JESUS
THE PRIEST

The things concerning
the Lord Jesus Christ as seen in
the four Gospels

THOMSON B. THOMAS

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Jesus the Priest

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Preface

This is the third volume in the exposition on the blessed life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is entitled 'Jesus, the Priest.' This volume covers the events of the Passion Week. Jesus, as a Priest, offers Himself as a sacrifice for all men. It begins with the Lord's visit to Jerusalem and the Temple, the day after the Triumphal Entry. The Lord had spent the night in Bethany. In the morning, He would come to Jerusalem. The first event we notice in this journey is the cursing of the fig tree. The week was the most eventful in the life of the Lord on earth. The volume concludes with the Ascension of the Lord from the borders of Bethany, on the slope of the Mount of Olives, and includes a note on the angelic promise of the Second Advent of Jesus. The title for the volume is given, considering the priestly ministry of the Lord, of teaching, praying, and offering Himself as a sacrifice. In His priestly ministry, He gave Himself for the atonement of our sins, on the cross as a perfecting sacrifice. This book is an exposition on the events of that eventful week.

The first volume, 'Jesus, the Sovereign,' covers the period from His coming to the earth in His first advent to the sending of the twelve to the Galilean cities. The focus was on the kingdom. That explains the basis for the title given. He was then offering Himself as their Sovereign, the King. The second volume covers the feeding of the five thousand to the Triumphal Entry. During this period, Jesus was mainly teaching the people and the disciples. At the beginning and the end, people refer to the Lord as the Prophet. As the teaching ministry is more prominent in this period, the volume was titled 'Jesus, the Prophet.'

I am grateful for the reception accorded to the two volumes published in 2009 and 2021. Many have been enquiring about

the writing of the third volume. These enquiries and expectations of many were a great encouragement to write the present volume. I hope the same welcome will be extended to this volume also.

The content of these volumes is a series of Bible studies taken at Bethel Christian Assembly, Santacruz, Mumbai. Mr A.T. Kurian, one of the elders of the assembly and the executive trustee of Gospel Literature Service, Mumbai, asked to take this topic for the Bible study series. The series went on for a few years with some breaks in between. After attending the early part of the series, he asked me to start writing it and assured its publication by the Gospel Literature Service. Though with some reluctance, sensing the enormity of the work, I took it as a God-given opportunity and agreed to write. Now, when I am typing these lines, I have the satisfaction of completing the project I undertook. All glory to God, without whose help I would not have been able to complete these volumes.

Without the help and encouragement of many others, this would not have become possible. Among them are Mr A.T. Kurian and other trustees, and the staff of the Gospel Literature service. I am grateful to all of them. Without the continuous support of my wife, Sheeba Thomson, and children with their families, Davis and Evelyn, and Lydia and Praise, this venture would not have been possible.

The pursuit of knowing the blessed Lord Jesus is the greatest occupation one can be possessed with in this life on earth. Our progress in the knowledge of Him shall continue even in eternity. Peter says, *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18). With much prayer and delight, I present this volume, 'Jesus, the Priest,' before the readers, to read, benefit and reflect on the life of the Lord Jesus, in all situations we move and live.

To God alone be glory and honour.

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I

Introduction

The Great High Priest

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."
Hebrews 4:14

I

The Great High Priest

The title, 'Jesus Christ,' denotes the Lord's two prominent states, humbled and exalted. The former, Jesus, which means 'Saviour,' is His title in humiliation. The angel Gabriel announced to Joseph, *"And she (*Mary*) will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins"* (Mt. 1:21). He fulfilled all that was necessary for saving His people and took His most honoured position in the highest place in all creation, the heaven itself, at the right hand of the Majesty. The title 'Christ' is His name in this exaltation. The word means 'anointed'. The equivalent Aramaic term is Messiah (John 1:41).

The Messiah, or the anointed, is an Old Testament word. Three offices in the Old Testament come under this term: kings, priests, and prophets. These were called 'anointed' as they were inducted into these offices by anointing (Leviticus 8:12; Psalms 133:2; 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 19.16). When this title is applied to Christ, it points to the Lord's offices or ministries as King, Prophet, and Priest. In the present volume, the priestly work of the Lord, while He was on earth is considered.

This volume, entitled 'Jesus, the Priest,' is the third and the last one in the series on the life of Jesus Christ. During His earthly life, the focus of His ministry was not always the same. For example, during the initial period of His public ministry, He was announcing the coming of the Kingdom. In the last week, He was focused on the cross. According to the shift in focus of the ministry, we might divide the life of Jesus into three sections. In

the first section, we see Him as King offering the Kingdom to Israel, in the second part His prophetic ministry, and in the last week of His public ministry as a Priest, He offers Himself on the cross.

In a sense, all three offices, prophet, priest, and king, He always adorned from eternity itself. Even in earthly life, He was always Prophet, Priest, and King. For example, the malefactor recognised Him as King even on the cross, and Jesus accepted the recognition. Similarly, even during the Passion week, He taught and exercised His prophetic ministry. The Olivet discourse and the Upper Room ministry were examples of this. Thus, we cannot say that the earthly life and ministry of Jesus are divided into watertight compartments. But at the same time, a careful and close study would make it evident that there is a shift in the focus of the ministry of the Lord in different sections of His life on earth. The One who entered human history as the Son of David, with a royal descent, offered the kingdom of God to the Jewish nation. Until they rejected Him, accusing Him that the miracles were done with the help of the Devil, He spoke about the Kingdom (Matthew 12). Jesus, then, utters the kingdom parables (Matthew 13). We have covered this part of His life in the first volume titled, 'Jesus, the Sovereign.'

The second volume in the series covers the life and ministry of the Lord, from feeding the five thousand to the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Here, at the beginning and end, we see the declaration that Jesus is the Prophet. John records, "*Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world"* (John 6:14). This was the response of the people whom the Lord fed. After the Triumphal Entry, there was a similar response. Matthew says, "*And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, 'Who is this?"* So, the multitudes said, "*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee"* (Matthew 21:10-11). The major part of the ministry in between these two terminals, the Lord was teaching, mainly His followers. Thus, the second volume in this series is titled 'Jesus, the Prophet.'

The present volume, the third in the series, is titled 'Jesus, the Priest.' The volume covers the Passion Week. These were the events of the last week of the Lord Jesus on the earth. The post-resurrection appearances that followed are an inseparable part of the week. That was the week the Lord offered Himself on the cross. When all the priests of the Old Testament, whose works prefigured the redemption work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, offered animals on the altar, Jesus offered Himself on the cross, once and for all. The writer to the Hebrews says, "*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things about God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people"* (Hebrews 2:17). This He accomplished by giving Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of everyone, once and for all. The focus here is on the events of that eventful week, the Passion Week.

Consider the High Priest

The Levitical priesthood was a shadow of the priesthood of Jesus. This matter is discussed in detail in the book of Hebrews. Jesus is called "*a merciful and faithful High Priest in things about God"* (2:17). All who are merciful may not be faithful, and all faithful may not be merciful. But Jesus is merciful and faithful. And believers are called to "*consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus"* (3:1). Further down, the writer says, "*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Here, Jesus is called "*a Great High Priest."* This is a unique title given to Jesus. When the epistle was written, the title 'High Priest' was given to the high priest, his deputy, those who were retired as high priests, heads of each priestly course, etc. But the title, the Great High Priest, was given to the one appointed as high priest for the year. In the Old Testament, the high priests were removed from their office only by death. When the Romans

came to power over Palestine in BC 63, to control the Israelites, they imposed certain rules for the high priesthood. They removed them whenever they wanted. If they were favourable to the rulers, their tenure of high priesthood was extended. Otherwise, the term would be short. Thus, at the same time, there would be many whom the people would call high priests, from the past and present. But to distinguish the high priest of the year, the high priest in the office was named the Great High Priest. When Jesus is called the Great High Priest, it indicates that He is serving His people now, in heaven.

Albert Barnes says,

> "The phrase 'Great High Priest' here is used with reference to a known usage among the Jews. In the time of the apostle the name high priest pertained not only to him who held the office, and who had the right to enter into the holy of holies, but to his deputy, and to those who had held the office, but who had retired from it; and perhaps also the name was given to the head of each one of the twenty four courses or classes into which the priests were divided. The name 'Great High Priest' would designate Him who held the office, and was at the head of all the other priests."[1]

The passage says that Jesus has passed through the heavens, the atmospheric, stellar, and the third heavens. He has entered the heaven itself (Hebrews 9:24). As He has suffered in His humanity, He can sympathise with those who suffer, and provide the succour that is needed for each moment of need. He is "*Jesus, the Son of God.*" *Jesus* is His name as Saviour, His name in humility. This name indicates His humanity. "*The Son of God*" shows His deity. He is God. Taken together, "*Jesus, the Son of God"* is called a '*theanthropic*' title. Theanthropic is '*theos*' and '*anthropos*.' The former means God, and the latter means man. Thus, Jesus is the God-Man. This makes Him eligible to be the High Priest for people in things of God.

