean to build little shelters or large

tabernacles like the one Israel built in the desert?

8. Explain why the Apostles were so sleepy. (Lk. 9:32) It seems as if these three fall asleep at the worst moments, especially when Jesus is praying!
9. How does Peter's suggestion to build three tents confirm and conform so well with what we know of his character elsewhere?
10. What is the meaning of the sudden appearance of "a bright cloud"?
11. Why should the Apostles have been afraid as they entered the cloud which overshadowed them? (Lk. 9:34; cf. Mk. 9:6)
12. What is the meaning and consequent effect of what the voice said from the cloud?
13. Why did the disciples fall on their faces when they heard what the voice said?
14. On what other occasion(s) did God thus publicly and audibly recognize Jesus?
15. What is implied in the words: "my *beloved* Son"? "my *Chosen*"? (Lk. 9:35)
16. What happened to Moses and Elijah at the conclusion of the vision? Is this significant? If so, why? If not, why not?
17. Why did the voice have to say, "Hear ye Him"? Did the Apostles sometimes not listen to Jesus, hence would have needed this command? What is implied in this command?
18. What circumstances make it imperative that Jesus give such a prohibition to these disciples?
19. How long were they to keep the matter to themselves?
20. What, in this text, indicates that the disciples did not yet understand that Jesus must die for the world's sins?
21. What two predictions were discussed as Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain?
22. On what basis did the Jewish scholars affirm that, before the appearance of the Messiah, Elijah would first appear to set the stage?
23. To whom did God refer when He promised the sending of Elijah? Where is this reference found?
24. How is it possible to say that John the Baptist is "the Elijah" intended, although he himself denied being Elijah? (cf. Jn. 1:21)
25. What does this undoubted fulfilment of OT prophecy teach us about the nature of prophecy? That is, how are we to understand it? God promised that Elijah would come, but He did not mean the ancient Tishbite at all. Rather, He referred to another

man. By what sort of logic can Jesus, or anyone else, say that John the Baptist is the Elijah intended?

26. What is the central message of the Transfiguration? What do we learn about Jesus from it? What happened to Jesus that made the transfiguration take place? Why was the transfiguration only temporary in the person of Jesus? Where did He get that glorious light that shone out of, or through, His physical human nature? What other Bible passages would help to explain what we should see in this event?
27. When or where is Jesus permanently glorified?

Section 43

JESUS HEALS AND FREES A DEMONIZED BOY

(Parallels: Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a)

TEXT: 17:14-21

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a man, kneeling to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is epileptic, and suffereth grievously; for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft-times into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 And Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him; and the boy was cured from that hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast it out? 20 And he saith unto them, Because of your little faith: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Many authorities, some ancient, insert ver. 21: "But this kind goeth not out save by prayer and fasting." See Mark 9:29)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where did the crowd of people come from? Why were they present here?

- b. How did the nine Apostles get embroiled in this embarrassing situation?
- c. Why were the scribes arguing with the Apostles? What do you suppose the argument was about? (Cf. Mk. 9:14, 16)
- d. What was there about Jesus' appearance that caused the crowd to be greatly "amazed" when they saw Him? (Cf. Mk. 9:15)
- e. Why did they all press forward hurriedly to greet Him? (Mk. 9:15)
- f. To whom do you think Jesus addressed His question: "What are you discussing with them?" The scribes? The disciples? The multitudes? (Mk. 9:16)
- g. What is Jesus' intent behind this question? (Mk. 9:16)
- h. In what way is the appeal of the father on behalf of his son the answer to Jesus' question? (cf. Mk. 9:17)
- i. Why do you think the father went into such great detail in his description of his son's case? Would it not have been sufficient to be brief, since anyone who knows Jesus understands that His compassion is aroused by a simple presentation of the problem. What did the father hope to gain by such a thorough recitation of all the symptoms found in the three Gospels?
- j. Does the boy have epilepsy, or is he demon-possessed? How can you distinguish between the two? Is it not evident here that the distraught father is confused by the severer attacks of the disease, to the extent that he sincerely, however mistakenly, ascribes the symptoms to an evil spirit in his boy's body? How do you decide this?
- k. With regard to whom does Jesus sigh: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?"? How do you know? Do you think this question indicates Jesus was exasperated? Why?
- l. Why does Jesus take so long to cast out the demon and end the poor sufferer's torments? (See Mk. 9:19-25.) Why waste additional precious seconds merely to ask further details of an already clear case? What possible good could be accomplished by this?
- m. Explain what the father meant by, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24)
- n. Do you think Jesus is impatient in throwing the father's statement back at him ("... if you can do anything")? Or is He patiently pointing out the weakness of faith in the father? Why do you decide as you do? (Cf. Mk. 9:23, 24)
- o. Why should Jesus be so concerned about a "crowd running together" (Mk. 9:25), that He would hurry up the casting out of the

demon? Or was He deliberately waiting on their arrival in order to achieve maximum publicity?

- p. In what sense were the witnesses to this miracle "astonished at the majesty of God"? (Lk. 9:43)
- q. If the disciples had at least some faith, however little (Mt. 17:20), why was this insufficient to expel the demon? What kind of faith is "little faith" and why did it fail?
- r. Are there varying kinds of demons? When the disciples asked the Lord why they could not cast it out, His answer was that "this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Mk. 9:29) Are there other kinds that can be driven out without prayer? What did Jesus mean?
- s. Why should the Apostles' unbelief prevent their working a miracle? After all, was not the power to do it actually God's? Could He not do anything He desired, notwithstanding their weakness and lack of faith? What did their faith have to do with it anyway?
- t. Should we expect the same miraculous demonstration today of mountain moving? In what sense? Does this mean that we can "pick our mountain" and, "in faith," order it to move, expecting God to do it? If faith is taking the Lord at His word, and He has given us no specific instructions regarding a particular "mountain" in our life, do we have any basis for believing that He will move it, merely because we have determined within ourselves that it has to be moved and simply because we want to believe that He will?
- u. Would you say that modern man is *liberated* from the fear of demons and the devil, or *superstitious and bound* by his bold assumption that "of course, they don't exist!"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The next day after the Transfiguration, Jesus, Peter, James and John descended from the mountain. They were approaching the other nine Apostles when they noticed a large crowd surrounding them and some theologians debating with them. Suddenly, when all the crowd saw Him, they were awestruck. Running forward to Him, they greeted Him. But He broke in, "What is this argument about? Why are you arguing with them?"

At this point a man pushed out of the crowd and fell to his knees before Jesus, imploring, "Teacher, I brought my son to you. I beg you to be merciful to him and take a look at him, because he is my only boy. He has a demon that makes him speechless. He is an

epileptic and is very ill. When this evil spirit attacks him, he screams unexpectedly. It convulses him, dashing him to the ground. He is always falling into the fire or into water. He foams at the mouth, grits his teeth and becomes rigid. The evil spirit is severely bruising him and is slow to leave him. I brought him to your disciples, begging them to drive out the demon, but they failed! They were not able to heal him."

"O you unbelieving, corrupted children of the times!" Jesus sighed impatiently, "How long must I be among you? How long must I put up with you? Bring your son here to me!"

Then they led the boy to Him. But before the lad could reach Jesus, the demon saw Him. He suddenly threw the child to the ground in a convulsion; and he lay there writhing and foaming at the mouth. Jesus interrogated his father, "How long has he been like this?"

"Ever since he was very small," the father responded. "It is always trying to end his life by casting him into fire or water! But if there is anything you can do, take pity on us and help us!"

But Jesus retorted, "What do you mean: 'If you CAN . . .!'? Everything is possible to the man who believes!"

Instantly the child's father exclaimed, "I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!"

Now when Jesus noticed that a crowd was rapidly forming, He spoke sternly to the foul spirit: "You deaf and dumb spirit, it is I who command you to come out of him and never go back again!"

The demon screamed and convulsed him terribly, but came out, leaving the lad like a corpse. This caused most of the people to gasp, "He is dead!"

But Jesus grasped the boy by the hand and lifted him up. He stood up, instantly cured. Then He handed him back to his father. Everybody stood awestruck at this demonstration of the majesty of God.

When He got home, Jesus' disciples came to Him privately, puzzled, "Why is it that we were unable to drive out that demon?"

"Because you believed so little," He replied. "I can assure you that even the tiniest amount of authentic faith is invincible against the most impossible obstacles! Nothing will prove impossible to you. Nothing is effective against this kind of evil spirit, unless you go to God asking Him to drive it out. Cases like this require prayer, not argument."

SUMMARY

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus and His inner circle of Apostles returned to the waiting nine whom they found engaged in argument with some rabbis, at the center of attention of a large crowd. Surprised to see Him back, everyone hurried to welcome Jesus. He, however, went straight to the point, asking what was going on. The father of a demonized epileptic presented his son's case to Jesus, describing the Apostles' failure to expel the demon. The Lord summoned the lad, but the demon made one last effort to break the boy, causing a violent convulsion. When He saw the despairing doubt of the father, He demanded of him unhesitating confidence. To end the further suffering of the boy, Jesus ordered the immediate and permanent expulsion of the demon, and it obeyed, but not without a final struggle which left the child apparently dead. Jesus instantly raised him up perfectly healed, and gave him back to the father, to the reverent amazement of the entire crowd.

Later, the humiliated Apostles asked for a private explanation. The Lord underlined their lack of faith and prayer.

NOTES

II. REPROOF OF FAITHLESSNESS AND FAILURE

A. POWER PARALYZED BY PREOCCUPATION,
PESSIMISM AND PRAYERLESSNESS

As will be seen by a summary comparison with the accounts of Mark and Luke, it is clear that Matthew boils this incident down to a few essential lines. He omits:

1. The greatness of the crowd gathered around the disciples. (Mk. 9:14)
2. The debate raging between the embarrassed disciples and the scribes. (Mk. 9:14, 16)
3. The amazement of the crowd when Jesus suddenly appeared. (Mk. 9:15)
4. Jesus' scolding challenge: "What were you discussing with them?" (Mk. 9:16)
5. The fact that the epileptic demoniac was only a child (Mk. 9:24)

and that he was an only child (Lk. 9:38).

6. The epileptic symptoms: its seizures, foaming at the mouth and rigidity (Mk. 9:18) and its convulsions (Lk. 9:38).
7. Whereas Mark and Luke immediately attribute the cause of the disease to a "dumb spirit" (Mk. 9:17) or a "spirit, a demon" (Lk. 9:39, 42), Matthew almost neglects to mention the demon until the actual cure takes place. (Mt. 17:18)
8. The long conversation between Jesus and the father. (Mk. 9:20-24)
9. The fact that Jesus was moved to rebuke the unclean spirit when he saw that a crowd was gathering. (Mk. 9:25)
10. The final convulsions as the demon came out, and Jesus' raising him up (Mk. 9:26f)
11. Jesus' returning the boy to his father, healed (Lk. 9:42b)
12. The astonishment of the witnesses at the majesty of God (Lk. 9:43)

Matthew brushes aside these instructive details in order to get down more quickly to the chief features of this incident: the faithlessness and failure of the followers.

17:14 **And when they were come to** the foot of the mountain the next day (Lk. 9:37), they immediately encounter *the multitude* (*tôn óchlon*). The definiteness of this expression makes the reader ask, "What multitude?" Since there was none mentioned as they went up the mountain, McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 152) disposes of the problem by deduction: "From the expression . . . we infer that Jesus and the three had left a multitude when they went into the mountain, and that they now return to the same." The point is, of course, that the presence of the article made such a deduction necessary. The last time a definite "crowd" was mentioned previously, was the multitude present with the disciples during Jesus' sermon on "The Cost of Our Salvation" (Mt. 16:24-28), but it was Mark who mentioned the crowd in that instance, not Matthew. (Mk. 8:34) Perhaps this crowd had remained with Jesus' party until now, lingering around the Lord for further teaching.

The solution may be that suggested by Thayer (*Lexicon*, 433, see his examples): "The article is used with names of things not yet spoken of, in order to show that definite things are referred to, to be distinguished from others of the same kind and easily to be

known from the context . . .” Arndt-Gingrich (552) agrees that “the individualizing article also stands before a common noun which, in a given situation, is given special attention as the only or obvious one of its kind . . .”

The linguistic result would be much like the common American idiom with which people often begin a story: “There was this man . . . ,” although we learn who the man was from what follows, not from what precedes, since this is the beginning of the story with a definite demonstrative pronoun!

So, Matthew may mean nothing more than “the (usual) crowd.”

As with all crowds, these folks were eager to find Jesus for almost as many different reasons as there were people. They had become, however, unwilling eye-witnesses both of the disciples’ humiliation and of the scholars’ insinuating questions. The fact that Jesus’ sudden return immediately brought them running to greet Him is evidence of where their sympathies lay during the heated discussion between the rabbis and His disciples. But the great amazement of the crowd caused by His sudden appearance so near them must not be attributed to any traces of the radiance of His transfiguration lingering about His face or body. Such a hypothesis is at variance with Jesus’ forbidding all publicity connected with His Transfiguration. The better explanation of their amazement is that Jesus’ sudden return at just the right moment took everyone by surprise. Those who sided with the rabbis would feel suddenly exposed as if they had been caught in the act. These loyal to Jesus would be happily surprised and relieved that He had arrived at just the right moment.

Upon His descent from the mount of Transfiguration He found disorder among His disciples, however not as crude as Moses found in the camp of Israel when he descended from Sinai. (Ex. 32) But the perversity and faithlessness were no less damning. Hurrying into the midst, Jesus challenged the scribes and His disciples alike with one blistering question: “What were you discussing with them?” (Mk. 9:16)

1. To the gloating scribes, this would mean: “Do you dare say to me what you just said to my disciples?”
2. To the disciples, this would mean: “What was so important that you had to discuss it with THEM, instead of getting on with the business of God?”

The scribes stand voiceless and impotent before His onslaught. Their

silence evidences a felt rebuke for the unjustified revelling over the failure of His disciples. The silence of the nine Apostles betrays their guilty conscience and they have not the courage publicly to admit their failure to their Lord and Master. Despite His fiery challenge, **there came to him a man, kneeling to him.** The desperation of a distraught father pushes him to leave the anonymity of the crowd and rush to his knees to state the pitiful plea in Jesus' presence. Although this is not the answer to Jesus' question, his case is the object around which the entire discussion had hinged.

B. THE POIGNANT PLEA OF A PATHETIC PREDICAMENT

17:15 **Lord.** The other two Evangelists quote him as saying, "Teacher." (Mk. 9:17; Lk. 9:38) Without denying these other testimonies, Matthew seems to underline the proper lordship of Jesus by showing the man's respect for Him. However, since *lord* (*kyrie*) may also mean nothing more than "Sir," an address used in place of the proper name of the person addressed, we cannot assess the depth of the man's faith on the basis of the form of address alone. **Have mercy on my son.** Although the father will later show the inadequacy of his confidence in Jesus' power (Mk. 9:22b), his initial request appeals to Jesus' compassion, as if the Lord's ability to heal the boy were for him a foregone conclusion.