Prefigure of Jesus' Priesthood

Further down in Hebrews chapter 5, the writer says that Jesus, as the High Priest, fulfils all that Aaron the High Priest prefigured. Aaron, the high priest, was ordained by God. So was Jesus also

appointed by God. Aaron suffered in the brick kilns of Egypt and was with the people of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus too learned obedience and suffered in His flesh, and suffered even to the death of the cross. Aaron was appointed "*that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*" (Hebrews 5:1). Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice, once for all. Even the attire of Aaron, which was for glory and beauty, spoke about the glories of the Lord Jesus.

A Melchizedekian Priesthood

If the priesthood of Jesus was in fulfilment of the Levitical priesthood, the order of His priesthood is after Melchizedek. He lived in the time of Abraham. His name appears for the first time in Genesis 14. He came to meet Abraham, who was returning after defeating four kings. The name, Melchizedek, means '*king of righteousness*.' He was the king of Salem, which later was known as Jerusalem. The Bible says about him, "*Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually*" (Hebrews 7:3). This does not mean that he had no parents or children. He was born just like any other human being is born, and he died also. But the statement only means that those details are omitted from the scriptures. The Bible is silent about those matters. This silence in the Scripture, the Spirit takes as a basis for the application. By these, the Holy Spirit is showing that the priesthood of Jesus Christ is eternal.

Melchizedek, a priest of the 'Most High God,' received tithes from Abraham, indicating that his priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood. Levi was in Abraham when he gave tithes. Further, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. This also points to the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham and his descendants. Quoting from Psalm 110, the writer affirms that the Priesthood of Jesus is greater than the high priesthood of Aaron or that of the Levitical priesthood. "*The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'*" (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 7:21).

The Perfecting Sacrifice

The Levitical priesthood or offerings did not perfect anything or anybody. But the Lord Jesus took flesh on Him and came and perfected the work of redemption by that one sacrifice on the cross. The Scripture says, "*But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption*" (Hebrews 9:11-12). The Old Testament priests never sat. There was no provision for sitting in the Tabernacle or the Temple, indicating that their sacrifices or service never perfected anything. But the Lord is seated on the right hand of the Majesty, having perfected the work He undertook for the redemption of humanity.

"*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*" (Hebrews 7:26-27).

The Days of His Suffering

During the week Jesus died, the Passion Week, Jesus is seen in His priestly works. In the Old Testament, the priests instructed the people, prayed for them, and offered sacrifices and offerings for the people (Exodus 29:38-42; Leviticus 1-7; 10:11; Numbers 6:24-26). During the last week of Jesus' earthly sojourn, we see Jesus doing all these for the people.

Jesus taught His disciples and the people. One of His major teaching sessions with His disciples is seen in the Upper Room (John 13-16). Almost all the great New Testament truths are seen in this section of the Scripture. In another session, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus is seen instructing His disciples. Here, Jesus taught them about the end times and what are the duties of the people living on earth in that time. Apart from these, there were

many people, Pharisees, scribes, and other Jewish leaders who came to Jesus with questions, either to test Him or to clear doubts. Jesus took all these as opportunities to share spiritual truths with those who came to Him.

Jesus prayed for His people. He prays for Peter. The Lord said, *"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren"* (Luke 22:31-32). Another instance of prayer is John 17. If there is any prayer which may be called the Lord's Prayer, it is this prayer. In this prayer, Jesus prays for Himself, for the Father's help in the time of His sufferings. He prayed for the eleven disciples who were with Him then. This is followed by His petitions for all the believers in the Church age. The Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane also.

Jesus laid down His life as a perfecting sacrifice. Having enfleshed and come to the earth, the greatest work the Lord did was His sacrifice on the cross. Normally, in anybody's biography, death will not be an important or extended narrative. It will be mentioned only casually, briefly. But, in the Gospel narratives, it occupies a major part and is explained in detail. It looks like, for the Gospel writers, it was not a matter of hiding from the readers but of proclaiming.

The purpose of the incarnation was to give His life as a ransom for all. The cross was not an accident for Jesus. He had told the disciples all that would happen in the Passion Week in Jerusalem. He said, "*Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again*" (Mark 10:33-34). This was an orderly announcement of all that would happen that week. The major events are His arrest, trials, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. These were the signs Jesus had offered to the unbelieving Jews. To the Jews who questioned His authority to cleanse the Temple, Jesus said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). He said this

about His body. Another time the Lord said, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:39-40). Jesus said this to the Pharisees and the Scribes when they asked Him for a sign.

The importance of the narratives of the Passion Week can be seen in the proportion of passages given in the Gospels to narrate them. The Triumphal Entry marked the beginning of the Passion Week. In Matthew's Gospel, 2/5th of the narratives pertain to this week. In Mark's Gospel, 3/5th of the portion is about the last week. 1/3rd of Luke's Gospel is about this, and in the fourth Gospel, John, almost ½ is about the Passion Week. It is calculated that about 1/5th of the content of the four Gospels occupies the last three days of the Lord Jesus. This shows the importance of the truths about the cross to the Gospel writers.

Jesus, in His priestly office, offered Himself, once for all, as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. The events associated with this sacrifice, the death of the Lord and its aftermath, are the subject of this volume, entitled 'Jesus, the Priest.' It covers from the day after the Triumphal Entry to the Ascension, ending with the hope of His return. Anyone who loves the Lord Jesus must be passionate about these truths.

The study on the life of Jesus Christ should give us an understanding of His person and work, and that knowledge must become an impetus to love Him more, adore Him, and live with full devotion. Writing about the death of the Lord Jesus, Martyn Lloyd Jones says,

> "You will never understand the significance of what happened there until you are clear about who it was that was dying there. Who is the Person in the middle nailed to the tree? And the Apostle answers the question: He is our Lord Jesus Christ."[2]

May these truths give us more knowledge of the Person and work of the One who hung there, on that middle cross.

Isaac Watts captures the grandeur and wonders of the cross in the following lines:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

.....

Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

II

Jerusalem and the Temple

"And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple."
Mark 11:11

1

The Fruitless Fig Tree

It was the beginning of Passion Week, the week scheduled for the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. It was the week in which the Lord Jesus, as the Priest, came from heaven would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The previous night, He stayed in Bethany, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, most probably. Or He might have stayed with the family that was there, which was dear to Him, the family of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus. For the journey to Jerusalem, He might have got up quite early and started.

The evening before this, the Lord had entered the city, Jerusalem, triumphant as a king, which is often referred to as the Triumphal Entry. The people cried out and said, *"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the kingdom of our Father David. That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Mark 11:9-10). But when the crowd was questioned, they toned down the acclaim and said, "*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."* (Matthew 21:11). Later, influenced by the Jewish leaders, they would cry out, "*Crucify Him", "Crucify Him.*" People are volatile in attitude.

A comparatively warm reception Jesus received at the beginning of the week. It must have happened immediately after the seventh day of the previous week was over. On that same evening, when the new week began, according to the Jewish reckoning, at sunset, after six in the evening, the Lord entered Jerusalem. He looked around and saw the conditions there in

the Temple, and returned the same evening to Bethany. Mark records, *"And Jesus went into Jerusalem and the temple. So, when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve."* (Mark 11:11).

The next morning, He returned to the city. There are two events recorded here, which happened on the same day - the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the Temple. Only the first two Gospels record these, Matthew and Mark. Luke and John are silent on these. The order in which they are recorded in Matthew is different from that of Mark. Matthew places the cleansing of the Temple before the cursing of the fig tree. And Mark reverses the order. Explaining the order, S W Jennings writes,

> "Matthew is pointing out the moral condition of Israel, followed by cleansing and judgment. Cleansing would answer to the tribulation and then the judgment of Israel at His coming. Mark will emphasise the lack of fruit, and there must be a reason. So, the curse comes first. The Lord judges the condition and deals with the cause."[1]

Matthew's Gospel is dispensational. Thus, what is followed here is the dispensational order. Mark may be giving the events in their chronological setting, the order in which the events occurred. Thus, we shall follow here the order of events, in the order Mark presents them. The first to consider is the cursing of the fig tree. Mark records how the Lord, Jehovah's Servant, prepares for this task for the day. He says that He went to Jerusalem, then He looked around and saw the need for action. This is followed by His withdrawal to Bethany, a place for fellowship, prayer, and refreshing. These are essentials for all those who are in the service of the Lord. They should be available at the place of action. They must be people who have a first-hand feel and information about the need for service. Similarly, they must prepare themselves also in the presence of the Lord and His people in fellowship. Without this, it is not possible to be of any use for the glory of God or the good of others, in the service of the Lord. Here, the Great Servant of Jehovah is an example for all who serve the Lord. At the same time, it is worth

noting that there is nobody who is not in the service of the Lord among those who are born again. Thus, this example of the Lord is worth emulating by all who are born again.

The Gospel Records on the Cursing

In the morning, on the first day of the week, when the Lord was going to Jerusalem with His disciples, the incident of the cursing of the fig tree occurred. Mark records it first, following the order of its occurrence.

As noticed before, for the Passion Week, the Lord made Bethany His base of operations. Early in the morning, He would travel from there to the Temple in Jerusalem and do His ministry for the day, and return for the night to the village. Mark records it succinctly and says, *"Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response, Jesus said to it, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again. And His disciples heard it.'"* (Mark 11:12-14). Matthew adds, *"Immediately the fig tree withered away."* (Matthew 21:19). A study of the incident calls us to consider its occasion, find some clarifications, and seek certain applicational truths.