The child is an *epileptic*, but not just an epileptic, because this physical malady is merely the background upon which his demon possession is superimposed. Rather, the cause of the epilepsy and its accompanying symptoms was a demon. (v. 18) On demon possession, see notes on 8:28ff and Seth Wilson's "Notes on Demon Possession" (*Learning From Jesus*, 302ff). Although the NT does not teach that all, or even most, cases of epilepsy were produced by demonic power, this one was. Note that doctor Luke (Col. 4:14), who would have most scientific reason to doubt the demonic cause, is as descriptive as Mark in attributing the seizures to "an unclean spirit, a demon." (Mk. 9:17f, 20, 25; Lk. 9:39, 42f) Matthew himself knew how to distinguish cases that were strictly demonic from those which were normal, non-demonic epileptics, paralytics and other various diseases and pains. (Mt. 4:24) Beware of that indiscriminating pseudo-scholarly talk that affirms that "during this time it seems to have been common to attribute various types of physical difficulties to demon possession. It should be obvious because of this that the term

'demon' in the various Gospel narratives may mean a number of different things, mainly bound up with what were otherwise inexplicable human problems." (McMillan, *Mark*, 113)

For he often falls into the fire and often into the water. Are these phenomena to be attributed to the epileptic seizures or to the attacks of the demon who maliciously tried "to destroy him"? (Mk. 9:22) Certainly the father means that the unexpected effects of the (demonically induced) convulsions required that the boy be constantly watched lest such terrible accidents endanger his life. **Into the fire.** Even non-epileptic children, if not controlled, can be horribly burned by their accidentally falling into the open brazier of live coals used for heating their homes. **Into the water.** The danger of drowning is just as real for a non-swimmer whose body is out of control.

17:16 **And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.** What damning evidence of their failure! The man had originally come, bringing his son to Jesus. (Mk. 9:17) Finding Him temporarily absent, he cheerfully turned to the very men who were reputedly disciples of His, men who had shared His miraculous power, men who should have shared His mind and heart and turned instantly to God in prayer for power. Instead they stood POWERLESS, sputtering over their embarrassing incompetence.

Had this distraught father neglected to try every remedy known in his time? would such a father have left any stone unturned, any solution untried to save his boy? If not, do we not learn that there was nothing in that time equal to the task of liberating him? Was there nothing in all Hebrew culture or religion that could touch that boy? Was there nothing in the refinement and learning of Hellenism to free him? In the presence of the most refined philosophies of his age, that father personally experienced their absolute bankruptcy and helplessness to set his little lad free from the foul demon that enslaved him! Only spiritual power can deal with spiritual problems, and even Jesus' disciples did not possess this.

Thy disciples means the nine Apostles left at the base of the mountain while Jesus ascended with Peter, James and John for prayer. Barnes (*Matthew-Mark*, 179) suggests that the disciples here are not the Apostles, but other followers who attempted to work miracles, for others of His disciples also worked them who were not personal attendants on His ministry. (Mk. 9:38) However, this explanation presupposes that the father had never asked the Apostles to heal his son. But this is highly improbable, since the Nine were physically present in this scene. The father probably would not have asked others

of Jesus' disciples present in the crowd, instead of the Apostles who would presumably have had more faith and more experience and power than those unsuccessful "disciples." On the contrary, the word *disciples* calls us back to remember that the mighty Apostles of the Church of Christ were one day but learners, struggling with doubts and mistakes.

They could not cure him. This is the first time any failure on their part is mentioned in the sacred narrative. Their embarrassed question at the conclusion is further proof that this is the only failure in their ability to work miracles. (17:19; see also Lk. 10:17-20) And, since Jesus showed them the cause of this unsuccessfulness, it is evidence that they learned the lesson of faith. (17:20)

17:17 The pained outcry of our Lord is provoked primarily by the powerlessness of His nine Apostles to heal the boy. Mark 9:18b, 19 underlies this by saying: " 'I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.' And he answered THEM . . ." Matthew in v. 16 furnished the fullest statement of the disciples' discomfiture. So, his v. 17 most naturally expresses Jesus' chagrin at THEIR ineptness.

Some consider this exclamation as addressed to the unbelief of the relentless scribes who were present, the doubting father, the vacillating multitudes, the human miseries caused by sin and unbelief, as well as the weak faith of the baffled Apostles. Others would inexplicably exempt the Apostles from censure, and blame rather the perversity on the malicious influence of the rabbis at work in the crowd, and only indirectly on the Apostles, if at all. It is not wrong to ascribe perversity and faithlessness on the crowds and the scribes, who undoubtedly were all of this.

In fact, can the Lord be complacent in the face of the pernicious influence that threatens to undermine the faith of His disciples and destroy the precious nucleus He had labored so patiently to create? And should He not denounce it, even in general terms, so that ANYONE who shared these doubts would feel compelled to reaffirm his personal decision about Jesus to follow Him in single-minded faith?

Because they had begun to entertain some of the uncertainty about Jesus and His Messianic methodology and the same doubts that were characteristic of their cultural ambient, the Apostles had been brought back temporarily to the same level of unfaithfulness with their own unbelieving countrymen. This is why they must share in the common condemnation.

O faithless and perverse generation. Often when Jesus used the word *generation*, He considered the whole contemporary generation of Jews as a uniform mass confronting Him. (Cf. Mt. 11:16; 12:41f; 23:36; 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 7:31; 11:29-32, 50f; 17:25; 21:32) He described that *generation* as "evil" (Mt. 12:45; Lk. 11:29), "evil and adulterous" (Mt. 12:39; 16:4), "adulterous and sinful" (Mk. 8:38). Contemporaries of the Apostles appeared to them as a "crooked generation" (Ac. 2:40) and "crooked and perverse" (Phil. 2:15), like the kind that provoked God in the wilderness (Heb. 3:10). See Arndt-Gingrich on *genedá*, p. 153.

Here, however, He leveled the charge of perverseness and unbelief primarily at His own disciples. How can such an attitude of bitter disappointment be justified? This is an unmitigated outburst of divine judgment upon people to whom had been granted the most extraordinary opportunities to know and obey the truth. Therefore His words are to be taken in their harshest sense. (Cf. Dt. 32:5, 20, esp. in LXX!)

1. There is no necessity to soften the apparent severity of His words, because the disciples had done more than merely empty their reputation as miracle workers. In their self-seeking, they had nearly wrecked the father's faith. They would not have gone away grieved about the poor boy whom they had failed to heal; they would have slunk away, red-faced over their soiled reputation. Consequently, they had embittered the father, armed the scribes with handy arguments, and tarnished the name of the Lord whose discipleship they owned.
2. The Apostles had worked miracles in the name of Jesus before, especially the casting out of demons. (Mt. 10:1, 8; Mk. 6:13) Had they only now succumbed to the temptation to use this power for their own glory "just to show those scribes that they really could"? As a matter of fact, they were arguing with the theologians instead of striving in prayer to God. Apparently they merely began to try to cast out the demon. But the Lord had not told them to TRY to do anything: He told them to CAST THEM OUT through confidence in His authority. (Mt. 10:1, 8) He had provided the power, but they were to furnish the faith. They are now perversely faithless, and He furnished them no power.
3. The perversity of their faithlessness was further evident in, and actually caused by, their running mental debate with Jesus' views of the Messianic Kingdom. They refused to envision any hope of

success for a suffering, dying Messiah who worked so patiently with the most unpromising people and whose notorious lack of economic schemes, power structures and military policy was becoming intolerable. In other words, what they could not rationally accept, they tended to believe impossible. Believing that God in Jesus Christ could work out all the seemingly contradictory details was fundamentally foreign to large segments of their entire way of thinking. THIS IS UNBELIEF, PERVERSE AND WICKED UNFAITHFULNESS! They, too, needed to have Jesus repeat to them: "All things are possible to him who believes!" To the extent that the Apostles shared the feeling that Jesus' views and practice were uneconomical, impractical, unsound, unscholarly and bound to fail, they must suffer His condemnation upon their skeptic age.

Perverse (*diestramméne*, from *diastréfo*) means "twisted, contorted, distorted, disordered, inverted, changed, seduced, depraved." (Rocci, 466) If this sounds too strong for Jesus' Apostles, or even His disciples, Morgan (*Matthew*, 224) shows the connection:

Moreover, the age was not only "faithless"; it was "perverse"; which does not mean merely that it was rebellious; but that it was a generation twisted, and contorted; a generation in which things were out of the regular; a generation distorted in its thinking, in its feeling, in its action; a generation unable to think straightly, to feel thoroughly, to act with rectitude; a generation in which everything was wrong.

The use of the two words "faithless and perverse," indicates a sequence. A generation that loses its faith, becomes distorted, out of shape. A people who live exclusively upon the basis of the things seen, form untrue estimates; their thinking is distorted, their feeling is out of the straight, their activity is iniquity, which simply means crookedness.

There is no more tragic *unbelief* in all the world of any generation than the unbelief of BELIEVERS. There is no *perversity* more wicked than that which claims discipleship to Jesus and claims to be asking honest questions, while attempting to force its own opinions upon Him. It is *perverse* for disciples to refuse, however unconsciously, to let Him be the Teacher and Lord, debating His every word as if He were no more than a common rabbi from the country!

How long shall I be with you to rescue from the abortive attempts of your faithfulness and to teach you until you understand? How

long must I visit you until you take my medicine instead of yours? R. C. Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary* 1959, 10) thinks that

This sweeping statement of Jesus seems to contrast earth and heaven. It was as if He looked up momentarily to all the glory and implicit obedience which had surrounded Him in heaven. It seems that a bit of nostalgic longing for all He had surrendered to come into this world suddenly swept over His soul. But it was not a word of self-pity, not to mention despair. It was a biting, challenging criticism and protest.

He had put up with this nonsense for almost three years now, and He longs for it all to be over. Not intolerable conditions, but intolerable UNBELIEF, wore Jesus out! In contrast to their wavering and wrongness, He trusted God and lived a life in harmony with His will, and the contrast caused Him pain. He had provided them enough reasons to trust Him implicitly, so He had a right to expect more intelligent faith. This anguished impatience is not evidence of His humanity, but of His deity! In fact, had He been but a mere man, He would have already given up! His impatience, disgust and weariness is just like God's! (Study Ex. 16:28; Nu. 14:11, 27; Isa. 1:14; 7:13; 43:24b; Jer. 4:14, 21; 15:6; Mal. 2:17) This longing for the finish of His earthly mission, even if that meant the cross and suffering in virtual preference to these continual disappointments, shows just how wearying to Jesus must have been the disciples' obtuseness and lack of confidence in Him. Yet, He loved them and continued patiently to minister to their needs until He could truly say, "It is finished!"

Bring him here to me. What imperative majesty there is in this summons! What confidence in the power of God at work in Himself! This prompt, decisive action is an indirect challenge to the scribes, because it focuses everyone's attention on Himself with whom "all things are possible," because HE believes that God will work through Him. It shames the Apostles for their time-wasting, faith-dissipating discussions.

The immediacy of Matthew's narrative omits the delay that occurred between Jesus' order (v. 17) and the expulsion of the demon (v. 18). In fact, Mark and Luke inform us that, while the boy was being brought, the demon, when he came in sight of Jesus, threw him to the ground in a convulsion. (See on 17:21.) At this point the following conversation took place:

C. THE PAINED BUT PERCEPTIVE PLEA OF THE PRESSURED PARENT (Mk. 9:21-24)

Mark 9:21 **And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?"** The Lord's apparently clinical manner is not intended to furnish Himself information for a proper diagnosis, and certainly not to prolong the suffering of the victim and, consequently, of his father. He achieved two purposes by this question: (1) He showed the father His personal concern and steady nerve even though the demon was raging his wildest, and (2) at the same time, He impressed everyone present with the obstinacy and apparent hopelessness of the case, so that they might form some estimate of the supernatural power required to resolve it completely. When combined with the disciples' bafflement and the father's desperation and the scribes' overconfidence and the multitudes' indecision, these two factors are well calculated to throw Jesus' calm mastery of the situation into greater relief. **From childhood** (*paidiôthen*) may not mean too long a time, since the victim was still a "child" (*paidiou*, Mk. 9:24)

Mark 9:22-24 Confident of the Lord's power, the leper had said, "If you will, you can . . ." (Mt. 8:2) The believing Martha showed some uncertainty about whether it would be Jesus' will to raise Lazarus, but she too had no doubt about His power. (Jn. 11:21-27) But this poor doubter, basing his plea only on Jesus' compassion, now cried: **If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.** Imagine the audacity of saying to Jesus Christ, "If you CAN . . .!" No wonder Jesus exploded, "What do you mean by saying to me, 'If you can . . .'? All the might of the living God is at the disposal of the person who trusts Him!" **Him who believes.** Where personal faith was impossible on the part of the victim, Jesus welcomed the faith expressed by those who brought them. (Cf. 9:2; 15:22, 28) The epileptic boy, victim of a malicious demon, could not be expected to believe, so Jesus requires faith of him who made the request and could believe. When HE breaks down under doubt, the Lord mercifully pricks his conscience to show him where his weakness lay. Note that the Lord expected him to believe in the face of the disciples' humiliating failure and the seemingly unanswerable attacks of the scribes and the deadening confusion of the crowds.

All things are possible to him who believes. Is this a general truth equally applicable to every believer, or to be understood only in this local frame of reference? The most natural explanation is to view Jesus as speaking directly to the need of a man who was clearly

doubting Jesus' ability. There is no suggestion here of Jesus' inability to heal an unbeliever. (See notes on 13:58.) Rather, He hints at the man's possible refusal, or failure, to believe that He could do anything needed. His word intends to stir the father to rid himself of the skepticism implied in his petition. It was the father's own wavering that was rendering the difficult healing even more so. Further, in the presence of the scornful scribes who had exulted over the failure of the nine disciples, Jesus would prove that *all things are possible to Him!* He Himself believed God and He would prove the truth of this doctrine by His miracle.

This passage is no justification for the assumption on the part of some who would take this as an unqualified promise for indiscriminate application, implying that God will automatically bend the universe to suit the fancies of the sincere. In His infinite wisdom, God may actually choose to bless the believer who prays that His will be done, in precisely the form in which the believer requests it. Yet, faith, to be faith, must be based upon objective evidence of God's will. (Ro. 10:17) But "faith" that is based on one's subjective wishes or dreams is not faith, but presumption. The backing of God is not promised for some screwy idea we cook up and attempt "on faith," because Jesus has not obligated God to deliver anything according to our whims.

The father instantly corrected his error, wringing out of his soul the most beautiful, most profound confession of trusting dependence upon God's mercy: **"I believe; help my unbelief!"** What a model for our every prayer in our struggle for righteousness! What profound understanding of the temptations to doubt despite our profession of faith! What humility to bare before the Lord our own unworthiness and lurking mistrust! What genuine confidence in Jesus to help us to greater faith and more real dependence upon His grace and power! What insight to call his little faith "unbelief!" This faith stood out in sharp contrast to the rabbis who had resisted the impact of the evidence and stubbornly insisted on not believing. Recognizing the inadequacy both of the content and of the sufficiency of one's faith, taken together with that intense, overwhelming longing to be all that it is possible for us to be, is the kind of faith that Jesus was longing to find.

What did the father believe? Jesus had been making tremendous, transparent claims to deity, leading men to accept Him as the only one who knew God (Mt. 11:25-30) and as the Forgiver of sins (Mt. 9:6) Despite its admitted weakness, this confession of faith made in

the presence of hostile witnesses admits that Jesus is possessor of divine power and divine truth. No small test this, it involved more than believing that the Nazarene could cure, since the very basis of this miracle was what Jesus claimed to be. Did the father believe this? His reaching out to grasp all the truth may have been caused by the ghastly realization that he only imperfectly saw Jesus as God's Revealer.

Meanwhile, the foaming, convulsing boy was half-carried, half-walked past the embittered critics and incompetent teachers of the age, past the fumbling, faltering followers, past the irresolute and inactive throng, into the presence of the Son of God.

D. THE PITEOUS PRISONER PROMPTLY PURGED OF HIS PERVERSE POSSESSOR

17:18 And Jesus rebuked him and the demon went out of him, thus ending years of suffering. (Mk. 9:21) That the Lord desired the clearest, most decisive conclusion to this event, is evidenced by the following considerations:

1. Before rebuking the unclean spirit Jesus waited until He "saw a crowd come running together." (Mk. 9:25)
 - a. A great crowd of people had been present from the outset. (Mk. 9:14) There is no evidence that these ever left. It is psychologically improbable that anyone would move a step until this great question was settled.
 - b. He had reason to await the arrival of newcomers. His purpose in waiting may have been to secure the largest possible number of eyewitnesses to His successful healing of the demoniac boy, since His own disciples had already muddled His reputation by their bungling.
2. When Jesus rebuked the demon, His wording is deliberate, precise and explicit (Mk. 9:25):
 - a. The specific demon causing the malady is singled out by description: "You dumb and deaf spirit . . ." i.e. the demon that caused the boy to be deaf and dumb. Note, Jesus did not address the disease, but the demon. Luke says it precisely: "Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy." (Lk. 9:42)
 - b. Jesus expressed His own personal authority: "I command you" (*egò epitásson soi*). He needed not, as the Apostles, to appeal to

any higher authority. (Cf. Ac. 16:18)

c. A specific order was given: "Come out of him!"

d. A warning admonished: "And never enter him again!" Men may have thought that the return of the convulsions had been associated with the return of the demon. Nevertheless, demons can return to former victims. (Cf. Mt. 12:43-45) However, we have no evidence that any Jesus expelled ever returned. McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 425) contrasts the particular "malicious effrontery and obstinacy" of this demon with the "cowed supplicating spirit shown by the Gadarene legion," (Mt. 8:28ff), suggesting that this demon might just try it, a possibility that would necessitate this precautionary warning.

3. Had He desired to avoid a valid use of theatrics, He could have shortened His conversation with the boy's father (Mk. 9:20-24) and gotten down to the business of casting out the demon much sooner, and done it instantly without any resistance by the demon. But the way Jesus led the father to deeper faith all the more clearly shows His deliberate intention to glorify God in the most spectacular way possible under the circumstances.

4. Finally, when He actually began the healing itself, He did not forestall the demon's violent, final convulsion which left the boy like a corpse and most of the witnesses convinced of his death. This tense moment furnished Jesus the privilege of lifting the boy up, perfectly and instantly cured. The first step (rebuking the demon) left the audience disappointed, so they were psychologically unready for His last move. The last step left the observers completely breathless and staring in wonder. So, His technique was made far more spectacular by a two-stage process than if He had simply hurried to banish the demon and heal the boy, all in one rapid gesture.

So, it is incorrect to affirm that Jesus' noting the gathering of a crowd caused Him to accelerate the healing, because this is not an example of His Messianic reserve, since there is no hint of an attempt to avoid the spectacular. If we have correctly located in semi-pagan country the mountain at the base of which this event occurred (see on 17:1), there would have been little or no need for silence to forestall unwanted publicity. It was only when He "went on from there and passed through Galilee" that "He would not have any one know it." (Mk. 9:30) Now, however, since His unbelieving, bungling disciples have forced Him to clear His name publicly, He has ample

reason to avoid secrecy on this occasion.

And the demon came out of him, not, however, without violent convulsions that left the lad so much like a corpse that bystanders pronounced the victim dead. Jesus ignored their judgment, took the boy by the hand, lifted him up and he arose, *cured instantly*. (Cf. Mk. 9:26f) The sensitive Luke notices that He "gave him back to his father." (Lk. 9:42) The instantaneous cure shows the decisiveness and completeness of Jesus' power, in contrast to others' time-wasting discussions and neglect of the suffering victim. It also leaves His hecklers suddenly facing the pressure of facts which they must accept (in which case they must repent) or reject (in which case they must invent plausible explanations in the presence of rejoicing crowds, astonished at the majesty of God and marvelling at everything Jesus did! Lk. 9:43). Whereas the disciples had drawn attention to themselves by their faithlessness and failure, the scribes had leveled unjustified criticism at the Lord's power, the demon had succeeded (apparently) in procuring the death of the afflicted lad, the crowds stood around with hands tied by human helplessness, the Lord, on the other hand, acted with compassion and total mastery. This vivid contrast left the crowd standing in awe of God! Lest our short-sighted love for Jesus cause us to be a bit jealous that "all were astonished at the majesty" not of Jesus, but "of God," let us rejoice at this compliment to Jesus whose every move draws men's eyes toward God. It is for this that we love and worship Him!

E. THE APOSTLES' PUZZLEMENT OVER THEIR PITIFUL PRODUCTION

17:19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could we not cast it out? The Nine had enough personal pride—or was it the timidity of bad conscience?—to reserve for private discussion the postmortem appraisal of their fiasco. In fact, Mark (9:28) notes that "when he had gone home" (*kai eiselthóntos autoû eis oîkon*), they approached the Lord.

NOTE: Who went home? Does this genitive absolute refer to the demoniac boy's departure for home, or the return home of Jesus? The last mentioned possible antecedent for pronoun *autoû*, subject to the participle, is the subject of the preceding verb, "he arose, (*anéste*), referring to the boy. If so, then Mark's

expression would mean simply that when the boy left, the crowds apparently dispersed, leaving Jesus alone with His followers who can now ask Him the cause of their vain attempt.

On the other hand, if the pronoun refers to Jesus, Mark may mean that the disciples reserved their question until Jesus had sought lodging in the area. Then, when He had gone indoors, they approached Him. But since *eis oíkon* is idiomatic for "home," especially with *eisérchesthai* (See Arndt-Gingrich, 563), Mark may mean that they did not dare bring up the question until they were clear back to Jesus' "home" in Capernaum! (Cf. Mk. 2:1; 9:33) If so, this section is recorded here because of its direct connection with the story of the demonized boy, of which it is the proper theological and psychological conclusion. But, from this standpoint, it serves as more fuel for the fiery debate on "who is greater in the Kingdom of heaven?" (See on Mt. 18:1ff)

It is to their credit, however, that, sooner or later, they **came to Jesus** for the solution to their turmoil.

This question is not proof that the pained lament of Jesus (17:17) could not have been leveled at them, since the formula used by Jesus had been broad enough to include ANY disciples contaminated with the spirit of the age. In fact, the Apostles ask a question which applies only to themselves, for had the answer they expected involved the failure of other "disciples," the question would not have been asked in the first person plural, but "Why could THEY not cast it out?," and, in the absence of the other disciples who presumably would have needed it, the answer becomes only academic information and a general warning to the Twelve. This question is, rather, proof only that they missed the connection Jesus intended to make between their perverse faithlessness and their failure.

Ironically, their failure was absolutely essential to their usefulness to Jesus. It was failure after exhilarating successes had left them elated with an invincible self-confidence. This was a humiliating defeat, but one they needed to see the fallacy of self-confidence and to make these disciples more really trusting, these strong men stronger.

The question may also have been part of the motivation behind the struggle for status in the Kingdom. (See on 18:1.) The Nine admit they could not cast out the demon, while the Three remembered that they themselves had been with Jesus, basking in the light of transfiguration glory. Naturally, these Nine cannot know about the

glory, but if the Three nourished any hopes of promotion (cf. Mt. 20:20-28), this contrast in fortune could not have escaped their notice.

We could not cast it out. This sentence guarantees the authenticity of this account, because the Gospel writers do not hide the weaknesses and failure of characters even this important in their narration. This shame, both in the presence of the multitude that day, as well as in the eyes of the present readers, is evidence of that stern truthfulness that must tell the facts as they occurred without embellishment even to save the influential. Lastly, this question and Jesus' answer is proof positive that they had not failed to work miracles before this time. It was a totally new experience, since, presumably, He could have answered, "You could not cast it out for the same reason you failed before."

1. THE POLLUTING POTENCY OF PRACTICAL PAGANISM

17:20 **Because of your little faith.** The Apostles, not the crowd or the scribes, had possessed but *little faith*. Their failure was not a question of lack of courtesy or skill, courage or readiness, or enthusiasm, or any other excellent quality, but of spiritual power! It was not the obstinacy of this loathsome disease with its foaming convulsions and shrieks, that left them despairing of being able to cure him, because they had faced bad ones before. It was not even this kind of malicious demon that stumped them, because "this kind comes out by prayer." It was not because Jesus was away, because He had commissioned them to cast out demons before in His absence, and they reported no failures then. It was not the heckling opposition of the scribes. Their insinuating questions perhaps contributed to the failure, but could have been silenced by confidence in God, prayer and miraculous success. Rather, it was their lack of confidence in the supernatural power of their Lord, which left them paralyzed in the presence of agonizing human need.

Their confidence in Him had been deeply shaken by His insistence upon the path of shame and suffering and the cross as the only road to glory. Perhaps they had hoped their Rabbi would change the world by an educational process, but now He had demanded their personal participation in the blood and ignominy of His own inevitable martyrdom. Consequently, to the extent that they did not fully trust Him to know, they began to be afraid of Him, even unconsciously, afraid lest He be mistaken, afraid to hold tenaciously to

Him and let Him lead, come what may. However unconsciously and insidiously this distrust grew, it nevertheless left them morally quite some distance from Christ, the Source of their power. At that moment, when face to face with real, demonic power and armed with only a paralyzed dependence upon a Christ only half-trusted, they failed!

Some have supposed that the demonized boy's father's lack of faith might have been a factor in the Apostles' failure. But the man's demonstration of doubt came after Jesus' arrival on the scene and after the Apostles' failure. The man himself had brought his son to Jesus originally. (Mk. 9:17) This is faith. Finding Him away, he asked His disciples to cast it out. (Mk. 9:18) This is cheerful perseverance that welcomes a suitable alternative. The man's desperation and struggles with doubts were caused, not by some original, deeply rooted distrust of Jesus, but by the blundering of the disciples who were supposed to know what they were doing, but clumsily handled the case and consequently collapsed, taking the father down with them! Even if the man himself possessed some faith, his weakness could have been healed by the Apostles' positive dependence upon God, had they but cast themselves on their knees instead of launching a debate with the scribes.

Note that faith is demanded of both: the Apostles and the one who requests the miracle. The mere possession of miracle-working power in the past was no guarantee of their present possession of faith or righteousness or worthiness to be God's representatives. (Cf. Mt. 7:21-23)

1. Even Judas Iscariot had worked these miracles previously. At least, he is not singled out as a non-participant. (Mk. 6:13) But miracles per se did not guarantee his personal honesty. (Jn. 12:6)
2. Remember Samson who would "go out as at other times . . ." but "did not know that the Lord had left him." (Jdg. 16:20)
3. "The Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." (1 Sa. 16:14) Nevertheless, stubborn in his unbelief, he went out to battle the Philistines, hoping against hope to be able to "beat his luck," the certain death predicted for him by God through Samuel. (1 Sa. 28:3-28; 31:1-13)
4. The sin of Achan compromised the sanctity of Israel, so that, their miraculous victory over Jericho notwithstanding, Israel's first attack on the city of Ai crumpled. God was not with them as

before! (Josh. 6, 7)

5. Even the mighty Moses buckled under the pressure of constantly having to prove himself the God-sent leader of Israel, and just once took credit for a miracle. Although God could have humiliated Moses and Aaron by letting them fail to bring forth water from the rock, He chose to punish them differently. But He did punish them, "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel . . ." (Nu. 20:12)
6. Remember Peter's imperfect walk on the water. (Mt. 14:28ff and notes.)

So, Jesus' disciples' previously effective ministry became ineffective, because they had grown self-reliant, supposing that busyness and activity could substitute for humility, prayer and worship of God. They had begun to identify their results as their own accomplishments, and this self-trust undermined their confidence in God as the only true Source of their power.

Because of your little faith to depend on and receive God's power. Their faith was not expected to **CREATE** miracle-working power independent of God's might; it was only expected to **COLLABORATE** with God in whom their confidence should have rested. It was expected to trust God to do His part perfectly. (See notes on 14:31; also 6:30; 8:26; 16:8 for notes on *little faith*) Faith, as such, does not confer God's power: God does that. Rather, faith makes it appropriate that He exert His power in favor of the believer.

If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move hence to yonder place," and it will move. This *mountain*, even massive Hermon, then in plain sight, is a symbol of impossible tasks, just as *a grain of mustard seed* symbolizes beautifully the smallest quantity of real spiritual power to fulfill them. That this is figurative, not literal, language, is proven by the Apostles' understanding and practice of what Jesus meant here. They did not go around rearranging earth's geography, but, by the exercise of genuine faith, they certainly "turned the world upside down!" (Cf. Ac. 17:6; Phil. 4:13) They did the impossible.

Some, while admitting that the point of the comparison is the smallness of the mustard seed in contrast to the huge mountain, insist that more is meant. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 675) says: "A mustard seed (see 13:31) though at first very small, yet, because of its uninterrupted and vital contact with its nourishing environment, grows and grows until it becomes a tree so tall that the

birds of the air come and lodge in its branches. Accordingly, 'faith as a grain of mustard seed' is the kind of trust in God which does not immediately give up in despair when its efforts do not meet with immediate success. It maintains its uninterrupted and vital contact with God and therefore continues to pray fervently, knowing that God in His own time and in His own way will bestow the blessing." That is, does Jesus mean to indicate a faith that, however small initially, will rise to meet the task it faces, in the same way a mustard grain flourishes against its obstacles and becomes a tree at the right time? While this is true of living faith, it seems to be pushing the figure farther than Jesus actually intended it. Others, in a similar vein, suggest: "If you have any of this real faith at all, you possess what is certain to grow into more, and thus you have what will ultimately be competent to remove the most impossible obstacles."

But the Lord's point is not based upon the seeds' growing to be what it should become, but upon *mustard seed* AS IT IS as opposed to the *mountain* AS IT IS. On another occasion when Jesus taught something the disciples thought impossible to accomplish, they exclaimed: "Increase our faith!" His reaction is significantly similar to our present context. (Lk. 17:1-6) What was needed, was not larger faith to meet this "impossible task," but confidence that even the smallest amount of authentic trust in God can accomplish wonders.

But having *little faith* is not equal to having "a little faith" even so small as a *grain of mustard seed*, because, while the latter is indeed small by contrast to the mountain it must move, it is real. *Little faith* is not really faith, but doubt asserting itself as self-trust. Genuine faith is solid confidence in God, does not dictate to God any time schedules, does not waver, does not give up. (Jas. 1:6-8; Lk. 18:1-8) Faith means believing what Jesus says. Ironically, some later reader of Mark's text of this incident (Mk. 9:29) just could not believe that prayer was sufficient, so to the words of the Son of God he added: "and fasting!" Cannot He even be trusted to tell us what is necessary without our doubts reasserting themselves? Faith in Jesus means that He must fill all our vision, His will must be our only standard of judgment. When we permit Him to be measured by human considerations and place Him among other human beings and gauge Him as but one among many other great teachers. His power is not available to us. It is only when we let His Word be the standard by which all

else is judged, when He is Lord of all for us and our only hope, that we can be competent to accomplish the impossible in His service.