Nothing But Leaves

In the morning, Jesus and the disciples were coming from Bethany to the Jerusalem Temple. It was not a distant walk. Luke tells that it was only a Sabbath day's journey (Acts 1.12). The phrase 'Sabbath Day's journey' refers to the distance the rabbis permitted a person to travel on the Sabbath without breaking the Sabbath. According to Mishnah, it was about two thousand cubits. A cubit, being eighteen inches, measures about one kilometre. Jesus, the disciples, and, probably, a large multitude were walking together. The presence of the multitude can be expected as it was Passover time. That is the time in the Jewish calendar when many Jews from around the globe would converge on Jerusalem. Their number may go into lakhs.

Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus was hungry (Mark 11.12; Matthew 21.18). Nothing is told here about the condition of the disciples. No one can assume that Martha would leave the group for their ministry in the Temple for the day without providing food for breakfast. She might have given them food. Probably, the disciples were present for breakfast, whereas the Lord was busy elsewhere. Most probably, He was with His Father in prayer. The Lord had the practice of praying in the early morning hours, as Mark records in the early part of His Gospel (Mark 1:35-37). Thus, it may be assumed that the Lord did not have any food when the disciples were full. So, He was hungry.

On the way, He saw a fig tree. Fig trees were common in Palestine. The land is described as a land that has many fig trees (Deuteronomy 8.8). The phrase 'being under the fig tree' was synonymous with having a peaceful existence, especially with communion and fellowship with God (Deuteronomy 8:8; 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10; John 1:48). They used to plant it anywhere. They had it on the contours of their vineyards (Luke 13:6). It was also planted on the roadsides for shade for weary travellers. Such fig trees planted on the roadsides also provide food for the hungry. Thus, Jesus, when He was hungry, found a fig tree and looked for fruit on it. The tree was full of leaves, but there were no fruits on it. This became the circumstance to curse the fig tree. The Lord, seeing it had only leaves and no fruit, cursed the fig tree and said, "*Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.*"

Certain Necessary Clarifications

There are certain questions this incident brings before us. Why did Jesus look for fruit in the fig tree? Didn't he know that there were no fruits on it, being omniscient? As Mark makes it clear, it was not the time of fruit-bearing for the fig trees. Then why did Jesus curse the tree for not having fruit on it? These are questions that need to be considered.

If the Lord knew that there were no fruits in the fig tree and still looked for it, then it sounds like He was faking a search. He should be pretending as if He were searching for fruit. If that is

so, then He should be the greatest hypocrite on earth, a fake. If His search was sincere and He did not know that there was no fruit on it, then it proves amply that He is not omniscient, and thus He is not God. To answer this contradiction, one must remember that Jesus was not only God, but He was Man also. He was perfect God and Perfect Man. In understanding His behaviour, it is necessary to keep these two natures, deity and humanity, separate and at the same time without confounding. He searched for the fruits just as any other man would have searched. He was doing this in His perfect humanity.

Albert Barnes explains,

> "That is, judging from the appearance of the tree, it was probable that there would be fruit on it. We are not to suppose that our Lord was ignorant of the true condition of the tree, but He acted according to the appearance of things; being a man as well as Divine, He acted of course as men do act in such circumstances."[2]

Just as He sought water from the Samaritan woman, or slept in the boat when a storm was blowing, or wanted an ass and its colt to travel to Jerusalem, here, He sought fig fruits in the tree, when He was hungry. There were certain prerogatives of deity which He denied for Himself while He was on earth. This denial explains His search for fruit in a barren fig tree. The explanation removes any aspersion on His deity.

In the narrative of the incident, Mark gives a piece of information that Matthew is silent about. He says why there was no fruit in the tree. He says, "*When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs."* If it was not the season for figs, then why did Jesus curse the tree? How can anyone expect a tree to bear fruit out of season? Or should they also be 'ready in season and out of season!'

There are many explanations offered for this question. Mark's statement, "*for it was not the season for figs*", is explained by Barnes as follows.

> "That is, the time of gathering the figs was not yet or had not passed. It was a time when figs were ripe, or fit to eat, or He would not have gone to it, expecting to find them. But the time of

> gathering them had not passed, and it was to be presumed that they were still on the tree. This took place in the week of the Passover, or at the beginning of April. Figs in Palestine are commonly ripe at the Passover. The summer in Palestine begins in March, and it is no uncommon thing that figs should be eatable in April."[3]

J D Pentecost gives a different explanation.

> "And it was hopelessly barren. For had it been fruitful the previous year, there would still have been some of the kermouses, hidden under their broad leaves. And had it been fruitful this year, the bakkooroth would have set into a green and delicious fragrance before leaves appeared. But on this fruitless tree, there was neither any promise for the future nor any gleanings from the past."[4]

'Kermouses' are the gleanings from the past years. 'Bakkooroth' are the fruits that appear early, before the season for fruit-bearing starts. According to the nature of the fig trees, either these remain from the past year, or fruits before the season must be on the tree. Thus, it would have some fruits throughout the year. If none of these are there, it means it did not bear fruit the year before, and it will not bear fruit the next year either. This means the tree is barren; it has never borne fruit. It is worth only to be cut off. This explanation understands Mark's statement, just as it is, as an indication that it was not a time of fruit-bearing at all.

These explanations clarify the apparent contradictions in the passage.

The Amazement of the Disciples

The Lord might have entered the city of Jerusalem in His Triumphal entry, most probably, at the beginning of the first day of the week, after the Sabbath. According to the Jewish reckoning, each day begins at six in the evening. As seen in Genesis 1, each day is made of "*evening and the day*". Evening comes first. Thus, after the end of the Sabbath on the seventh day evening at six, Jesus and the disciples entered Jerusalem. The Lord looked around in the Temple and returned to Bethany. In the morning, He, with His disciples, left for Jerusalem. It seems that the disciples

had their breakfast, as the passage tells that "*He was hungry*" (Mark 11.12). Nothing is told about the disciples. Probably, Martha might have prepared breakfast for all of them. Jesus might have been in prayer or meditation with the Father. Thus, Jesus might not have eaten while others ate. So, He hungered and looked for fruit in a fig tree full of leaves. As explained before, if the leaves are there on a fig tree, then some fruits should also be there. There was no fruit in that tree when He looked for fruit and He cursed the tree and said, '"*Let no fruit grow on you ever again.' Immediately the fig tree withered away*" (Matthew 21:19). Matthew's statement that the fig tree withered away immediately does not mean that then and there itself the tree became fully dry. Mark tells us that the disciples found the fig tree dried up the next morning. He reports, *"Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots"* (Mark 11:20). This shows that the tree dried up fully only on the next day. But the drying up of the tree might have begun immediately after the Lord cursed it.

Matthew says, "*And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither away so soon?'*" So, Jesus answered and said to them, "*Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive"* (Matthew 21:20-22). The disciples were amazed at the event.

The 'hypostatic union' of Jesus is very much evident here. This is the union of the two natures of the Lord Jesus, divine and human. Just like any other human being, He was hungry. In this, the humanity of Jesus is seen. When there was no fruit found in the tree, He cursed it, and it started drying up immediately. In this action, the deity of the Lord is evident. Thus, Jesus is seen as God-Man here. There are other similar instances also where the dual nature of the Lord is seen in the same place. At the beginning of the public ministry, when Jesus was in Nazareth, the people in the synagogue pushed Him uphill to push Him down the hill. They could push Him up without any problem.

But they could not push Him down. In pushing Him up the hill, we see the humanity of Jesus. Like they could do to anyone else, they could do to Him also. But surprisingly, they could not push Him down the hill after reaching the hilltop, which is a comparatively easier act to do. Here we see His deity. Another similar instance is when He raised Lazarus. Just as others did, He also wept. At the same time, He called him out of the grave, showing that He is God. Once we see Him exhausted in the boat. There was then a storm, and the disciples were worried. When they woke Him up, Jesus got up and stilled the storm. In all these places, the Lord's two natures are seen. These two natures of Jesus cannot be confounded nor separated. They dwell together in His person.

Fig Tree and Israel

There are three trees in the scripture, representing Israel. These are the vine, olive tree, and fig tree. The vine talks about their past failure (Isaiah 5:1-7). The olive tree speaks of their present rejection (Romans 11:17-21). The fig tree talks about the future restoration (Matthew 24:32).

Two passages give us the failure of the people of Israel. Isaiah says, *"Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; So, He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes"* (Isaiah 5:1-2). Psalmist Asaph also sings about this vine and the vineyard. *"You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea and her branches to the river. Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it"* (Psalms 80:8-13). Both these passages talk about the people of Israel. The Lord had brought

them and planted them for fruit. But it produced only wild grapes. It did not bear fruit for its owner.

In the present passage, where the Lord curses the fig tree, the same lesson is presented to us. The fig tree had lush green leaves, but it did not bear any fruit. As mentioned before, if the leaves are present, there should be fruit as well. However, this fig tree failed the Lord when He sought fruit. It had a promising appearance on the outside but lacked real worth on the inside. This reminds us of the disconnect between profession and practice or reality. This was the condition of the people of Israel during Jesus' time. They were very focused on religious matters, yet they had no power of godliness. They had no relationship with God whatsoever and had to be rejected. Of course, this rejection is not permanent but only for a brief period, known as the church age. After this parenthetical period, the Lord shall turn to them again.