Jesus Himself BELIEVED that the Kingdom COULD be established "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord," and all the mountains of traditional theology, all the mountains of ignorant zeal and deliberate opposition, were no match for Him! (Cf. Zech. 4:6, 7) As later events proved Him right point by point, His words, which now must have seemed so visionary, would have been the pragmatically successful power behind the unflinching courage of these same disciples. Belief did not come easy for them. They were even then totally incapable of grasping the most fundamental concept of God's Kingdom. (See on 17:22f.)

Nothing shall be impossible to you. Although addressed to His ancient disciples, is this promise applicable to modern ones?

1. Hurte (*Restoration NT Commentary*, 37) answers,

No, it can only apply to those who had the gift of power. Christians can appropriate any promise made to them as God's children, but the working of miracles was a special gift bestowed only upon a few. It was true to the apostles in relation to their work, but not to others.

2. However, it is God who decides what specific powers He will confer on any one disciple in any given age. Faith lets God decide this. Faith does not desire nor attempt anything but what He desires, a fact that automatically eliminates capricious rearrangements of terrestrial topography and any other supernatural fireworks not within His will. But the question of the hour is not: "Does anyone today have the miraculous power to do the impossible?," but: "Does anyone have faith enough to do all that is POSSIBLE for him?" The fault of our failure to attain to all that is good, true and noble lies in our shallow, inconstant faith. (Jas. 1:5-8; 4:2, 3; 5:8-11, 13-18)

2. THE PURIFYING POWER OF PERSONAL PENITENCE AND PERSISTENT PRAYER

(17:21 is omitted in the better manuscripts: **But this kind cometh not out except by prayer and fasting.** See Mk. 9:29) Comment is made on this verse, not because Matthew wrote it, since he probably did not, but because Mark says that Jesus said it, and because of its

appropriateness as a comment on Matthew. (This is probably why someone originally copied it from Mark into their copy of Matthew, and a later scribe mistook the marginal note for a textual correction.)

This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. (Mk. 9:29) *This kind* of demon suggests the natural antithesis: "other kinds," Trench (*Notes on Miracles*, 232) believes that

. . . *this kind* marks that there are orders of evil spirits, that as there is a hierarchy of heaven, so is there an inverted hierarchy of hell. The same is intimated in the mention of the unclean spirit going and taking "seven other spirits more wicked than himself." (Mt. 12:45)

On these hierarchies, remember also Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1:21.

Are we to infer that "other kinds" of demons were more cowardly, hence more easily cast out? Jewish exorcists apparently attained considerably professional notoriety and success through the use of incantations and magic by which they were able to bring temporary remission for demoniacs. (See on Mt. 12:27; cf. Ac. 19:11-17; see also Josephus, *Antiquities*, VIII, 2, 5) In this case, it would be thought that some demons might be cast out without prayer and dependence upon God. And, if they obtained control over demons by obtaining, through magic, power of Satan or by compromises with him, they could temporarily appear to succeed. But their results were tainted with evil, unlike those of Jesus who caused all to be "astonished at the majesty of God." (*ISBE*, 1068)

This kind, then, speaks of the audacious wickedness and peculiarly determined viciousness of the demon Jesus had just cast out. The demon's maliciousness not only drove him to keep a strangle-hold on the lad despite the disciples' attempts, but appeared obstinately determined to defy the power of Jesus too! (Cf. Mk. 9:20; Lk. 9:42) Further, he took hellish delight in inflicting pain. (Mt. 17:15; Mk. 9:22) Confidence in God gives moral power that commands respect for the man of God determined to expel a demon. But without this fundamental confidence in God's backing, or faith, even the most experienced miracle-worker must back down and admit defeat in the presence of tenacious, malignant spirits of *this kind*.

Besides the disciples' prayerlessness, their floundering is attributable also to their alternative: they were arguing with the rabbis. (Mk. 9:14, 16) It is quite likely that they had been busy defending themselves against the heckling of these skeptics, when they should have

been praying and getting on with the business of glorifying God by healing the demonized epileptic. (Mk. 9:29) Prayer is the only suitable preparation of one's faith to address oneself to the task of doing the impossible. Prayer itself would not have given them the power needed, but it would have intensified their sense of dependence upon God, and so enabled them to be His instruments in utilizing the power He had granted them.

APPLICATION

What a striking parable of the modern Church! How important the lesson for the modern disciple during the Lord's absence, when he too is facing the daily cry of needy humanity in the valley of humiliation, the positive opposition of the agnostics, the frustration of confrontations and the need to succeed! The desperate world, finding Jesus temporarily away from the earth, turns to those who should know Him best and share the secrets of His power, crying for assistance to cure the ills of human existence. Far too often the faithlessness of the prayerless Church, busy with her ecclesiastical machinery and worldly concerns, is not only the main ingredient of her own failure, but, more tragically, the principle cause of the world's unbelief and doubting even the mighty power of Christ Himself. Embarrassed by lack of real spiritual power, the Church is too ready to try to save man by social programs of self-improvement, by theological debate, by religious programs, by psychological gimmicks or by the power of positive thinking. She depends upon these as a source of power, rather than fulfill a mission blessed by the power of God. Then, the now nearly hopeless world, bypassing the fumbling Church, with one last rattling gasp, whispers to our Lord, "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us!"

Under such circumstances, brethren, we deserve the sternest denunciation our Lord can pronounce! To the extent that we personally share the doubts and consequent helplessness of our age, our perversity and unbelief cannot escape His holy judgment!

Brethren, when we are pressured by circumstances to doubt our direction, our abilities and our Lord's care and concern for us, let us pray. Let us admit our lack of great faith, confess our dependence upon God, consecrate ourselves more completely to Him, and rise to do the work of God as the men of God in our time until our Lord returns! Since men are not going to be saved and made fit for God

except by our faith and prayer, let us by prayer nourish a faith so mighty that it will not be put to shame as we deal with the impossible difficulties of our time! (1 Jn. 5:4)

DEMON POSSESSION — DO WE BELIEVE IT?

With his usual keen insight, Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary*, 1959, 13) asks this incisive question and applies its significance to our section, in a note that well deserves repetition:

It is remarkable that in a lesson which concentrates upon our lack of faith, our need of faith, and the fact that Jesus calls forth faith, we find ourselves considering the type of record which today causes many people to doubt the truth and accuracy of the Gospel accounts.

Many people are caused to stumble at the fact that demon possession existed in the time of Jesus, that Jesus talked with the demons, that they responded intelligently and with evidence of superhuman knowledge, that He cast them out. As Jesus called for faith in the heart of this father, so He demands faith of us as we study these records.

Who are we to attempt to dispute the record of demon possession? What do we know about the spirit world? We cannot comprehend, except in a superficial manner, even the physical world approached by the five senses. If a person is moved to doubt that there are actually in existence the devil and his angels who serve him and seek to bring man to destruction, then will he also doubt the existence of angels in heaven? Thus the Sadducees went forward in their logical deductions that denied the existence of angels and of any life after death. That this compelled them to deny the truth of the Old Testament and robbed them of all hope did not bring them to a halt in their folly. But if there be no angels and no life after death, how can there be any God?

Jesus calls forth faith in the heart of every humble Christian today to accept without question the New Testament record as a true and faithful account of what actually happened.

The fact that vast mysteries lie imbedded in the records should not overwhelm us with doubt. What else can we expect? Are we not mere finite beings with puny outreach of both intellect and physical power? We cannot encompass God. We must believe.

We must depend upon God when our understanding and our strength fail.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus and some of His disciples been when they encounter the remaining Apostles and a crowd of people? When and where did this take place? At what chronological point in Jesus' ministry did it occur?
2. In what activity were people engaged just before Jesus appeared on the scene? Where would they have likely come from? What was their interest in this situation?
3. What special goal would the scribes have hoped to reach in their debate with the disciples of Jesus? Who are the scribes: what section of national life in Judaism of Jesus' day did they represent?
4. What was the central point of focus of the entire situation that caused the excitement before Jesus' arrival?
5. What reasons did the disciples have for believing that they could have cast out the demon? Had they ever done so before?
6. List the physical symptoms described by the epileptic's father.
7. Did the father distinguish between epilepsy and demon possession? Are all epileptics demon-possessed?
8. What information in the text indicates that Jesus clearly distinguished between the disease and demon possession?
9. There are only four possible views with reference to the Gospel accounts of demon-possession and the casting them out, but only one of them is tenable. List them, showing why each of the three is illogical or historically improbable while the other is practically unassailable.
10. From the Biblical information available to us, is it possible to say whether demons always caused maladies or defects? Are there other symptoms of demon possession not seen in the case reported in this section (17:14-21)? If so, what are they?
11. To whom did Jesus address the words: "O faithless and perverse generation"? Prove your answer. What is the meaning of Jesus' question: "How long shall I be with you"? What does He mean when He says: "How long shall I bear with you"??
12. What caused the father to say to Jesus, "If you can do anything . . ." (Mk. 9:22)
13. What is the point of Jesus' reply? (Mk. 9:23)

14. Explain the seemingly contradictory answer of the father: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24)
15. How did Jesus cast the demon out?
16. What was the effect of the miracle on the eyewitnesses? (Lk. 9:43)
17. Why did the disciples fail to cast out the demon? State both of Jesus' answers. (Mt. 17:20; Mk. 9:29) Explain what He meant by each one.
18. List any Biblical passages which would tend to qualify our understanding of the phrase: "All things are possible to him that believes."
19. List other Biblical examples of demon expulsion that would aid our understanding of demons and demonic possession. Are demons merely bad habits? Must those who are demon-possessed be exceptionally wicked? What other young children have been mentioned as demon-possessed during Jesus' ministry?
20. What is learned about demons from the command Jesus gave to the demon: "Enter no more into him"? Can demons return?
21. What does the phrase "unclean spirit" indicate about the nature or the effect of demon-possession on the one possessed?
22. What is the significance of the reaction of the multitude to Jesus' signal victory over the demon? (Lk. 9:43)

Section 44

JESUS MAKES THIRD PASSION PREDICTION

(Parallels: Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

TEXT: 17:22, 23

22 And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be delivered up into the hands of men; 23 and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up. And they were exceeding sorry.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why were people "gathering in Galilee"? (See comment on the textual variation from "abode in Galilee.") Is there a suggestion

here of a mass rallying of the Galileans for a popular march on Jerusalem?

- b. Why does Jesus need privacy to teach His disciples? (Cf. Mk. 9:30) Cannot He do anything He wants to, even teach His followers in the presence of great crowds? What kind of hindrance would the great audiences present to the training of the Twelve?
- c. Is there any connection between this prediction of death and the marvelling of the disciples? (Cf. Lk. 9:43)
- d. Why does Jesus preface this third passion prediction with the words "Let these words sink into your ears"? (Lk. 9:44)
- e. Why were the disciples afraid to ask him about this saying that so deeply distressed them? (Mk. 9:32)
- f. In what sense was it painfully true that the disciples at that moment in their experience did NOT believe the gospel? What, to you, is gospel?
- g. Why should such an embarrassing account be included in the story of the life of Christ? After all, the Apostles are put in a bad light by this sort of thing. Would it not have been better simply to edit the narrative, omitting the spiritual obtuseness of the very men who later were to become the pillars of the Church? What could possibly be gained by this unabashed mention of their shameful fears and misconceptions?
- h. How was "this saying concealed from them"? (Lk. 9:45) Did God hide it from them? Did Satan? Did they do it themselves? If so, how? If not, who did?
- i. Why did the prediction produce a different effect in the disciples this time, as compared to the previous one?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus and the Twelve traveled on from the district around the mount of Transfiguration, passing through Galilee. It was a time when people were gathering in Galilee, full of admiration and awe over everything He was doing. It was for this reason that He wished this journey to be kept secret, because He was trying to teach His disciples. He would say to them, "You all get this through your head: the Messiah is destined to be betrayed into the power of evil men. They will execute Him. Nevertheless, though He be killed, three days later He will rise from the dead."

Yet they did not understand. Preconceptions concealed its meaning,

making it impossible to understand and accept. Even though they were crushed with grief by it, they were afraid to ask Him about it.

SUMMARY

The realism of Jesus demands that, in the midst of great popular enthusiasm, He continue hammering on the major, however unacceptable, theme of His ministry: His death, burial and resurrection. Though He often repeated this prophecy of ultimate victory over apparent defeat, the Twelve saw in it nothing but incomprehensible pessimism. The deep dread that what He predicted might possibly be true so numbed them that they could not bring themselves even to request further information that might have alleviated their pain, for fear that they would receive only additional confirmation of their worst unspoken fears.

NOTES

III. REPETITION OF THE PASSION PREDICTION

A. THE PERCEPTIBLE PRESSURE OF POPULARITY

17:22 **While they abode in Galilee.** The American Standard Version revisers decided that the better reading here is "abode" (*anastre-foménon*). However, in the calculation of probabilities of scribal correction, Metzger's evaluation (*Textual Commentary*, 44) is the more sound:

It is probable that the reading *sustrefoménon* (taken to mean "were gathering together") would strike copyists as strange, and therefore would be changed into what seemed more appropriate (*anastre-foménon*, "abode"). The verb *sustréfein*, which occurs only twice in the New Testament, apparently means here "while they were crowding (around Jesus)."

The attentive reader will object (as probably did the one who made the original change in Matthew's copy) that, if the original reading were "they were gathering" instead of "abode," it would make Matthew's affirmation of the presence of crowds ("gathering" or "crowding") contradict Mark's secret journey ("And he would not

have any one know it"). To this it may be countered that even Luke (9:43) seems to contradict Mark by implying the presence of crowds at least in the general area when Jesus made the Passion Prediction. Doubtless this is but faulty harmonization. A better solution is to see that the Lord repeated this prediction several times during this same period. Resultantly, the three Gospels were never strictly parallel because they refer to different aspects of this period. The basis for this solution is as follows:

1. Mark's verbs in the imperfect tense (*éthelen, edidasken, élegen*) affirm that Jesus repeated His Passion Prediction many times during this period, so exact harmonization of the three Gospels is not necessary, even if the wording of the prophecy is comparatively similar each time. Thus, Matthew's "gathering in Galilee" is not even parallel, much less contradictory, to Mark's secret journey.
2. Luke's version is to be closely linked with the epileptic demoniac episode, hence the first of the series of Passion Predictions implied in Mark's imperfect-tense verbs.
3. Matthew's "gathering in Galilee," then, occurred near the close of this journey from the mount of Transfiguration, perhaps as Jesus and His disciples neared, or arrived at, Capernaum.
4. Another solution is the lexical significance of *sustrefoménon* given by Rocci (1784) who interprets this word in Mt. 17:22 as "to roam about together." Accordingly, he would see no crowds whatever, since the last personal reference in the context is only to Jesus and the disciples talking privately. (17:19ff) If this interpretation be adopted, Matthew and Mark would be seen as more closely parallel.

Certainly there is no ground here for accusing the Evangelists of self-contradiction and no basis for emending the text. In fact, there is even another suggestive solution which would see Matthew and Mark as parallel.

Although Rocci personally interpreted *sustrefoménon* in our text as "to roam about together," he points out that *sustréfo* is also a military term meaning "to regroup, to close ranks," i.e. pulling one's forces into a compact unit ready for action. What a picture, if this be thought of as Matthew's intention! With a materialistic coup d'état in mind, the Galileans would be closing rank around Jesus to march on Jerusalem. The Apostles and more spiritually-minded disciples would expect Him to proclaim His Messianic Kingdom there. Jesus

Himself is going to battle in Jerusalem too, but in the only way this war can be won—by dying for sinful man. So, in this Galilean staging area for “the long march” on Jerusalem, Jesus called aside His aides for a private briefing. (Mk. 9:30) Not only “would he not have any one know” about their travel through Galilee toward Capernaum (Mk. 9:30, 33), but He must repeat His incredible message only in the hearing of His disciples. (Lk. 9:43b, 44; Mk. 9:31; Mt. 17:22b, 23) Although He will make several quick trips to Jerusalem before the fated Passover (cf. Jn. 7:10; 10:22f; 11:17f), the final assault actually begins from Galilee. (Cf. Ac. 10:37-39; Lk. 9:51) But before leaving Galilee, the Apostles must understand the true purpose of this final approach to Jerusalem. So He now lays before His men for the nth time the ultimate targets to be reached, but they are not the kind of objectives that anyone else had in mind.

Although Matthew mentions nothing of great crowds, except this possible oblique reference (“while they were crowding” around Jesus), Luke (9:43) connected the first of these Passion Predictions with the liberation of the demonized epileptic boy and the consequent astonishment of the people at the majesty of God, causing them to marvel at everything He did. Therefore, enthusiastic praise and popular excitement are definitely part of the background situation to which the Lord addressed this prophecy of His death. The excitement caused by the healing of the demonized boy in the area of the mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:43) may have had only local repercussions. Nevertheless, if the Feast of Tabernacles was not far off (cf. Jn. 7:2), it is not impossible that crowds should begin to form for the trek to the capital. Although the Lord desired privacy (Mk. 9:30), His deliberate return into Galilee and Capernaum in particular brings to an end the “withdrawals” He had begun when He took His disciples to Phoenicia. (Mt. 14:1, 13; 15:21; 16:4f, 13) So, as they return to Galilee and potential popularity, with the hallelujahs of His recent victory ringing in their ears, they must be brought back down to reality.

Incidental proof of Jesus' long absence from Galilee during the preceding period is furnished by John, who, although he does not recount Jesus' withdrawals from Jewish population centers, nevertheless, records the challenge of Jesus' unbelieving brothers, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.”

(Jn. 7:3ff) Ironically, this too tempts Jesus to ignore the reality of the cross and keep the popular, enthusiastic approval coming.

Accordingly, Jesus' Passion Prediction, given in these circumstances, means, "Gentlemen, do not let yourselves be taken in by the false hopes of the people nor fall for their mistaken opinions, by forgetting or doubting my declarations. In fact, it is into the hands of ignorant, mistaken men that I am to be delivered, men to whom I am related by blood, men from whom I should expect understanding and faith, loyalty and submission, gratitude and honor!"

Ironically, the basis of the astonishment at the majesty of God evident in everything He did should have furnished the Apostles reasons to accept anything Jesus said, however unreasonable or improbable it might seem. For these are proof that He is "a Teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs unless God be with Him." (Jn. 3:2) But, like Nicodemus who must argue the new birth with Jesus rather than let Him reveal it, the Apostles, too, are left distressed by His teaching. So, rather than strengthen their faith in Him, the miracles psychologically widened the breach between their belief that He is the Christ, on the one hand, and their total incomprehension of His death-predictions, on the other, because of the strident incongruency between these two ideas. The more miracles He did the more He seemed like the Messiah and God's Son, and the less likely seemed His predicted murder!

B. THE PAINFULLY PRECISE PLAN OF HIS PASSION

The Son of man shall be delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up. All generals ask men to die for the cause they represent, but Jesus talked about voluntarily dying for His enemies. Now, those disciples who expected a triumphant militaristic Kingdom in which men would be delivered into the hands of the Messianic King, must now learn that **the Son of man is about to be delivered (*méllei paradídesthai*) into the hands of men.** Who delivered Jesus over to His enemies? Judas Iscariot thought HE did, but it was God the Father who handed His own Son over to men. (Ac. 2:23) In Gethsemane Jesus actually handed Himself over! (Study Jn. 18:4-11; Mt. 26:51-54; Jn. 10:18!) While the God-fearing disciples wept bitterly around the cross, they would deem the Passion of Jesus a betrayal by a God who had let

them down at this critical moment by not intervening to rescue Him from such a fate. But the Father had not betrayed them. He handed over His only Son, yes, but not to have done so would have been a betrayal of the entire human race. This is what it means to believe that "God so loved the world that He **GAVE** His only Son!"

C. THEIR PERCEPTION PREVENTED BY PERSISTENT PREJUDICE

As we evaluate His planning from our vantage point, we appreciate the precision of His time-schedule. His divine foreknowledge, like all prophecies, is more impressive after the fulfillment. But His disciples were not unimpressed: they were appalled!

1. **They were exceedingly sorry** (*elupéthesan sfódra*), deeply grieved. Although they found no place in their mental framework for the literal interpretation of His words, His persisting in repeating them (Mk. 9:31) hurt them deeply. Whereas they had been shocked before, and indignant that anyone should think of plotting His death (Mt. 16:21ff), now they are crushed with disappointment. Not even the promise of His resurrection can transform this grief into hope. This sorrow proves how unsympathetic they yet were with Jesus' intentions, and proves that they too were yet unbelieving. (Study 11:6 and notes.)
2. "They did not understand this saying and it was concealed from them, that they should not perceive it." (Mk. 9:32a; Lk. 9:45a) Since its obvious, literal sense was totally unacceptable to them, and since they could not decipher any other meaning, they were as unable to understand it as if someone were trying to hide its meaning from them. How could the Messiah they believed Him to be, actually permit His enemies to slay Him when He possessed the supernatural power to annihilate them, assert His God-given right and so prevent such an injustice?
3. "And they were afraid to ask him about this saying," (Mk. 9:32b; Lk. 9:45b) Two motives:
 - a. Fear to be reproved by Jesus for their reluctance to accept it at face value, as Peter had been rebuked. (16:22f)
 - b. Fear to face the horrible truth, hoping that ignoring it would make it go away. This is based on the horrifying possibility that He really intended to go through with every appalling

bit of it.

So they preferred to remain ignorant. And His solitude became complete. (Cf. note on Mt. 11:27)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. By what route did Jesus return from the preceding incident to Capernaum? (Cf. Mk. 9:20) Where had He been? How do we know Capernaum was His immediate destination?
2. List several reasons why Jesus would have desired anonymity at this time.
3. Who was "gathering in Galilee," according to the better manuscript evidence for Mt. 17:22?
4. Why does Jesus refer to Himself as "the Son of man"? What does this title mean?
5. On what other occasions had Jesus predicted His own untimely death and bodily resurrection?
6. Indicate several motives for His repeating these predictions here.
7. List several factors which collaborated in causing the disciples to fail to understand His remarks about His death. (Cf. Mk. 9:32; Lk. 9:45)
8. Explain their great distress. Explain how "they were exceeding sorry."
9. What reason would explain why they were afraid to ask Him for further explanation? (Cf. Mk. 9:32; Lk. 9:45)

Section 45

JESUS QUIZZES PETER ABOUT TEMPLE TAXES

TEXT: 17:24-27

24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received the half-shekel came to Peter, and said, Doth not your teacher pay the half-shekel? 25 He saith, Yea. And when he came into the house, Jesus spake first to him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? the kings of the earth, from whom do they receive toll or tribute? from their sons, or from strangers? 26 And when he said, From strangers,

Jesus said unto him, Therefore the sons are free. 27 But, lest we cause them to stumble, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a shekel: take that, and give unto them for me and thee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why ask Peter? What do you suppose was the motivation behind this question posed by the collectors of the temple tax? Did they just happen to meet Peter during their normal collection rounds and decide to take advantage of Jesus' presence to close out their books? Or do you think that there was something sinister in this query? Why not come to Jesus directly?
- b. Why did Peter answer as he did?
- c. On what basis could Jesus claim exemption from a tax that was required by God from every Israelite? Was not Jesus a true Israelite? Should He not have to pay like everyone else? Why this tax dodge?
- d. Maybe you can justify Jesus for not having to pay the tax, but why did Jesus pay the tax also for Peter? Did he enjoy the same exemption? After all, did not Jesus say: ". . . lest we cause them to stumble"? Did not this imply that Peter too would not have had to pay, technically, were it not for the fact that his not paying would have caused this scandal? Or, is that what Jesus meant?
- e. Be honest now: on a plain reading of this text, do you see anything miraculous in the way Jesus had Peter procure the tax money? If so, where? If not, why not?
- f. Do you not think that this "miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth" violates the principle that "miracles are not necessary to be done where ordinary means are available"? There were plenty of other places where Jesus could have obtained the tax payment without resorting to the use of His miraculous power. What possible good could come from a miracle that only one person, i.e. Peter, knew about? Or would others know about it too?
- g. Does it not seem to you that this concentration of the mighty power of God to find one little fish with a coin in its mouth is a misrepresentation of what we usually see in Biblical miracles? Do you not think it a grotesque distortion of the dignified, sober presentation of divine power, to think that God concerns Himself with so tiny a sum as this? God has more important business to

take care of than causing the right fish with the right coin to come up at the right time when Peter first throws his hook in! What is your opinion?

- h. This miracle, if you still think of it as such, brought no relief to suffering humanity. Therefore, it is unworthy of God and Jesus, so it probably did not really happen. Affirm or deny this and tell why.
- i. In the temptation scene in the wilderness Jesus refused to use His miraculous power to supply His own personal needs, even as desperate as His need for food. Here, however, we see a narrative which totally reverses this unselfishness, because Jesus Himself shared in the benefit of this "miracle," a deed contrary to what we see of His spirit elsewhere. How can you possibly justify the inclusion of this story in the Gospel? How can you possibly justify Jesus for doing it?
- j. Show how Jesus' decision to pay a tax He did not owe marvellously illustrates one of the most fundamental principles of Christian ethics, described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:12—11:1; Romans 14:1—15:7.
- k. How many people do you think heard this conversation between Jesus and Peter, and, consequently, knew about the conclusion Jesus drew from His own premises? In other words, how many would probably have actually benefited from His good example given here of paying a tax He did not really owe, in order to keep others from stumbling? Why did not He pay for the other disciples too, as well as for Peter? Would not this have been a greater example? Or were the others not involved?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Upon the arrival of Jesus and the Twelve to Capernaum, those who collected the special poll tax for the upkeep of the temple approached Peter with the question, "Your teacher does pay the tax, does he not?"

"Why, yes, of course, He does!" he said.

However, when Peter got home, Jesus spoke to him first, "What's your opinion, Simon? Who is really subject to pay customs or tribute to earthly monarchs? Their own sons, or strangers outside the royal family?"

"The strangers," was Peter's reply.

"That means, then, that their own sons are exempt," Jesus reminded him. "On the other hand, since we do not want this refusal to pay to become a hindrance to these people so that they would be influenced to think or do something wrong, you go down to the lake and throw in your hook. Haul in the first fish that bites. When you open its mouth, you will discover a silver coin in it. Take that and pay them the tax for you and for me."

SUMMARY

Jesus and the Apostolic company had no sooner arrived back in Capernaum when Peter was cornered by the poll tax collectors about Jesus' payment of the tax for the upkeep of the temple. Without hesitation Peter covered Jesus. But upon his arrival back home, Jesus clarified His own right to exemption from this payment as Son of the King. However, rather than horrify the moral sense of the Jews by His seeming refusal to obey God, He chose to pay the tax. By providing the necessary money in an unusual way, He paid for Himself and for Peter.

NOTES

IV. READINESS TO BE SUBMISSIVE BEYOND DUTY

A. THE PETTY PESTERING FOR PAYMENT OF THE POLL TAX

17:24 **And when they were come to Capernaum**, they had just returned from a long journey north to Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16:13) and possibly to Mt. Hermon nearby. (See on 17:1.) This culminates a series of wide-ranging journeys outside Palestine. (See on 17:22.) The discussion of the temple tax is the first of two events that occurred upon Jesus' return to *Capernaum*, before He left Galilee for elsewhere, and there is an amazingly close connection between them. Bruce (*Training*, 224) is absolutely right to observe that,

. . . though the scene (of the temple tax question) occurred before the sermon (on relative greatness in the Kingdom) was delivered, it happened *after* the dispute which supplied the

preacher with a text. The disciples fell to disputing on the way home from the Mount of Transfiguration, while the visit of the taxgatherers took place on their arrival in Capernaum. . . . Is it too much to assume that His knowledge of what had been going on by the way influenced His conduct in the affair of the tribute money, and led Him to make it the occasion for teaching by action the same lesson which He meant to take an early opportunity of inculcating by words?

In the discussion of the temple tax, Jesus, the Son of God the King, magnanimously pays a tax that He does not owe, thus making Himself the servant of others in order not to place before anyone a temptation to sin. By forgiving Peter's presumptuousness, He illustrates His own rule to forgive indefinitely. Rather than take offense at Peter's compromising answer, He mercifully led him and the others back to that faith in Him they sorely lacked, especially in the preceding moment of failure at the mountain's base. Jesus Himself avoided harsh treatment by the kindness He showed in dealing tenderly with Peter's lack of understanding. The lesson of the first event is that stumbling-blocks can be avoided by gentle consideration of others, while that of the second is that stumbling-blocks occur by neglecting this consideration, and must be correctly removed. (Mt. 18)

The half-shekel (*didrachma*) means the yearly atonement money to be collected from every Hebrew over 20 years of age, as an offering, originally for the service of the tent of meeting, and then of the temple. (Cf. Ex. 30:11-16; 38:25f; 2 Kg. 12:4; 2 Chron. 24:5, 6, 9; also Josephus, *Antiquities* III, 8, 2; XVIII, 9, 1; *Wars* VII, 6, 6) The one-third of a shekel of Neh. 10:32 may represent a temporary reduction due to the poverty of the people. Though it was called an "offering," it was nevertheless compulsory, not only because commanded, but also to serve as a ransom for the payer during the census-taking: "that there be no plague among them when you number them." (Ex. 30:11-16) The plague during the census of David may be an example of this. (See 2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21:27:23f.) The monetary value of the Hebrew half-shekel was two Greek drachmas (the *didrachma*) or two Roman denarii, hence the equivalent of two days' work of a common laborer. **They that received the half-shekel** were Jewish (*Wars*, VI, 6, 2), but not publicans, because no such outcast would have been permitted to handle what was destined for temple service.

Because the *half-shekel* is the temple tax, it is evidence for the early redaction of this Gospel. For, if the *Gemeindetheologie* school is correct to assert that "the unknown editors of our present Gospels dealt only with problems alive in their own given congregations (*Gemeinden*), then on the hypothesis of a later date for the writing of Matthew, how are we to explain this incident where Jesus is pictured as paying the temple tax, when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.? For congregations after that date this problem would no longer exist.