Jesus told the Jewish leaders, "*The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do*" (Matthew 23:2-3). John the Baptist also spoke about the failure of Israel and told about the judgment that was due upon them. He said, "*Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'we have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Matthew 3:8-10).

Application for Believers

The scripture talks about God's expectations from believers. They are His farm. They are His planted trees. Then, they must bear fruit for the glory of the Father God. Another time, the Lord told a small parable that only Luke records. "*A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find*

none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and fertilise it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-9). This was spoken to the Jews, but it has a general application. The Lord is looking for fruit from the believers. The Bible talks about the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of our labour, the fruit of light, and the fruit of lips. We must bear fruit for the glory of the Father.

If we do not bear fruit, the Lord may remove us from the place of responsibility. Looking at us, He may say, "*Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?"* The purpose of the fig tree is not for shade or to decorate, but to bear fruit. If that is not happening, then the purpose is not met.

2

Cleansing of the Temple

On the day Jesus cursed the fig tree, as it had no fruit despite having many leaves, Jesus entered the Temple and cleansed it. Jesus had entered the city of Jerusalem and the Temple the day before and saw the condition and the need for cleansing it. He chased out all that defiles the House of God. This was not the first time that Jesus cleansed the Temple. About three and a half years before, at the beginning of His public ministry, the Lord had cleansed this same place. This shows that cleansing must continue in our lives. There is no time when we can think that there is no need for any cleansing. That is the condition of life and the situation in this sin-stricken world. The world corrupts us, and thus cleansing is essential at every moment. This action of Jesus is of paramount importance.

The cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of the public ministry is recorded only in John. He says, "*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up"* (John 2:13-17). The cleansing at the end of His public ministry is recorded only

by the Synoptic Gospels. Though some say that these records are of the same event, a comparison of both indicates otherwise.

Mark's record of the cleansing is as follows. *"So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves." And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him because all the people were astonished at His teaching. When evening had come, He went out of the city"* (Mark 11:15-19). This is also recorded by other Synoptic Gospel writers (Matthew 21:12,13; Luke 19:45-48). When there are similarities between these two cleansings, the differences are overwhelming.

Allan Chapple gives the following differences to prove that these are two different events.[1] Firstly, it affected different groups of people. In the cleansing recorded in John, it affected only the sellers, whereas in the cleansing in the Synoptic records, it affected both sellers and buyers. Secondly, there is a difference in the method of sending the merchants out. In the first instance, He used a whip of cords and chased them out. In the latter occurrence, He did not use any instrument to chase them. Thirdly, it affected different objects. In the former, it affected *"sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables."* In the latter, Jesus *"overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves."* Fourthly, in the Johannine record, *"He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away!"* In the Markan record, instruction was given to those who carried the vessels through the Temple precincts. Mark says, *"And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple."* Fifthly, Jesus' indictments are also different. In the first, He says, "*Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"* In the second instance, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves."* Sixthly, the Old Testament quotes are different. John's

passage quotes from Psalm 69:9, and Mark's quote is from Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11. Seventhly, the response to the events was also different. In John's record, the event is followed by the quote from Psalm 69:9. The disciples remembered it. Mark's record is followed by the attempt of the Jewish leaders to kill Him. Eighthly, in the former record, only the disciples are seen as responders, whereas in the latter, we see the Jewish leaders. These show that they are two different events. The event in John's record happened at the beginning of the Lord's ministry, and a similar event recorded in the Synoptic Gospels occurred in the last week of His public ministry. A helpful discussion on this is also found in Leon Morris [2]

In John's Gospel, when the Lord refers to the Temple as *"My Father's house,"* He is presenting Himself as the Son of God, and in Mark's Gospel, when He refers to it as *"My house,"* He is the Messiah.

Coming to the Temple

Matthew gives us the impression that the cleansing happened immediately after the Triumphal Entry. He says, "*Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves'"* (Matthew 21:12-13). But when compared with the record of Mark, it gives the chronological order of the events. Mark records, "*And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve"* (Mark 11:11). This is about the day He entered Jerusalem. He saw the situation in the Temple. The next day, He went and cleansed it. Notice what Mark says, "*Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry*" (Mark 11:12). He cursed the fig tree when He found no fruit in it. This is followed by His entrance into the Temple and cleansing. Marks says, "*So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple and*

overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves" (Mark 11:15). The evening before this, He saw everything and prepared for it. It is worth noting that He begins at the house itself. Peter says, "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* (1 Peter 4:17). This is the order for God always. He begins with His own. Thus, in the Passion Week, a week in which the Lord is going to be involved in many things before He would accomplish what He had undertaken before the world began, to fulfil the work of redemption for all humanity, He starts with the cleansing of His Father's house.

The coming of Jesus to the Temple and its cleansing were in fulfilment of the prophecies. Malachi prophesied and said, "*Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts"* (Malachi 3:1). Fulfilling this, Jesus enters the Temple.

The Temple, a Market Place!

Two words in Greek may be translated as 'Temple.' They are *Heiron* and *Naos*. The latter word, *Naos*, is the word often used for the Temple proper, that is, the Holy Place and the Holiest of All. Here, ordinary people could not enter; only the priests could. In the Holiest of All, only the High Priest could enter, and that also, only one day in a year, the Day of Atonement. The cleansing did not happen here. The word *heiron* is used for the Temple and the surrounding consecrated area. The court here was divided into various sections. The court of the Gentiles was there, where only the Gentiles could enter. Then the court of the women was there, where only the Jewish women could go. Barclay notes,

> "It was so called because unless women had come actually to offer sacrifice, they might not proceed further."[3]

Then there was the court of the Israelites. Further in was the court of the priests. In this area, they had the altar and laver. The priests came here for their service.

The cleansing probably happened in the court of the Gentiles. That was the place where all the businesses in the Temple happened. The marketplace there was often called the 'Bazar of Annas.' Most of the businesses belonged to Annas, who was the high priest before. Spirituality had become a matter of big business. This is the situation always. Originally, these businesses were started for the good of the people who came to worship from faraway places. It was according to the provision given in the Law. Moses wrote, "*You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you"* (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). Thus, it was an arrangement that God Himself had provided for the people who came from far. Instead of carrying the things they wanted to offer to God, they could bring money to the Temple and buy whatever they wanted.

To make such exchanges of things, animals or money, possible, arrangements were made in the Temple. However, some saw them as business opportunities for making monetary benefits. Priests and, as noted before, high priests also dabbled in these matters. Temple became a den of thieves. It should be noticed that in the first instance, when the Lord cleansed the Temple, He called it only a 'House of Merchandise.' But now, after three and a half years, He calls it a 'Den of thieves.' Degeneration happened

there to that extent! 'Den' is the domain of lions. Here, thieves are a metaphor the Lord uses for the merchants in the Temple. They were mostly of the priestly class. The same metaphor the Lord used, Peter also used for the devil (1 Peter 5:8). When He compared the Temple to a Den, the metaphor of a lion is implied. The devil was ruling there!

Driving Out the Occupants

The Lord put out all the miscreants that occupied the house of God. Mark records, "*Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple"* (Mark 11:15-16). The following are the people whom He put out.

The people *"who bought and sold"* – This may be a generic statement, including all the people mentioned after this. These were exploiting the worshippers who travelled to the Temple from faraway places. The arrangement of selling and buying here, as seen before, was for the convenience of the worshippers. However, these merchants, finding an opportunity for making a financial profit, exploited the worshippers. The Lord drove them out.

He overturned the tables of the money changers. The male Israelites were supposed to pay half a shekel as the temple tax. The instructions about this are seen in Exodus 30:11-16. "*When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to the LORD. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves. And*

you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves." This was supposed to be paid in Jewish shekels or the Tyrian shekel, which was the nearest to it. It was made in the Phoenician city of Tyre. It had a high level of silver, about ninety to ninety-five per cent. Originally, the temple tax was paid only once, although, later it became an annual payment. Probably, it became an annual payment as the expenses for the upkeep of the place became high. Half a shekel was not a lot of money. It was roughly equivalent to two days' wages. 2 Kings 12:5-17; Nehemiah 10:32,33, and Matthew 17:24-27 indicate that it became an annual payment. It was collected during the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. The people who came from faraway places had with them only Roman money. They exchanged Roman money for Jewish or Tyrian shekels at the counter of the money changers at the temple. The merchants charged a commission for this. This was higher than the normal charges for commission.

He overturned the seats of those who sold doves. Doves were offered in sacrifice by those who could not afford more expensive animals for sacrifices. The Law says, *"But if he is poor and cannot afford it, then he shall take one male lamb as a trespass offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such as he can afford: one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering"* (Leviticus 14:21-23). This instruction is also seen in Leviticus 12:8; 15:14. It is worth remembering here that the offering of Joseph and Mary at the presentation of the child Jesus was turtle doves, the poor man's offering. Those who sold doves had no concern for the poor. The poor were also exploited at their counter. It is said that a dove which cost only three and a half pence was sold for seventy-five pence. If a person buys the bird from outside and comes to offer it, the priests would not accept it as suitable for the offering. They insist that the dove should be brought from the merchants inside the Temple precincts.