But if this temple tax payment were a pressing problem for early Christians living in Judea, problem to which the Evangelist gives a positive answer, then, we have positive evidence for the early dating of the final redaction of this Gospel. Before the fall of Jerusalem's temple, when the Christians had separated themselves from Judaism but continued to live in Jewish territory and under Jewish religious legislation, the question of the legitimacy of the payment of tribute to the temple would have become quite urgent. And, if the final edition of this Gospel comes from so early a date, there is no necessary reason why the Apostle Matthew himself could not have written it!

That this episode was never intended to deal with civil taxes in general is admitted by an exponent of the *Gemeindetheologie*, Cuminetti (*Matteo*, 237). He frankly notes that, if Matthew included this episode to illustrate not merely the temple tax question, but taxes in general, then Jesus' desire not to "scandalize them" (the tax-collectors) is nonsense. After all, for disciples to refuse to pay taxes in general on the ungrounded pretense to being sons of the King, would be to violate Christian orders to pay taxes. (Cf. Mt. 22:21; Ro. 13:6, 7) In this case there could be no scandal based upon a misuse of one's personal liberty not to pay, but only disobedience to a positive divine command to pay. The intention of the Lord not to scandalize the tax-collectors is comprehensible only if it is a question of the Jewish temple tax. In fact, "the force of the argument depends on the assumption that Jesus was a son of the king for whom the tribute was collected." (McGarvey, *Matthew-Mark*, 155) And He was not the son of any Roman Caesar!

The same should be said of Barclay's attempt (*Matthew*, II, 188) to date Matthew around 80 or 90 A.D., hence after 70 and the destruction of the temple. Vespasian, accordingly, enacted that the half-shekel temple tax be diverted from the now non-existent Jewish temple and paid to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. (Josephus, *Wars*, VII, 6, 6) Accordingly, says Barclay, Matthew

included this story to calm the nerves of Jewish Christians so they would be good citizens and pay their Roman taxes. Unfortunately for this explanation, the Vespasian order is not a Jewish law which had now been superseded, but a Roman one to which the Christians must render obedience. Problem: how could the Christians then justify their support of a pagan without compromise of their conscience toward God? How would this differ from incense to Caesar? A simple but adequate answer would be that Matthew was not addressing himself to the situation in Vespasian's time, because he was really writing long before the Jerusalem temple was destroyed.

If this tax was not a Roman tax payable to publicans at the local tax office in Capernaum (cf. Mt. 9:9), and if the half-shekel for the temple was payable at Jerusalem to Jewish officials, then how explain the approach of these collectors? The answer lies both in their system and in their motives:

1. Concerning the system of collection, the Jewish fiscal organization should be noticed. On the first of Adar (February-March in our calendar) it was proclaimed in the Palestinean provincial cities and towns that the temple tax time had arrived. On the fifteenth of the month authorized money-changers set up booths in each provincial town and village. At these money-stalls, after the local money was exchanged for the sacred coin, the tax was paid to these money changers. Ten days later on the twenty-fifth of Adar, these pay booths were transferred to Jerusalem and set up in the temple precinct. If the tax had not been paid by the twenty-fifth, therefore, the payer could only pay it directly at the temple in Jerusalem. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 111; also I, 367f)

Although Peter paid his and the Lord's tax at this time, there is no necessary indication in this fact that the time of year was near Passover, since the collectors may have accosted Peter merely because Jesus had just returned to Capernaum, and not because they were open for regular pre-Passover business.

2. Concerning their motives for approaching Peter on the Capernaum street, we may notice:
 - a. Jesus' official residence for the major part of His life had been at Nazareth, so the Capernaum collectors would not have been concerned with records of His payments for the ten years He would have been obligated to pay at age twenty until He began His ministry around thirty (cf. Lk. 3:23), because those years were the concern of the Nazareth census bureau and money-

changing tax-collectors.

- b. However, He had changed residence from Nazareth to Capernaum at about age thirty. (Cf. Jn. 2:12; Lk. 3:23; Mt. 4:13 notes) This put Him under the jurisdiction of the Capernaum office. But since His rapid-paced, itinerate ministry kept Him on the move from place to place, it took them nearly three years to catch up with Him, or at least with someone who could furnish correct information about His payment for this year. Further, He had been out of the country a lot recently. (See on Mt. 15:21; 16:5, 13; 17:1, 22.) During the six months from Passover (Jn. 6:4) until this return to Capernaum, He had been in town once only briefly. (Jn. 6:59)
- c. Their question does not necessarily betray any hostility, since it is framed in Greek in such a way as to permit Peter to answer "yes": "Your teacher does pay the two-drachma tax, does He not?" (. . . *ou telei didrachma*; See Blass-Debrunner, *Grammar*, §427 (2); 440; Arndt-Gingrich, 594) This may or may not be another move to entangle Jesus in such a way as to furnish a basis for saying that He was not keeping the Law or supporting the temple.
- d. Their approaching Peter, rather than Jesus, may evidence their timidity to approach the great Rabbi on such a mundane subject. They may have considered Peter a particularly important disciple, another factor possibly contributing to the jealousy behind the subsequent discussion of relative greatness. (Mt. 18)
- e. However, being conversant with Jesus' claims to superiority to many points of Jewish law and His disdain for "authoritative" traditions (cfr. Mt. 12:1-14; 15:1-20), they may be questioning whether He considers Himself exempt from paying this tax too. Since the Pharisees and Sadducees had fiercely debated whether this tax were obligatory or not (See Edersheim, *Life*, II, 112), they may be testing Jesus' views thereabout. This would be their preliminary investigation before attacking Him directly for ignoring what was obligatory obedience to God.

B. THE PRECIPITATE PARRY BY PETER

17:25 **He saith, Yea.** On the basis of Christ's previous practice, Peter responds correctly that He does pay. Without even pausing to wonder whether Jesus NEEDED to present any of the offerings

commanded in the law, Peter leaps to the defensive and presumes to give a positive answer. Since, in the fisherman's estimate his Lord is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and since the tax is obligatory for every self-respecting, Law-abiding Hebrew, Peter reasoned, his Master obviously **HAD** to pay the tax every year. Although Jesus had apparently paid the tax on former occasions, He had taken a position in the meantime, a position that Peter himself had accepted, i.e. that of being the Christ, God's Son. (Mt. 16:13-20) Now, in contrast to all previous years, were Jesus to pay the tax without explaining His motives for so doing, He would have caused very serious misunderstandings for His followers, especially those spiritually-minded souls who could sense the incongruity of the King's Son paying taxes to His own Father. But Peter, in his concern to place his Teacher in a favorable light with the tax people, had overlooked the relationship of Jesus' divine Sonship to their question. He had not thought through his own confession to see its practical ramifications for the earthly life of Jesus.

And when he came into the house, Jesus spake first to him. Returning home from some errand in downtown Capernaum where he had been accosted by the census people, he was met, not by a scolding for his impetuous inference, but by a puzzle. **Jesus spake first to him.** Had Peter intended to mention his conversation in town? Edersheim (*Life*, II, 111) thinks that he would have had no intention of telling Jesus about the conversation, since his defense of the Master was but another way of eliminating opposition to Jesus in its every form. He had answered without previous permission, so he probably sensed that the Lord would not have approved his decision. Whether he intended to bring it up or not, the Lord anticipated it and furnished His disciple not only the essentials for arriving at a correct solution to his question, but gave him additional proof of His omniscience. He showed Peter that He knew about the discussion while that disciple was away from Him. Feel the psychological soundness of His approach to a question about which Peter stood on the wrong side: *What do you think, Simon?* Rather than browbeat him for his wrongness, Jesus invites him to ponder a phase of normal, royal administration and give his opinion. *Simon:* is this a kindly, familiar use of Peter's real name (cf. Lk. 24:34; Ac. 16:14), or, when addressed to him who should have been "Peter" and what this implies, does it imply that Jesus addressed His friend as the man who yet needed to learn much? (Cf. Mk. 14:37; Lk. 22:31; Jn. 21:15-17)

C. THE PRIVILEGED POSITION OF THE PRINCE

The kings of the earth. Is there an antithesis implied here: "the King of heaven"? (Cf. Dan. 4:37; 5:21-23; Mal. 1:14) **From whom do they take toll or tribute? From their sons, or from others?**

NOTE: *toll* (*télos*) is just any kind of tax, customs, duties, the collector of which is called a *telónes*, like Matthew. *Tribute* (*kênsos* = Latin: *census*) is a census tax, or poll tax, payable every year. This latter word, while a common Roman word referring to the census tax (cfr. 22:19), shows Peter that the Lord knows about the Jewish census tax discussion downtown.

The question is easy because of the absurdity it involves: *Toll or tribute* is tax money for the support of the kings themselves and *their sons* as well. To tax their sons is tantamount to taxing themselves, like one hand paying the other. No, kings collect taxes, not from their own sons, but from those outside the royal family, i.e. from *strangers*.

1. THE PROPER PREROGATIVE OF
A POTENTATE'S POSTERITY

17:26 **And when he said, From strangers**, he had answered correctly, but Jesus must make His real point, using the half of the answer that Peter omitted: **Therefore the sons are free.** Two reasons prohibit our seeing in the plural *sons* any application of His principle to the disciples, or even properly to Peter:

1. The essence of the argument does not depend upon whether the royal family is represented by one son or by several, since the contrast is between those who are members of the royal family, hence exempt, and those who are not, hence obligated to pay. (Plummer, *Matthew*, 245)
2. The question raised by the collectors is not whether Peter, or the Twelve, pay, but whether Jesus Himself does. It is nowhere doubted that the disciples are liable. In fact, all God-fearing Hebrews were "sons of God" in this secondary sense (cf. Hos. 1:10; Isa. 43:6), but the very law in question rendered none so bound to pay this tax as they.

So the plural *sons* does not consider Peter and Jesus together as "sons of God's Kingdom," Jesus as God's true Son; Peter, His

disciple, a true "son of the Kingdom." In fact, what was Jesus implying in His conclusion about the exemption?

1. The tax money in question was designated for the service of the temple, the house of the true King of Israel, God Himself. Josephus (*Antiquities* XVIII, 9, 1) affirms that Jesus' contemporaries considered this tax as offered to God.
2. Both God and Peter had confessed Jesus to be "the Son of the living God." (16:16; 17:5)
3. If He is the Son of God, the King and Owner of the temple, then the tax destined for its service does not apply to Him. Should He contribute tax money to His own Father's house? (Cf. Jn. 2:16) Why should He weaken His title as "Son of God," or appear to disown it by acting in a manner out of character with its dignity?

If this is all Jesus said about His own exemption, then we may admire His kindness in not exulting over Peter's wrong thinking, by saying: "So, you see, Simon, how **WRONG** you were to commit me to pay taxes I do not even owe?" He just gently draws out the implication and lets Peter think it over and see the obvious conclusions. This is the face value of His little puzzle, but consider the unstated, but nonetheless indisputable, magnitude of these implications:

1. In His attitude, God's Son towers above the Temple of Javéh and the Mosaic legislation that collected half-shekels for its service. Indeed, "something greater than the temple is here!" (Mt. 12:6) He challenges His obligation to pay this tax only for Himself, because all those who were not sons in the unique, unshared sense of His Sonship, were still liable.
2. Without any preamble or a word of explanation from Peter, Jesus led him around a veritable labyrinth of theological speculation about whether the Messiah, as typical Hebrew, should offer sacrifices, and, by means of a simple illustration, pointed out the right solution. Only One with the certainty of Heaven could keep it that simple, that true and that conclusive. If He were not the Son of God in the highest sense of that word, even His conclusion, so rich in implications, is blasphemy, and He would have no choice but to pay the tax like everyone else.
3. Another reason for not submitting to the tax, which could have laid before the disciples, is based on one of the purposes of the tax. It served as a ransom for the souls of the individuals being counted

in the census. (Ex. 30:11-16) How could He who is the God-appointed ransom for all men somehow be thought to need a ransom for His own life? To admit obligation at this point would cast doubt on His true relation to God and to all other human beings.

2. POWERS POSTPONED BY A PRACTICAL PLIABILITY AND A PURPOSE TO PROTECT PEOPLE

17:27 **But, lest we cause them to stumble . . .** *We* means both Peter and Jesus, because the former had rashly taken a position that committed the other to pay. So both would be involved in any scandal caused by Jesus' refusal to pay it now. The collectors of the half-shekel would not have understood Jesus' divine right not to pay. Unless convinced of His deity, they would have interpreted His proper refusal to pay as claiming a liberty He did not truly possess and as evidence of a lack of reverence for God, the temple and the Law, and they would have been unnecessarily horrified, whereas there was no Hebrew in all the history of Israel that ever had a higher, more intelligent regard for God and His will.

THE ASTOUNDING QUESTION ARISING OUT OF THIS SITUATION IS: "HOW MANY OTHER INDIGNITIES AND INCONGRUITIES DID JESUS HAVE TO ENDURE AS A HUMAN BEING?"

Does this section furnish an answer to the question whether Jesus attended the feasts, offered the sacrifices, and generally respected every other requisite of God's Law given through Moses? May we conclude, on the basis of what He reveals about Himself and His policy in this incident, that it was His normal practice to do everything that it was right for a Hebrew to do? (Mt. 3:15)

1. He had been born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4, 5) There was no intrinsic need for Him to be circumcized (Lk. 2:21) or purified (Lk. 2:22f), except "to perform everything according to the law of the Lord" (Lk. 2:39). Is the temple tax question but a tip of the iceberg of legal obligations which Jesus made it His standard policy to respect?

2. The changes in OT legislation, that Jesus taught would go into effect after His death had set aside the old covenant. (Heb. 9:15-17; Col. 2:13, 14; Eph. 2:14f) Examples:
 - a. The distinction between clean and unclean meats (Mt. 15:11; Mk. 7:19)
 - b. The centralized place of worship (Jn. 4:21-24)
 - c. To what extent did He participate in Passovers without offering sacrifices and sharing in the meals? (Jn. 2:13-23; Lk. 22:15; cf. 1 Co. 10:18)

The Bible does not positively say whether Jesus did or did not offer animal sacrifices—even as thank-offerings to God for His goodness. Nevertheless, simple silence on this question is not a positive argument. Rather, His refusal to offer sacrifices without accompanying His refusal with appropriate explanations to His contemporaries would have caused far more scandal than His refusal to pay the temple tax! For Him to have offered such sacrifices in the temple when not obligated to do so and when fully aware of the temporary character of the Mosaic system would not have contravened His deity, any more than paying the ransom involved in the temple tax would have disproven His right to be the Redeemer, any more than submission to John's baptism would have proven Him sinful merely because one of the primary purposes of that rite was "the forgiveness of sins." (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3)

3. There is no warrant for affirming that Jesus and the Apostles had never paid the temple tax during the three preceding years of His ministry, as if Peter hurried anxiously to get a ruling from Jesus on the matter. Such anxiety would have been psychologically impossible, if a precedent had already been established. But there is no textual indication that Peter was anxious for a ruling or that he even wanted to talk about it. Jesus' anticipation of Peter's mentioning the tax conversation can be interpreted differently, not as anxiety on Peter's part, but as urgency on the Lord's part. The Lord desired to furnish Peter additional proof of His Sonship to God. It is better to assume that Peter well knew that the Lord paid every year, for the simple reason that, had He not done so, Peter could not have truthfully answered "Yes" regarding a yearly tax. Also, would not the Apostles have already questioned Jesus about His non-payment and already received the information just now revealed to them in our text?