Jesus would not allow anyone to carry wares or vessels through the temple. These may be people who sold oil and wine in the temple precincts. Probably, some of them sold vessels. It may benefit the people who come from far, as they would need vessels for cooking during their stay there. For these merchants who supplied wares and vessels on sale or rent, these were times to make some money. They never wasted such opportunities. Or these may be people who went from the eastern side of the city to the Mount of Olives. If they went through the temple, the way would be considerably shorter. Thus, the temple was used for passage.

The Lord drove them all out. He overthrew their tables. He would not allow anybody to make the temple their pathway. Mark says, "*Then He taught, saying to them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of thieves"* (Mark 11:17). The Lord was bringing two portions in the prophets together here. Isaiah says, "*Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"* (Isaiah 56:7). Jeremiah says, *"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD* (Jeremiah 7:11). There is one important thing to notice here. That is the order in which the Lord acted. He drove out all the merchants from the temple. Jesus spoke to them and taught them. This clearly shows the urgency with which the Lord worked. He could not tolerate them even for a moment. He dealt with them harshly, and then He explained the reason for His action. We must know the attitude of God toward evil. He could not tolerate them. Without losing a moment, He acted and then He explained His action to them. The house of God now is the individual believer and the local assemblies. Evil may creep into both these realms. It is necessary to show the same urgency Jesus had to cleanse the house of God. The scripture says, *"Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever"* (Psalm 93:5).

Effects of the Lord's Action

The effect that this event had on the people around was various. And it was quite natural because the scribes and the high priests were the authorities who controlled everything in the Temple. They were having their way with everything. Now, here is a young man who came from Galilee, which does not normally attach any spiritual significance; He has exercised His authority and apparently superseded them. That would create interest in the people, and they would respond in various ways. The Gospels record for us the way they responded.

The people who were sick and in need came to Him, acknowledging His authority. Matthew says, *"Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them"* (Matthew 21:14). He not only had authority over the Temple but over their lives also. He healed them there. Mark brings before us another effect. He says, "*And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him because all the people were astonished at His teaching*" (Mark 11:18). Here, the attitude of the leaders of the Jewish people and the common people is seen. The ordinary people gave respect to the Lord. They loved His teaching. But their leaders wanted to put Him to death. They were only worried about their waning power over the system. They were also concerned about the profit they were making in their business. They lost their businesses. This also might have made them desire His death. They wanted to eliminate Him somehow. Luke's report also calls for our special interest. He says, *"All the people were very attentive to hear Him"* (Luke 19:48). These show that the impact of the episode was varied. It divided the people. All that Jesus did and said did the same thing. That was not the intention of the Lord. He wanted all to have the same interest in what He taught. He wanted all of them to give themselves to His authority. But due to their self-interest, they got divided. Anyone could take an interest in Him, only if he denies his self. Such shall not divide, but unite to follow Christ.

Keeping House Holy

God is holy, and He desires and demands that all that belongs to Him should keep holiness in all realms. But the fact is, man is always prone to err. As also Robert Robertson wrote in his song, "Come thou fount of every blessing," which is a favourite among the saints, even after about two centuries since it was written.

"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above."

Robert was born on September 27th, 1735, in Swaffham in the county of Norfolk, England. His parents were Wilkin and Michael Robinson. His father was a customs officer. He died very early when Robert was just an eight-year-old child. His lot was to look after his widowed mother. He worked as an apprentice to a barber. However, he was hardworking in all areas. His habit of reading and self-studying made him a knowledgeable young man. Later, as a young man, he was converted to faith in the preaching of George Whitfield. He became a minister of the gospel. He pastored in many churches. One of the churches he pastored grew up to become a congregation of more than a thousand members. When he was at such spiritual heights, he penned this beautiful song.

But Robertson was unstable and unhappy. He became backslidden later in his life, and it seems he never was restored. While in such a state, when on travel, a young lady sitting next to him started singing the song, "Come Thou Fount," to remove monotony in a long journey. But she was singing with all joy, getting into the spirit of it. After she finished singing, she turned to Robert and asked how he felt about the song, not knowing that he was the one who wrote it. He replied, "Madam, I am the unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago; and, I would give a thousand worlds if I had them if I could feel now as I felt then." He felt the pull of the flesh, the proneness to fall in sin, and succumbed to it. It shows how real and serious the matter of sin is. It tempts even the best of the saints and pulls them down.

If we are prone to err, it is essential to repent and be restored, also. The cleansing of the temple, the passage we are considering now, teaches this important truth.

A Continuous Action

Cleansing is essential continuously. There is no time when we can say that there is no need to guard ourselves. This fact is clear from the repetition of the cleansing of the Temple. It was cleansed at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (John 2:13-17). But during the public ministry of Jesus, despite all the teaching and preaching Jesus did in Judea, in Jerusalem, the evil merchants, hand-in-glove with the Jewish leaders, especially the high priests, made the house of God a den of thieves. Now, after three and a half years, the Lord had to repeat the cleansing act. Mark says, *"Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple"* (Mark 11:15-16). The condition was such that it called for another act of cleansing. It teaches that cleansing is an ongoing act. There is no moment when we can become complacent in the matter of holiness.

God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden. The garden was made for the well-being of Adam. We may say that it was the most secure place on earth. However, even in such circumstances and conditions, alertness was needed. The scripture says, "*Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it"* (Genesis 2:15). Here, to *'keep it'* means to guard the garden. This indicates that an attack from the enemy, the Devil, was expected. Adam did not give much heed to the instruction, it seems. When Eve was alone, the devil worked through her and brought down humans. The important truth to notice here is that even the safest moment or place on earth is not safe enough for us. If the devil worked his craftiness in the Garden of Eden and made the first humans fall into sin, he worked through the religious leaders of the Jewish community to corrupt the Temple precincts to turn the house of God, the house of prayer, into a den of thieves. The Temple was

unholy when the Lord of the house came there. There is a need for continuous effort to keep holy. The command is, "*As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct"* (1 Peter 1:15). This command needs to be heeded every moment of our lives.

Reasons for Keeping Holiness

In the words of the Lord to the merchants in the temple, we may trace at least three reasons why the house must be clean.

Firstly, because of the revelation. Notice the words of the Lord. He said, *"Then He taught, saying to them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a den of thieves"* (Mark 11:17). Jesus was drawing their attention to the Word of God. The corruption in the temple followed the prophetic word. It is a quote from Isaiah 56:7. The teaching of Jesus in connection with the cleansing, as recorded in Matthew and Luke, also draws their attention to the Old Testament passage. A similar emphasis on revelation from God as a reason for holiness is in the words of Peter. When calling to keep holiness, he says, *"Because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'"* (1 Peter 1:16). Here, Peter was quoting from the book of Leviticus (11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7).

Secondly, because of the relationship. The Lord calls it 'My house.' He says, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.*" God is holy. He never compromises on holiness. As He is holy, His people should also be holy. In heaven, what is always acknowledged and extolled is His holiness. Many other attributes of God stand out in His dealings with humanity. But above all of them, the most important is holiness. When He is holy, His dwelling place also must have the same character. The psalmist says, "*Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever"* (Psalms 93:5).

Thirdly, because of expectation. Here we are referring to the purpose of the house of God, the Temple. It was supposed to be the house of prayer. After Solomon built the Temple, at its dedication, this purpose was mentioned in the prayer he made to God. He said, "*Regard the prayer of Your servant and his*

supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive" (1 Kings 8:28-30). This is followed by his requests that the Lord should attend to the cries and prayers of His people when they pray in different situations and difficulties in their lives. The situations of famine in the land, attacks from foreign nations, sins of the people, and scatterings of the people to the four winds because of their sins, are all mentioned in the prayer of Solomon. The temple was supposed to be the house of prayer. In the name of prayer, many things were happening in the house of God. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus, could not see it as a house of prayer. Prayers were happening when businesses were paramount.

The Lord, who cleansed the temple at the beginning and the conclusion of His public ministry, is concerned about the holiness of His people, individually and collectively. Each believer is a temple of God. Paul tells Corinthians, "*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This is about individual believers. Collectively, Paul calls the Corinthians the Temple of God. He says, "*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"* (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The measure of holiness in us and among us depends upon the measure of our submission to God's Word. In the high priestly prayer of the Lord, He said, *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:17). As the will of God is revealed to us, because of the relationship He has with us as our Lord and Master, and because of the purpose He has for His house, let us give priority to holiness.

3

Prayer Our Power

On the day of the Lord's Triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, offering Himself as king of the Jews, the Lord entered the city and went to the Temple. He looked around and viewed the situation there. Probably, the matters there might have grieved Him much. But on that day, the Lord returned to Bethany and took the night's rest there. The next morning, the Lord and His disciples were travelling back from Bethany to Jerusalem. That is when He looked for fruit in a fig tree and cursed it when it had only foliage but no fruit. The Lord gave lessons on prayer the next day, morning. In the instructions, the Lord made clear that the prayer of faith can make possible the things that are, humanly speaking, impossible. It is the power given to a child of God for life and ministry. Yeah, prayer is our power. The house of prayer is the powerhouse in the service of the Lord.

The Lord had told that His house would be called the 'House of Prayer.' But the people who should have prayed became materialistic. They turned the 'House of Prayer' into a house of merchandise. The Lord is now correcting and instructing them on prayer. When Matthew gives only a summary of the matters, Mark gives the details.