If we rightly object that Jesus did not have to subject Himself to the

indignities of offering animal sacrifices required of other Hebrews, we still have not positively affirmed that He did not actually offer them. In an exquisite passage rich in insight, Bruce (*Training*, 217ff) observes:

Surely, in a life containing so many indignities and incongruities,—which was, in fact, one grand indignity from beginning to end,—it was a small matter to be obliged to pay annually, for the benefit of the temple, the paltry sum of fifteenpence! He who with marvellous patience went through all the rest, could not possibly mean to stumble and scruple at so trifling a matter . . . He wished them to understand . . . that it was not a thing of course that He should pay, any more than it was a thing of course that He should become a man, and, so to speak, leave His royal state behind and assume the rank of a peasant: that was an act of voluntary humiliation, forming one item in the course of humiliation, to which He voluntarily submitted, beginning with His birth, and ending with His death and burial.

For our magnanimous Lord, the dilemma was easy to resolve: to refuse to pay, merely to prove a point for some, would cause others to stumble and cost the salvation of some precious souls, but to pay when under no obligation to so do, costs exactly one *didrachma* and He could teach His disciples deference! So He paid, and in so doing He did not violate either His own freedom or the conscience of others. Rather, by submitting, He demonstrated his majesty. **Lest we cause them to stumble**, expresses Jesus' concern for the weak and ignorant. (See on 18:12, 13.) By His example He instructs all disciples not to abuse their freedom and to be sensitive to unbelievers, refraining from unnecessarily offending those who could be positively influenced to accept the Gospel. Although we cannot permit or refuse compliance to a thing on any other grounds, we cannot refuse on this one. The requirement wholly uncalled for in Jesus' case He found absolutely irresistible on the ground of others' weakness. Although He was exempt from the tax because of Who He was, His interest was not in exercising His proper prerogatives, but in helping to protect others from stumbling. Jesus' justification for waiving His privileges may well have been identical to that of Paul. (1 Co. 9:1-23) To relinquish one's own undeniable, inalienable personal rights for the good of others is true self-denial and the story of Jesus' life. (On self-denial, see "The Cost of Our Salvation" after 16:28.) Behold

how "though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor!" He did not possess one half-shekel to His name, and yet His honesty would not divert community funds for private need.

3. THE PRAISEWORTHY PERFORMANCE OF THIS PRINCIPLE OF PRECEDENCE

He paid by procuring the money in such a way as to furnish surprising evidence that He really was the King's Son and exempt as He had said. **Go thou to the sea** (of Galilee just outside Capernaum) **and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a shekel: take that, and give unto them for me and thee.** How would this particular choice of miracles have impressed His fisherman-Apostle? This alone justifies the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth against all His detractors. Anyone who can either create a fish with the right coin in its mouth and bring it to Peter's hook as the first one to bite, or else knew that such a fish would so come, and tell the fisherman to go catch it, qualifies for temple tax exemption, because only Deity can do that! Jesus is not the mere son of an earthly potentate, but the Son of the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, and if He cannot make use of one small fish to bring Him a coin to fill the need, what kind of Son is He?! The moral purpose and spiritual instruction in his miracle were aimed squarely at Peter, and indirectly and secondarily at us. The coin itself was not a *shekel*, as translated in our text, but a *statér*, a silver coin equivalent to the Jewish shekel, hence enough to pay two half-shekel taxes.

Take that, and give unto them for me and thee. Why pay for Peter too? He was not a Son of God, hence not exempt in the way Jesus was. However, his constant association with Jesus in His whirlwind ministry may not have permitted him leisure to pay his just dues as a true Hebrew. Therefore, when Peter took Jesus' payment to the collectors, they might well have questioned Peter about his own tax payment, and were they to find him delinquent, there would be another cause of stumbling. So Jesus paid for them both to eliminate any possible cause for scandal. The money the Lord furnished, however, was not "for us," as if both were sons of God in the same sense, but *for me and for yourself*, the Son who is exempt and the citizen who is not. The payments are identical, but the reason for which each of them is paid is different.

OBJECTIONS TO THIS "FISH STORY"

1. **There is no real miracle here.** Some would suggest that Jesus' reference to the fish be understood metaphorically: "In the fish that you will catch you will find what will pay for us." Accordingly, this might mean that the fish would sell for the right amount. And since we are not told that Peter actually did find a coin in the mouth of a fish, the confirmation of the prediction's exact terms is missing.

ANSWER: Matthew did not need to elaborate on Peter's obedience to Jesus' orders, the latter not being essential to the account of Jesus' teaching about the temple tax. The fact that the miracle is not described means that the emphasis of this story is not on the miracle, Matthew's purpose being to teach Jewish Christians their duty not to abuse their freedom. However, the natural impression on the reader is that the order was obeyed and that the miracle really occurred. This impression is confirmed by the skeptics' own attacks based on this impression. But to demythologize the miracle by reducing His statement to "You will find our tax money (in the sale of) the very first catch," excludes divine foreknowledge and, in its place, substitutes simple, human probability prediction.

2. **It was not beyond human power to earn such a trifling sum.** "A day or two of fishing by the Apostles would have brought in enough money to pay the tax for themselves and Jesus too. Therefore this miracle violates the usual principle that supernatural means are not used where natural means suffice. Poor as Jesus and His disciples were, the putting together a sum equivalent to the salary for four working days is not so serious a matter as to require a miracle to raise such a trifling sum."

ANSWER: Natural means would never have sufficed in this situation to prove what Jesus proved by this sign of His true Sonship, nor demonstrated that Jesus needed not to submit to the humiliation of paying a tax for the support of the royal house. Divine power is required to testify that all nature serves HIM, and that, as His father's Son, He possessed all things. Admittedly, the intrinsic value of the sum is trifling, but this can never be thought the basis for considering the miracle as having been worked for a very trifling purpose! Is it a trifling purpose to show His disciples how profound was His voluntary submission to a servile obligation, despite His full consciousness of His own identity? And is it a trifling purpose to establish that identity by choosing a

manner of payment which would contemporaneously illustrate Himself "as the Lord of nature, to whom all creatures in land or sea were subject, and all their movements familiar, while yet so humbled as to need the services of the meanest of them"? (Bruce, *Training*, 219) Even so, Jesus sent Peter to go fishing. He did not will the fish to come to Him at the edge of the lake and drop the coin within His reach. He made use of ordinary human means to complete the miracle.

3. **It served the personal need and was done for the personal benefit of the one who worked the miracle.** "If this story be taken in its crude literalism, it would show Jesus using His divine power to satisfy His own personal needs. But He had decided never to use His miraculous power selfishly to satisfy His own hunger or to enhance His prestige as a worker of wonders. (Mt. 4:1-11) Thus, taken literally, this story violates Jesus' own character and wilderness decision."

ANSWER: Instead of seeming to compromise the completeness of His humiliation, this miracle only makes it that much more glaringly conspicuous, as if the miracle story proclaimed: "Notice who it is that must pay this tax and is so painfully poor that He must stoop to such a level in order to pay it! It is He who has 'dominion over the works of your hands . . . the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea!' " (Psa. 8:6-8; 50:11) So, rather than profit in such a way as to alleviate His human life of hardship by the use of His divine power, He is still teaching others the reality of His humiliation. If this seems an exception to His normal rule of doing nothing miraculous for His own benefit, "the exception, however, had the same reason as the rule, and therefore proved the rule." (Bruce, *Training*, 220)

3. **The story is immoral in that it encourages man to suppose that by a stroke of good luck he can solve his problems, meet his obligations without exertion on his part.**

ANSWER: Those who accuse the Lord of solving His problems without exertion should consider how much it cost Jesus to place Himself in the incongruous position of becoming a man at all. Let them decide whether HE would have considered it a "stroke of good fortune" or "meeting one's obligations in a lazy, effortless way," when His entire life was one grand indignity, one continuous and voluntary servanthood, from start to finish. No, the miracle story, by its very nature and the lessons it teaches, distinguish Jesus the miracle-worker from any common mortal who would

excuse himself for effortless laziness and refusal to pay the normal price of work for all things.

4. **The miracle is grotesque and unworthy of God:** "The very idea of using a fish to deliver tax payments, indeed!"

ANSWER: Consider God's use of animals to do His bidding: Nu. 21:6; 22:21-33; 1 Kg. 13:24; 17:4-6; 2 Kg. 17:25f; Ezek. 14:15, and especially God's use of the great fish to deliver Jonah! Jon. 1:17; 2:1-10. Why shouldn't He have had to take the coin from the FISH's mouth when HE could have taken it from an ANGEL's hand! On the other hand, Jesus did some other scandalous things (Mt. 11:6) like going to a cross. (1 Co. 1:18-23) More grotesque than that . . .!

EVIDENCES OF JESUS' DIVINE DIGNITY REVEALED IN THIS SECTION

1. Omniscience is revealed by His anticipating Peter's recounting the temple tax discussion. (17:25)
2. His consciousness of His true Sonship. (17:25)
3. His considerate deference to others' weakness shown in His unwillingness to take offence at nor scandalize those who would not understand His reasons. (17:27)
4. His omnipotence was again manifest in drawing the right fish (the one that had precisely the right coin) to Peter's hook first. (17:27) Or else, by divine omniscience He knew that the coin was there and that the fish would come to Peter's hook. He knew and foretold that God would pay His tax in this way.
5. His generousness with Peter: not only did He not scold him for his unfitting answer, but He shared His own bounty to pay Peter's tax along with His own. (17:27) God does things like this.

Barclay's note (*Matthew*, II, 183f) beautifully concludes Jesus' lesson to us from this chapter:

We see here the constant demands which were made upon Jesus. Straight from the glory of the mountain top, He came to be met by the demands of human need and human suffering. Straight from hearing the voice of God, He came to hear the clamant demand of human need. The most precious and most Christ-like person in the world is the person who never finds his fellowmen a nuisance. It is easy to feel Christian in the moment

of prayer and meditation; it is easy to feel close to God when the world is shut out, and when heaven is very near. But that is not religion—that is escapism. Real religion is to rise from our knees before God to meet men and the problems of the human situation. Real religion involves both meeting God in the secret place and men in the market place. Real religion means taking our needs to God, not that we may have peace and quiet and undisturbed comfort, but that we may be enabled graciously, effectively and powerfully to meet the needs of others.

As noted before, the second half of this lesson will be concluded with Jesus' sermon in chapter 18.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus and the Apostles been when they arrived in Capernaum?
2. What is this "half-shekel" tax that the collectors ask about? What was its purpose? What Scriptures speak about this tax?
3. Why do the collectors ask this particular question? Did they expect Peter to answer yes or no?
4. Where was Peter when accosted by the collectors?
5. Who were "they who receive the half-shekel"? Were they the same as "publicans"? How do you know?
6. In this section Jesus demonstrated His deity and divine dignity in various ways. What are they?
7. What does this section indicate about Jesus relation to the Mosaic Law and its institutions?
8. Why did Jesus anticipate Peter when he came home? How did He do this?
9. What is the principle behind Jesus' question and the point of His own conclusion?
10. Why did Jesus pay the tax? Of what grand principle in Christianity is this an excellent illustration?
11. Explain the mechanism in this situation whereby Jesus and Peter would cause these tax collectors to stumble, were they not to pay the tax these thought was due.
12. Explain how Jesus paid the taxes.
13. Prove that there is (or is not) a miracle involved in the peculiar way Jesus secured the tax money. Indicate the purpose(s) involved

in His getting the money this way.

14. Show how this incident is excellent psychological preparation for the teaching the disciples must have and will receive in the incident that immediately follows in Matthew 18:1-35.

INTRODUCTION: THE UNITY OF CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

No chapter is better connected nor better reveals the mind of the Lord back of every paragraph, uniting its every concept from beginning to end, than chapter 18. The most remarkable characteristic of this section is not merely its wholeness, but the amazing number of threads per verse that connect and interweave ideas throughout the entire chapter.

Perhaps the best way to experience this unity at first hand is to pick out an idea as if it were a thread of one color, and then trace it through the chapter to see its various applications. Then, pass to another colored thread of thought and follow it through the Lord's message. The ever-pleasing result will be a growing appreciation for our Lord's ability to deal with His disciples' initial dispute and the deeper spiritual problem that caused it, as well as a sense of amazement at the long-term, final answers Jesus gave to our most complex modern problems.

Here are some of the themes you might wish to trace throughout this chapter:

1. Right and wrong ambition in the Kingdom of God.
2. Relative rank: one's relationships to those who are his inferiors and superiors.
 - a. Definition and illustrations of "inferiors";
 - b. Redefinition of "superiors."
3. Responsibility for others' spiritual growth, needs and failures.
4. Responsibility for one's own spiritual interests and needs.
5. Standards of judgment and a concept of mercy.
6. Greatness in the Kingdom, or, relative importance to God and the Kingdom.
7. The perils of pride, despising others and unmercifulness.
8. The various faces of humility.
9. Jesus' love for the least, the last and the lost.
10. Christian discipline as this reveals itself in personal self-discipline

and in congregational discipline.

11. The picture of the Church that Jesus paints: the Kingdom of God is not a community of plaster saints typical of an ideal purity impossible to realize. Rather, it is a congregation of people who continue to make mistakes, to sin, to cause occasions of stumbling and refuse to forgive, and who always need forgiving. And it is an assembly that lives in the awareness that God loves and cares for each single member without exception and is conscious that Christ is in its midst, and so acts with full authority and confidence.
12. True and false concepts of structures of authority.

Additional proof of the chapter's unity is the fact that each of these themes is so important to the texture of the final result that one outline of the chapter will just not exhaust its meaning, since to outline means to summarize, but to summarize means to omit some of the chapter's thematic developments. The outline we will be following is an attempt to represent as many of these themes as possible.

This chapter is an interesting study of human motivation to action. It shows how holy and unholy ambition are related, yet contrary. As you go through the chapter, ask yourself, what are the various sound psychological devices used by the Lord to help disciples to aspire to true greatness as He defines it?