Matthew says, *"Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately, the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, "How*

did the fig tree wither away so soon?" So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done" (21:18-21). Here, the incident of cursing the fig tree, the marvel of the disciples, and the instructions of the Lord following this are all given together, as if they all happened at the same time. But Mark gives a more detailed narrative. He records, "*Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away." So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"* (Mark 11:20-26). This narrative indicates that the matter was spread over two days. The details are more complete in Mark. But though the narratives differ, there are no contradictions.

The Order of Events

A cursory reading of the narrative of Matthew gives the impression that the curse, the withering of the fig tree, the marvel of the disciples, and the instructions that followed happened on the same day. Matthews records, "*Immediately the fig tree withered away*" (Matthew 21:19). In the verses following, there is no gap between the incidents. But Mark says Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in His Triumphal entry, in the evening (11:11). The next morning, when they were returning to the city, Jesus was hungry and He looked for fruit for breakfast. This was followed by the cursing of the tree (11:12,14). This was the day when Jesus cleansed the Temple. The next morning, Jesus and the disciples entered the city. The disciples noticed that the tree was

withered and commented on it to Jesus (11:20). Following this, Jesus gave instructions on prayer.

In the context of the lessons Jesus taught on prayer, there are three matters to notice. Firstly, the marvel of the disciples, when they observed the fig tree wither after Jesus cursed it. Secondly, Peter speaks to Jesus about the withering of the tree. Thirdly, Jesus followed this with instructions on prayer. Understanding these lessons is important.

Marvel of the Disciples

It seems, from the record of Matthew, that the process of drying up started immediately after Jesus cursed the fig tree. He says, "*Immediately the fig tree withered away*" (v.19). This does not mean that the tree withered completely in a moment. It might have taken the whole day for the tree to dry up fully. The curse of Jesus was for a complete drying up. Jesus said, "*Let no one eat fruit from you ever again*" (Mark 11:14). Thus, the curse was for a complete drying up. By evening, the tree might have become completely dried up. But when they were coming back from Jerusalem to Bethany, the disciples might not have noticed this as it was evening. They saw it only the next morning. Cor Bruins states,

> "They had no other opportunity for doing so- it took place probably at night just before leaving for Bethany."[1]

In the morning, they saw it and marvelled.

When the disciples saw the fig tree dried up, they marvelled. Probably, they might have expressed their marvel among themselves. Matthew seems to express this while recording, *"And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither away so soon?'"* (Matthew 21:20). As was often the case, they could not come to a final answer to it by discussing it among themselves. Then they brought the problem to the Lord. It is Mark who records this. He says that it was Peter who asked the Lord, representing all the disciples. Mark says, "*And Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away'" (*Mark 11:21). He did not present

the matter as a query. Probably, he did not want to show their surprise before Jesus. What had happened, the drying of the tree, should not have surprised them. They had seen Jesus doing many mighty works and miracles for about three and a half years. Even the dead were raised before their eyes. Then, the drying of a tree should not have been a matter of marvel for them. For this reason, probably, Peter was trying to hide the surprise. Thus, Peter presented the matter in such a way that it would only sound like sharing a piece of information. He stated, *"The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."*

When Jesus answered the disciples, He rebuked them for their lack of faith, thus exposing what they wanted to hide from the Lord.

The dual nature of the person of Jesus is evident here. This was noticed before, also. In the hunger of Jesus, we see His humanity. Like any other human being, he was hungry. But at the same time, He was fully God also. He cursed the tree, and it dried up immediately. This clearly shows the deity of the Lord Jesus. The tree dried up immediately. He is the perfect God and perfect man. As Paul also says, *"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2:9).

Peter's Careful Statement

The marvel of the disciples and how Peter told Jesus with much care, hiding their wonder from the Lord, was discussed earlier. The sensibility of Peter is also worth noticing. He put it before the Lord in a very sensible way. Probably, his age and experience gave him this ability.

The disciples, especially Peter, were astonished by the event. They were witnessing one more event which, humanly speaking, was impossible to happen. In his wonder, he brings it to the notice of the Lord. He was attempting to interpret the person of Jesus through His work. Jennings says,

> "Now Peter comes to the forefront as he observed and remembers in verse 21. What he really did was to interpret the words of the Lord by the event that followed. This is a lesson to believers, to interpret the word by events (Matthew 24:15)."[2]

If the words and works of the Lord do not turn our eyes upon Jesus, we have not learned anything worthwhile from the event!

Instructions on Prayer

The marvel of the disciples at what the Lord did in drying the fig tree, He took as an opportunity to teach them truths about prayer. An effective prayer life was important for them. This determines success and effectiveness in life and ministry. Thus, the Lord had taught them how to pray. They sensed the need for it and asked the Lord to teach them how to pray. The Lord had also taught them principles for effective prayers and prayer life. Now Jesus does the same thing again. The principles taught here are important and relevant for all believers.

In Matthew's Gospel, the words of the Lord are instructive or indicative. He said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive"* (Matthew 21:21-22). In Mark's Gospel, the instructions are in imperative mode. Jesus said, "*Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done"* (Mark 11:22-23). Mark's version is more complete. He also added, "*And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"* (Mark 11:25-26). Unto those disciples who marvelled at the event, Jesus said that it is possible for them also to pray like He prayed, with similar or greater effect.

Jesus said that what was done to the fig tree may be done unto a mountain also. He referred to "*this mountain*." Probably, He was pointing to the Mount of Olives, which was on the outskirts of the city. We may take the Lord's words literally or figuratively. When taken literally, it referred to the Mt. of Olives.

By prayer, one can remove it and plant it in the sea. This does not mean that one can go around removing and planting mountains in the sea. The idea is that there is nothing impossible with prayer. If it is in the will of God and necessary for the glory of God, by prayer, even such a feat is possible. However, it seems it is better to take it figuratively.

There are two possible explanations when it is taken figuratively. Cor Bruins explains it as applicable to the land and the people of Israel. The fig tree represented the people of Israel. As they bore no fruit for the glory of God, though they had foliage outwardly, giving an impression that they were fruitful and all things about them were fine, inwardly they were hypocrites. They had the outward show of piety but lacked the inward reality and power. They were, temporarily, removed from the position of responsibility. If the fig tree was a figure of the people of Israel, the mountain represented the land and the nation.[3] The Lord said, "*If you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done."* Figuratively taken, this is understood as the scattering of the nation of Israel, which was in the offing. They were scattered among the Gentiles, who are represented here in the metaphor of the sea. A similar interpretation is seen in the Book of Revelation. When explaining about the great whore that sat upon many waters, the angel told John the apostle, *"The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues"* (Revelation 17:15). In AD 70 the Lord scattered His people for their disobedience, into the four corners of the earth, among all nations. The 'mountain' was cast into the 'sea,' so to speak. The Jews thought that such a thing was impossible. Even when Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction that was going to come upon the land and the Temple of Jerusalem, and warned about the coming captivity, the people could not digest it. They considered the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as something impossible. They were about to kill Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26). But the impossible happened, and the people of Judah went into the Babylonian captivity. And Jeremiah was there in the city when this happened (38:28).

Jennings suggests another figurative interpretation of the phrase: the mountain being removed into the sea. He gives the meaning of the mountains as the 'mountainous difficulties.'[4] The same figure is used in Zechariah 4:7. *Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"* Here, these mountains may be a reference to the officials of Darius the King. Ezra gives the historical record of this. When the captivity of Judah returned from Babylon, the Samaritans, and others with them tried to hinder the work of rebuilding the Temple and even the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. They tried to influence the officials in the kingdom and obstruct the construction. But God overruled and helped His servants to complete the work they undertook. The history of this is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Those who obstruct the work are termed here as 'the mountain.' Similarly, all those men who come against God's children may be understood as the mountains. Prayer can remove all such obstacles.

Conditions for Prayer

The Lord said, "*And whenever you stand praying*" (Mark 11:25). This instructs that God's people must pray. In Luke's Gospel, where Jesus Christ is presented as the Perfect Man, a larger number of His prayers are recorded. The Lord is seen praying at every stage of His public ministry - at His baptism, before choosing the apostles, before ministering, after ministering, on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Gethsemane, on the cross, etc. This shows that we must pray always. Instructions and parables on prayer are very much in this Gospel. Luke says, "*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart*" (Luke 18:1). This shows that prayer is the most difficult occupation.

Many can preach for hours. Yet, people able to pray for a few hours are a rarity. The privilege a child of God has for prayer is amazing. They can pray anytime, anywhere, for any number of hours. But they feel out of stock in a few minutes. For an assembly, the prayer meeting is the primary meeting. But hardly anyone attends. It is the least attended meeting of an assembly. Even

those who know the importance of prayer for a successful life and ministry find difficulty in praying for extended periods. Satan is more concerned about people who pray than those who preach. He is not worried about eloquence or homilies of high standard. He is concerned about the mutterings of a child of God in prayer. He knows that the Almighty works for such when they cry. For this very reason, he manufactures as many hindrances to prayers as possible. But a child of God must overcome them and become a warrior in prayer. It is like a breath for a child of God.

Those who do not always pray often say that there is no need to pray much, as God knows everything. Some even say that we must not pray for a matter more than three times. They say Jesus asked the Father to remove the cup from Him in the Garden of Gethsemane only three times. Paul also prayed only three times for the removal of the 'thorn in the flesh.' But these incidents quoted do not suggest to us the number of times we can pray for any need. As long as the Lord lays the burden to pray for a matter, we may continue praying for that. George Mueller of Bristol is known for his prayer life. He looked after thousands of orphans with faith as capital. He prayed for his two or three friends, for their salvation. It is said that the prayer was answered only after his death. However, he continued praying for that matter. The scripture exhorts us to pray without ceasing. We must not faint in prayer. There are no prayers that are not answered. The fact is, the answer to our prayers may not always be positive. The denial of the Lord is also an answer. We must be ready to take the will of God as His answer. Submission to His will is a necessity.

While we pray, we are not educating God. Or we are not bending the mind of God either. Prayers must be prayers in the Spirit. The indwelling Spirit reveals God's will to us. We, in turn, put forth these as requests before God. In this exercise, God is granting us the privilege to be part of what God is doing on earth.

But for prayers to be answered, there are certain conditions to be fulfilled. There are many conditions laid down in the scripture. But we shall confine ourselves to the passage we are considering now.

In recording the conditions for prayer, it is Mark who gives more details. There are two conditions here: faith and forgiveness.

The Lord said, *"Have faith in God"* (Mark 11:22). Here we have the first condition for our prayers to be answered. The Lord puts this instruction as a command. From them, He demanded faith in God. He wanted them to trust in God in all things. Later on also, He would remind them of this. In the upper room, He said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me"* (John 14:1). Matthew records it in an indicative mode. *"Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done"* (Matthew 21:21). This was more like a promise given to them. The Lord demands faith or trust in Him for prayers to be answered. He wanted them to believe that He cared for them. He wanted them to be assured that He was able to meet their needs. He wanted them to know that He knows all their needs. These are God's desires concerning all His children. It is not just a desire, but He demands it. The Lord asked them to have faith or trust in God.

The second condition for our prayers to be answered is forgiveness. It is only Mark who records it. The Lord said, "*And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"* (Mark 11:25-26). Similar instructions are seen in Matthew's Gospel, in the Sermon on the Mount. *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you"* (Matthew 6:14).

Albert Barnes gives the following comment about the posture suggested in the words of Jesus.

> "It seems that the posture in prayer was sometimes standing and sometimes kneeling. God looks upon the heart rather than upon our position in worship; and if the heart be right, any posture may be proper. It cannot be doubted, however, that in private, in the family, and wherever it can be conveniently done, the kneeling

posture is more proper, as expressing more humility and reverence, and more in accordance with Scripture."[5]

Humility and reverence are essential when we draw near to God.

If a person is humble in the presence of God, then it must be manifest in his relationship with others also. When we love and have reverence for others, then there cannot be any grudge within against anybody. There will be a desire for reconciliation with others. There will be peace with others to the maximum extent, to the possible level.

The Two-fold Relationships

As explained before, when we draw near to God, our relationships with Him and with others are important. God cares about how we nurture these connections. If God desires us to maintain this two-fold relationship as we approach Him, we must remember that there is no moment for a child of God when we are not in His presence. We live and move within His very presence. Therefore, it is essential to keep these relationships intact. We must consistently uphold the right relationships with both God and our fellow man.

The Ten Commandments have to do with these relationships (Exodus 20:1-17). The first four of the Decalogue have to do with our relationship with God. The last six commandments have to do with our relationship with other humans. The conversation the Lord had with a doctor of the Law is also worth mentioning here. Luke narrates the incident thus, "*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."* These, then, are what God is looking for in us. He demands that we maintain both relationships correctly. This is the summary of the whole scripture. The same idea of relationships is also seen in Paul's instruction. Unto

Timothy he says, "*I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Tim. 2:8). It says, when men pray in the assembly gatherings, how they ought to be. They should lift holy hands; they should pray without wrath; and they must pray without doubting. These show their various relationships. When it says that they must lift their holy hands, it indicates that they should be holy in their daily lives. Their prayers cannot be heard if they lead an unholy life. It is worth noting that it never indicates that they should lift their hands, as some do. It calls for holiness in life. 'Holy hand' must be taken figuratively. The verse then says that they should pray without wrath. They should not have a prejudiced heart. They must not have a judgmental spirit. This calls for love and unity with others. To keep these, there is a necessity for forgiveness. Then, prayer must be without doubting. This calls for faith in God and His promises. Our flesh may say that God cannot be trusted. The indwelling Spirit would encourage us to trust God and His word. If we give heed to the flesh, we end up with doubt and despondency. These show the Lord is concerned with our relationships. Therefore, there should be conscious efforts to set them right.

Faith and Forgiveness

Our relationships with God and one another are linked in Luke 17:1-6. *Then He* (Jesus) *said to the disciples, 'It is impossible that no offences should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It should be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if repents forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."* So, the Lord said, "*If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."* In the passage, we see how these two virtues are linked together. In the prayer that the disciples made, we see the need for faith to forgive

others without limit, as God forgives us. The Lord says what is necessary is a '*faith as a mustard seed.*' A seed has a life principle in it. This means a living and growing faith, that is, a genuine faith. What is needed is not a greater quantity of faith but a better quality of faith. The better the quality of our faith, the better our relationships with others will be. An effective prayer life demands good relationships, both upward and outward, with God and with others.

III

Leaders and People

"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching."
Matthew 21:23

4

Questions and Answers

In Jerusalem, Jesus faced many questions from the Jewish opponents. All the opponents mentioned in the Gospels appear one after another, challenging the Lord. Probably, the enemy was trying to hinder God's purposes, the work of redemption. But Jesus, the Wisdom Incarnate, answered all the questions posed against Him. Not only that, He also taught them the right way to approach God. Grace in its fullness is evident here. They were attempting to trap Him with their words. Yet, He patiently responded to their inquiries while also sharing the truth with them. He not only urged us to love our enemies, but He also provided the example of doing so, even when He knew all that would occur that weekend. Marvellous is His patience in love and grace.

The opposition of the Jewish leaders is recorded in Matthew 21:23-23:36; Mark 11:27-12:40; Luke 20:1-47. John, in his records, omits them altogether, probably due to the nature of his Gospel. He presents Jesus as God. God cannot be tempted (Matthew 4:7). Notice the following seven groupings; "chief priests and the scribes" Matthew 21:15; "chief priests and the elders" Matthew 21:23; "chief priests and Pharisees" Matthew 21:45; "Pharisees and Herodians" Matthew 22:15,16; "Sadducees", Matthew 22:23; "Pharisees" Matthew 22:34,41; "scribes and Pharisees" Matthew 23:2,13,14,15,23,25,27,29. All these came around Jesus with various questions to trap Him and bring on Him the inevitable. But what they did not realise then was that all things were being fulfilled according to the eternal purposes of

God. If God had not given the authority, none could have stood before Him. But they were blinded and could not see the grace and love reaching toward them. They asked questions in ignorance. But Jesus answered them in wisdom.

The questions the Jewish leaders asked were the following.

Question on authority, Matthew 21:23; 22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-18.

Question on tribute, Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26.

Question on resurrection, Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38.

Question on the great commandments, Matthew 22: 34-40; Mark 12:28-34.

The Lord answered all their questions and denounced them for their antagonistic attitude toward the gospel. Further, He extended His invitation to them to turn to the Father. In all these, the divine wisdom is very much evident. We can only wonder at His wisdom. *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"* (Romans 11:33). He is wisdom incarnate!

Question On Authority

"*The chief priests and the elders of the people*" were the first to come to Jesus with questions. Matthew says, *"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?'" But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." So they answered*

Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Matthew 21:23-27). Mark records that the scribes were also among those who came with questions. Probably, they were comparatively silent. Thus, Matthew does not mention them. The contingent that came for questioning was of much importance in society. They were members of the Sanhedrin council, the highest office of the Jews, especially on religious matters. They thought they were the supreme authority over the Jews. For this reason, the Lord was questioned by them when He exercised His authority over the temple and the people.

There are two questions they posed. Firstly, *"By what authority are You doing these things?"* And, secondly, *"And who gave You this authority?"* With these questions, they were questioning the nature of the Lord's authority and the Source of His authority. Now, the Lord should answer them. But before we go into the answers the Lord gives, it is necessary to look at the occasion that made them ask these questions.

The Occasion for the Questions

At the Triumphal entry, the Lord was given a royal welcome. The people sang 'Hosanna' and welcomed Him. It generated discomfort in the minds of the Jewish authorities. After the Triumphal entry, the Lord had gone to the Temple and seen the condition there. It had become, so to speak, a place of merchandise. The Lord was grieved about the situation. That evening, He returned to Bethany, located at the slope of the Mount of Olives. The next morning, on returning to the city, the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the Temple happened. These were matters which the Jewish authorities could not digest. The Lord had taught the people also with authority. These actions and teachings were closely monitored by the Jewish authorities. The questions about the authority of Jesus might have come from watching these actions of Jesus. They thought that they were the authority of the Temple. They were the ones who taught the people. Now, when Jesus assumed those positions, it was only natural for them to come and ask these questions.