The more one works with each paragraph in this study, the more he becomes convinced that one can take almost any motif anywhere in the chapter and see its connections with almost any other which precedes or follows it! Even the scholar who begins with the pre-supposition that some unknown editor arranged these otherwise unconnected materials into one discourse, if he permits himself to entertain the not improbable possibility that that unknown editor was a gifted, intelligent Christian, hence knew exactly what he was about, must be smitten with the surprising cohesion with which every single idea in this chapter is intertwined with every other. Judged merely from a literary standpoint, this speech is an unexcelled masterpiece on human relations. Its lucidity and incisiveness, its simplicity and far-reaching applications, its tenderness and its terrible power to strike terror in the conscientious, all present us with a wisdom so high as to be worthy only of Him who identified Himself as the Son of God. Only eternity can bring to light the brilliance of character produced in His disciples and all the lasting good done in the world and all the problems resolved in the Church by this single lesson by our Lord!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN OUTLINE AND SUMMARY

Section 46. Jesus Trains the Twelve in Personal Relations (18:1-35)

SITUATION: DISCIPLES DREAMING OF DISTINCTIONS: Argument among the disciples about relative status in the Messianic Kingdom (18:1; Mk. 9:33f; Lk. 9:46f)

RESPONSE: JESUS' SERMON ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHERS

TEXT: "The secret of true greatness is humble service to others."
(Mk. 9:35)

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: The little child in the midst. (Mt. 18:2; Mk. 9:36; Lk. 9:47)

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMILITY THEME:

- I. Your position in, and relative importance to the Kingdom of God is measured by your humility. (Mt. 18:3f)
 - A. Entering the Kingdom depends on humility: "only the humble need apply!" (Mt. 18:3)
 - B. Relative rank in the Kingdom depends on humility: "The humblest is the greatest: the most important is he who admits his deep spiritual need!" (Mt. 18:4)
- II. Your humility is measured by your openness and sensitivity to so-called "inferiors" in the Kingdom: "There are NO UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE in the Kingdom!" (18:5; Mk. 9:36b, 37; Lk. 9:48-50)
 - A. Receiving the least important means receiving the King! (Mt. 18:5; Mk. 9:37; Lk. 9:48)
 - B. John's question about the unaffiliated miracle worker the rebuke of whom implied a sectarian rejection of all but themselves. (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:49)
 - C. Jesus' answer: a lesson on exclusiveness and bigotry versus tolerance (Mk. 9:39-41; Lk. 9:50)
 1. "Do not forbid him: I am in control here."
 2. "Whoever helps me will not soon turn against me."
 3. "Whoever is not actively opposed to you, permits you to work."
 4. "Whoever helps you in the smallest way will be rewarded."
- III. Your humility is measured by your concern about your own sins

- and liability to sin and what this does to others. (Mt. 18:6-9; Mk. 9:42-50)
- A. "The one who causes stumbling is better off dead!" (Mt. 18:6; Mk. 9:42)
 - B. "The world is bad enough off without YOUR contribution to its stock of stumbling blocks!" (Mt. 18:7)
 - C. "Your own most important and justifiable bodily members can cause you to stumble, so are better dispensed with than permit them to cause the loss of your soul! No sacrifice is too great! (Mt. 18:8, 9; Mk. 9:43-48)
 - D. "How do you want it: saved by the fire or saved for the fire?" (Mk. 9:49, 50)
- IV. Your humility and sensitivity to the weak is measured against Heaven's concern for them. (Mt. 18:10-14) The problems of "inferiors" immediately and actively involve the sympathetic concern of Heaven.
- A. Ministering angels have God's immediate audience. (Mt. 18:10)
 - B. The Good Shepherd came to seek the lost little ones. (Mt. 18:11-13)
 - C. God Himself has no desire to lose any we might designate "inferiors." (Mt. 18:14)
- V. Your humility and sensitivity to others is measured by your concern about others' sins. (Mt. 18:15-20) Does it really matter to you about the gain or loss to the Kingdom of a brother? "If your brother sins . . .
- A. Make a personal effort to regain him. (Mt. 18:15)
 - B. Get other helpers as witnesses. (Mt. 18:16)
 - C. Enlist the strength of the congregation (Mt. 18:17-20)
 1. The special weight of the common judgment of common believers: God will recognize Church decisions rightly taken! (Mt. 18:18)
 2. The special power of the common prayer of common believers: God will answer their prayers! (Mt. 18:19)
 3. The special honor of the common meeting of common believers: Jesus Himself is present and personally interested!

VI. Your humility and sensitivity to others is judged by your readiness to forgive or show mercy. (Mt. 18:21-35)

A. Peter's question: "How many times forgive?" (Mt. 18:21)

B. Jesus answers: "No limit; mercifulness is the rule in God's Kingdom!" (18:22-35)

1. Consider the greatness of God's mercy to you. (18:23-27)

2. Consider the smallness of your brother's sins against you. (18:28-30)

3. Consider the consequences of indulging an unforgiving spirit. (18:31-34)

CONCLUSION: You endanger your own position in the Kingdom by unmercifulness and reckless superiority! (Mt. 18:35)

Section 46

JESUS TRAINS THE TWELVE IN PERSONAL RELATIONS (Parallels: Mark 9:33-50; Luke 9:46-50)

TEXT: 18:1-35

A. Humility and True Greatness

1 In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2 And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

B. Responsibility

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me; 6 but whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea,

C. Self-renunciation

7 Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh! 8 And if thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. 9 And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire.

D. Individual Concern

10 See that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. (Many authorities, some ancient, insert ver. 11: "for the Son of man came to save that which was lost." See Luke 19:10) 12 How think ye? If any man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go unto the mountains, and seek that which goeth astray? 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth over it more than over the ninety and nine which have not gone astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

E. Discipline in the Fellowship of Christ

15 And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. 17 And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. 18 Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my

Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

F. Forgiveness

21 Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven. 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would make a reckoning with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, that owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 27 And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred shillings: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest. 29 So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due. 31 So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord called him unto him, and saith to him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me: 33 shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. 35 So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.

(19:1 And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan.)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

a. Matthew (18:1) says the disciples came to Jesus asking, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom?" whereas Mark (9:34) says that

when they were asked directly about this very discussion, "they were silent." How can both statements be true? Explain this apparent contradiction by showing the proper order in which these took place.

- b. What is the spirit of the Apostles' argument? What would their mental concept of the Kingdom have been that caused them to discuss the question of relative greatness?
- c. What is the point of Jesus' object lesson: what is there about children that makes them a good illustration of what the disciples must become?
- d. What does it matter what attitude one has who would seek to enter the Kingdom?
- e. How does humility so radically affect a man's life as to produce the desired change Jesus indicates as absolutely essential for entrance into God's Kingdom? Explain how it is that the most humble are the greatest in the Kingdom.
- f. How do the principles of Jesus conflict with those of the world as to what constitutes true greatness? Who are the truly great in God's sight?
- g. What are some dangers to avoid in trying to be truly humble?
- h. Does Jesus actually say that it is wrong to want to be great? Did He imply it?
- i. What does "receiving little children" have to do with humility? Do "the great" of this world not receive them?
- j. Does Jesus mean that those who operate orphanages serve God perfectly?
- k. Why were the Apostles mistaken to hinder the unaffiliated worker of miracles?
- l. Why do you suppose Jesus permitted the unaffiliated worker to do his work in His name? So that the disciples would have to encounter him and have to decide about him?
- m. How does building a religious denomination with its great agencies, its shows of strength, its big conventions, its fences of separation, its grand institutions, defy the spirit and will of Jesus? Or does it? If not, why not?
- n. What does judging by harsh condemnation do to this spirit of Jesus?
- o. How does the incident involving the unaffiliated worker of miracles relate to His teaching concerning false teachers? Does this passage instruct us to receive all religious teachers regardless of their teaching, simply on the strength of the fact that "they follow

not with us"?

- p. How can you harmonize "he that is not against us is for us" (Mk. 9:40) with Mt. 12:30: "He who is not with me is against me"?
- q. Does Jesus specify what reward may be expected by any who help the disciples? What do you think it is?
If you say that "these little ones who believe in me" are young Christians, why then does Jesus call them "little"? What is so "little" about them?
- s. How or why would death by drowning be "better" or "profitable" for the one who causes others to stumble?
- t. Why "must" occasions of stumbling come? How do they come?
- u. If a Christian, despite his pure life in Christ, unknowingly causes others to sin, is he thereby placed under the condemnation of Jesus? What is a stumbling block anyway? Is it best to look for them in our lives, or to ignore them and let others point them out? Are any of your present habits or attitudes likely to become stumbling blocks? What are you doing about them?
- v. What is the relationship between Jesus' dire warnings about one's own hands, eyes or feet, and what precedes as well as what follows them? In other words, what principle is seen in self-discipline and self-mastery that affects the disciples' attitude toward others?
- w. What protection against damning selfishness does Jesus afford His disciples in the very words of our text? (Mt. 18:1-35)
- x. How many weak, sinful, stubborn, abusive, hardheaded church-members are included in the command: "See that you despise not one of these little ones"? How do you know?
- y. How does the illustration about the finding of the lost sheep hold an undisguised threat to status-seeking disciples ambitious to be the greatest in the Kingdom? How does this parable serve as an extremely important context for the teaching on church discipline given later in this same text? (Mt. 18:15-18)
- z. Who is meant by "thy brother (who) sins"? Should we bring "against thee" into the discussion? Is our action toward a sinning brother dependent upon whether he has sinned against us or not?
- aa. Even if we admit "against thee" as having been written in the text by Matthew, does this change anything about the nature and seriousness of the brother's sin? What "sin" is referred to in this command the Lord obviously intended for us: it is *anything* listed in the NT lists of sins? What is the law whereby we know when a person sins? How are we going to apply Jesus' will as He states it here?

- bb. Must this "sin" be a public disgrace before we do anything about it? What if it is a failure in one's Christian faith which needs to be strengthened by privately showing him the lack? Are there sins concerning which one should not make a public issue where it is better to forgive than to publish them by initiating disciplinary action? On what basis should this decision be made?
- cc. Since not everyone is gifted with tact and wisdom sufficient to approach the sinning brother in order delicately to remove the cause of his stumbling, would it not be just sufficient merely to be kind and forgiving toward him without going to him about it? Must we go? Why not just pray for him and stay home? Besides, if we lack the necessary abilities to handle the case right, would we not do more harm than good? What does the Lord say?
- dd. Why go to the sinning brother privately at first? Show the wisdom of this course.
- ee. Why, in the case of failure, should one or two others go too? What is their exact function?
- ff. Why "tell the matter to the church"?
- gg. Who or what exactly is the "church" here? How could Jesus speak of the church before it even existed?
- hh. Do you think that God has nothing better to do than cooperate with the Church on earth by ratifying in heaven decisions made by the Church? Who is governing this world anyway: God or the Church? How are we to understand the "binding and loosing on earth and in heaven"?
- ii. Do you think Jesus should require anyone, much less His Church, to call people names like "pagan" or "publican"? Why or why not?
- jj. Just because two people agree to ask God for something, does this mean that God is obligated to honor the promise made by Jesus in our text? (18:19) Or are there other considerations? If so, what are they?
- kk. In what sense is it true that Jesus is present wherever two disciples meet in His name?
- ll. Do you think an erroneous decision made by the Church, or perhaps one which contravened God's law, would be binding on anyone? What do you think should be done, if the Church does err in a particular disciplinary case?
- mm. When Peter asked the Lord how often "my brother shall sin against me," who does he mean by "my brother"? only Andrew? What had been said in Jesus' previous discussion that would cause

Peter to ask this question?

- nn. Do you think Peter was being generous or Pharisaic to try to ascertain the precise limit to which one should go in forgiving a brother? Why?
- oo. Should we forgive an offender who does not seek forgiveness from us? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- pp. Why should Jesus have to tack onto His demand that we forgive the additional expression "from the heart"? Is there any other kind of forgiveness?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Returning to Galilee from the tour of Phoenicia, Syria, Decapolis, and, most recently, the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus and the Twelve arrived in Capernaum. Now an argument had arisen among the disciples as to which of them was the most important. But Jesus knew what they were thinking. So when He was indoors, He faced them with the question, "What were you discussing on the way home?"

But they would not answer, because on the road they had been disputing with one another about who was the greatest. At that moment some of the disciples came forward to Jesus, blurting out the question, "Who then is really the most important in the coming Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus sat down and, calling the Twelve together, told them, "If any one wants to be first, he must put himself last of all and be the servant of everybody!"

At this point He called a child to His side and stood him in the center of the group, commenting, "Truly I can assure you, unless you change your entire outlook and become like children, you will certainly never get into God's Kingdom! The most important man in the coming Kingdom is the one who humbles himself till he is like this child."

Then, putting His arms around the child, He continued, "Whoever takes care of one little child like this for my sake, is, in effect, welcoming and caring for me. And whoever welcomes and cares for me, is not receiving me only, but also God who sent me. You see, he who seems to be the least important among you all, is really the one who is the most important!"

John broke in to say, "Master, we encountered somebody invoking

your name to drive out demons, so we tried to stop him, because he does not follow you along with us."

But Jesus' answer was, "You must not hinder him, because no one who uses my name to do a miracle, will immediately thereafter be able to insult or revile me. In fact, anyone who is not actively against us is on our side. I can assure you that, whoever gives you a mere cup of water to drink on the basis of the fact that you belong to Christ,—there is no way he can miss his reward."

"On the other hand, if someone becomes the means whereby one of these seemingly less important disciples is caused to stumble into sin, it would be better for him to have a millstone tied around his neck and be plunged into the sea and drowned. How terrible for the world that there are things that cause people to stumble into sin! In fact, it is inevitable that such things happen, but woe to the person through whose influence the temptation comes! So, if it is YOUR hand or YOUR foot that proves a snare to YOU, hack it off and fling it away from YOU. By comparison, it is better for YOU to live forever maimed or lame than be thrown with both hands or both feet into the eternal, unquenchable fire of hell! It is the same way with YOUR eye, if this is the cause of YOUR undoing, tear it out and hurl it away from YOU. Entering life half-blind in the Kingdom of God, is better for YOU, than with two good eyes to be thrown into a fiery hell, where the maggots never die and the fire is never put out. The salt with which everyone will be salted is fire. But the "salt" is a good thing only if it has not lost its strength. Otherwise, how will you season it? You must have in yourselves the "salt" I mean, and keep on living at peace with one another."

"Be especially careful not to underesteem—much less despise—one of these seemingly insignificant followers! I assure you that in heaven their angels have uninterrupted access to my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? Suppose a man had a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray. Would not he leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that is straying? Moreover if he manages to find it, it goes without saying that he is happier over it than over the ninety-nine that have not gone astray. So, it is not the will of my heavenly Father that even one of these seemingly insignificant disciples should be lost.

"So, if your brother sins against you, go and convince him of his fault privately, just between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed

by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, present your case to the congregation. And if he refuses to listen even to the community of believers, then consider him like you would a pagan or an outcast. I assure you that whatever action you take on earth will conform to the divine pattern and God will back you up. I intend to underline the fact that, if even two of you agree on earth about anything they pray for, they will receive it from my heavenly Father. This is because, where two or three come together as disciples to meet in my name, I am right there with them."

Then Peter came up with the problem: "Lord, how often shall my brother keep on sinning against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?"

Jesus disagreed, "No, I would not say, seven times, but seventy times seven! This is why God's Kingdom may be compared to a king who decided to settle accounts with his agents. He had no sooner begun than one man was brought in who owed him an astronomical figure. Since he could not pay it, his Lord ordered him to be sold as a slave—his wife, his children and all his possessions—and payment to be made. At this the agent fell to his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, give me time, and I will repay you every cent of it!' Out of mercy for him, this lord not only released him, but also forgave him the debt. But this same fellow, as he went out, happened to meet one of his co-workers who owed him a paltry sum. Grabbing him by the throat, he began choking him and demanding, 'Pay me what you owe!' At this, his companion prostrated himself, pleading, 'Just be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But the other refused. Instead, he hauled him off to prison till the debt should be paid. Since other co-workers had witnessed the spectacle, all very upset they went to their master and reported the entire incident. Then the king summoned that agent and addressed him: 'You wicked ingrate! I cancelled your entire debt because you asked me to. Should you not have been as merciful to your fellow worker, as I was to you?' His indignant master then turned him over to the prison torturers, until he should pay the entire amount. This is precisely how my heavenly Father will treat every last one of you, unless you sincerely forgive your brother!"

Then, when Jesus had finished this message, He left Galilee and went beyond the Jordan River to Perea which borders on Judea.