Quoting Edershiem, Pentecost says,

> "All teaching must be authoritative since it was traditional, approved by authority, and handed down from teacher to disciple. The highest honour of a scholar was that he was like a well-plastered cistern, from which not a drop had leaked of what had been poured into it. The ultimate appeal in cases of discussion was always to some great authority, whether an individual Teacher or a Decree by the Sanhedrin. In this manner had the great Hillel first vindicated his claim to be the Teacher of his time and to decide the disputes then pending. And, to decide differently from authority, was either the mark of ignorant assumption or the outcome of daring rebellion, in either case to be visited with 'the ban'."[1]

The Lord's authority was not human. He did not receive it from any teacher on earth. He was sealed by the Father and sent. In His actions and words, He was exercising this authority. When others, while teaching, quoted other rabbis for authority, He said, '*I say unto you.*' In His cursing of the fig tree, He showed His authority over nature. They obey His command. He cleansed the Temple as the authority over the house. It was His Father's house. The Jewish authorities, in ignorance of these authorities vested in Him, questioned Him. These authoritative actions of the Lord moved them to counter Him with questions.

Darell L Bock explains by emphasising the phrase, *"these things"* in the questions, and says that it was not just one action or statement that made them question Him, but all the actions and the teachings of those days. He further notes,

> "The temple cleansing has made the issue of special importance because now He has acted upon the central symbol of Jewish worship."[2]

Matthew says that the Jewish leaders came and questioned the Lord when He was coming into the Temple alone. He says, *"Now when He came into the temple"* (Matthew 21:23). This does not mean that He was alone. The disciples were also there with Him. Mark includes the disciples also. He says, *"Then they came again to Jerusalem"* (Mark 11:27). This difference in record can be explained by the nature of these Gospels. Where Jesus is

presented as the Servant, all the disciples are included. But where He is presented as King, in the Gospel of Matthew, only He is mentioned. There, He is seen as separate from all others. The activities of Jesus when the Jewish leaders came with their questions are also recorded in the Gospels. Matthew says He was teaching (21:23), Mark reports that He was walking in the Temple (11:27), and Luke writes that He was teaching and preaching (20:1). These indicate the various activities Jesus was involved in at the time when they came with their questions. Those include walking, viewing, teaching, and preaching. He might have taught from the things in the Temple as they were shadows of Himself. He might have taken the occasion to correct the wrong practices and teachings of the Jewish rabbis. Those were unpalatable for the leaders. These prompted them to come and question Jesus.

Answer to the Leaders

The answer Jesus gives is recorded in Matthew 21:24-27; Mark 11:29-33 and Luke 20:3-8. Jesus answered their question with a counterquestion. Matthew says, "*But Jesus answered and said to them, 'I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?'"* (Matthew 21:24-25). One fact to notice here, and elsewhere, is that wherever His enemies came to question Him to trap Him in words or with insincere intentions, He always replied with questions. At the same time, when His disciples came to the Lord with sincere questions, He always took time to clear their doubts. This is a model for anyone in the ministry. There are always people who come with questions, especially when we are in public. When we try to answer them sincerely, it will always lead to more problems. More people with other questions would join in. Then the calm would turn to chaos. Then the matters would turn to the extent where we may not be able to go to the place or people with the gospel at all. Jesus' pattern is a model here. Where questions are not sincere, always counter them with questions. But not any questions, but questions that would help them to think over and find the answers themselves.

If the chief priests and elders had tried to answer Him sincerely, that would have led them to the right answer. God had sent John to minister. He witnessed to the Lord Jesus. John had said that Jesus came from above. Thus, if they had accepted the ministry of John, they would have also known that Jesus was from above. They would have understood that Jesus had taught and acted according to the authority given to Him by God. But they did not want to be sincere. Notice how they answered. Matthew says, "*And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know."* They were not sincere in their answer. They played it safe. They did not want to face the ire of the people. They said that they did not know where John the Baptist got the authority to minister. When they did not want to answer, Jesus also said that He would not answer them (v.27).

Accusation Against Jewish Leaders

The Lord did not let the Jewish leaders get off just like that. He would now bring charges against them. He establishes that it was not He who usurped the divine authority, but the Jewish leaders. The Lord tells three parables to show how the Jewish leaders denied divine authority. These parables are the parable of two sons (Matthew 21:28-32), the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18), and the parable of the marriage feast (Matthew 22:1-14). All three parables tell how these Jewish leaders and all Israel denied the authority of God. These three parables tell us the nature of God's authority over the people. He was Father to them. This truth is seen in the first parable. In the second parable, God is presented as a householder. In the third one, He is King. The Israelites did not accede to divine authority. They neglected the filial, legal, and royal authority of God over them. The Lord was masterfully turning the tables against those who brought charges against Him. He made it clear that it was not He who usurped the divine authority, but it was they who denied God's authority over their

lives. God has absolute authority over His people, and they should submit to His authority over them.

The Parable of Two Sons

This parable is a small one, but it has many important lessons. The Lord said, *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterwards he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go"* (Matthew 21:28-30). In this parable, the Lord would prove that they denied God's filial or parental authority over them.

The parable at the outset seems straightforward and appears to be a shallow story. However, when we try to understand its meaning, it reveals its depth. A closer look is needed to unravel its truths. The parable is about a man who has two sons. The father owned a vineyard where work needed to be done. Initially, the father asks the first son to go and work. He bluntly says no, but later thinks it over, changes his mind, and goes to the vineyard. There was more work to be done. He approaches the second son next. The second son claims he will go, but he never does. Notice how, with these simple lines, the Lord presents profound truths to them. The following truths are evident in this parable.

This parable and the following one are about vineyards. Vineyards are often taken as a symbol of the nation of Israel. There are three trees used for Israel: the vine, the olive tree, and the fig tree. The vine shows the past failure of Israel. As seen in Isaiah 5, when good fruit was expected from it, it brought forth wild grapes. Asaph also sings about this condition of Israel (Psalm 80). The olive tree is taken as a metaphor for Israel in Romans 11. It shows their present state of rejection. The fig tree is used as a figure for Israel by the Lord in Luke 13. He tells about a fig tree planted in the vineyard. It did not bear fruit. He asks the servant to cut it down. On the way to the Temple in Jerusalem, the Lord cursed a fig tree as it did not yield any fruit for Him (Mark 11:12-14). Even this fig tree is a picture of the fruitless Israel. Thus, the use of the metaphor of the vineyard is instructive.

In John 15:1, God the Father Himself is the owner of the vineyard. God has work to be done in the nation of Israel. He wants His people to do the labour there.

After narrating the story, the Lord asked the chief priests and elders of the Jews, Which of the two sons did the will of the father? They rightly answered that it was the first son who did the will of the father (v.31). In the explanation of the parable, the Lord tells who the two sons represent. He says, *"Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterwards relent and believe him"* (Matthew 21:31-32). The first son represented the outcasts in society, like harlots and publicans. They were in worldly ways. However, they repented and turned to God when they were convicted by the ministry of John the Baptist. Ellicot notes,

> "Both of those who are called to work are 'sons,' and not hired labourers - i.e., there is a recognition of both Pharisees and publicans, the outwardly religious and the conspicuously irreligious, as being alike, in a sense, children of God."[3]

All were also the children of Abraham after the flesh. As children, we must honour God. Malachi says, *"A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?"* (Malachi 1:6).

The opportunity to serve the Lord is open to all. This truth is evident from the fact that the owner of the vineyard calls both sons to work in the vineyard. The call is for all. The Lord said, "*Go ye into all the world*." This commission is for all the children of God and not just for a select few. All must work for the Lord in the situations they are in. The Lord says, "*You are My witnesses.*" All believers must take this commission seriously. However, one caution must be noted. When we say that 'all' should be involved in the work, it does not mean that the 'publican and harlots' are involved in the work 'just as they are.' Repentance must happen in their lives. They must leave their old ways and turn to the Lord. Only then can they be of any use to the Lord.

The urgency of the work in the vineyard was evident in how the father asked the sons to do the work. He asks the first son to go to the vineyard. Though he hesitated at first, he changed his mind and went to work. The father did not stop there. He goes to the second one and asks him to go to the vineyard. This shows that all must work as there is much work to be done. The work is enormous and plentiful. Otherwise, there was no reason to ask the second one to go. This fact is also evident in the words of the Lord elsewhere. He said, *"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few"* (Matthew 9:37).

In the interpretation, the Lord indicates that the time for repentance was not yet closed. They could still be involved in the work if they repented and turned to the Lord. He says, "*Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you."* Notice how this statement ends. He says that the unworthy shall enter the kingdom "*before you*." It means opportunities for them were still open. It should be applied to the present time. The opportunities to labour for the Lord are not yet over. We must repent and turn to the Lord.

We must not forget that the conversation was about the authority. The Lord accused the Jewish leaders of denying God's authority over their lives. They were, earlier than this, questioning the authority of the Lord. The Jewish leaders thought that they needed no repentance. For this reason, when John the Baptist called the people to repent, they did not turn to the Lord. They thought it was only needed for people like tax collectors and sinners. However, there is nobody who does not require repentance. Self-righteousness shall not qualify anybody to enter the kingdom. The Lord was here accusing the Jewish leaders that they were denying God's authority over their lives as Father. He asked them to be humble before God, repent, and serve the Lord. But the idea of repentance was beyond them. They saw no need for this in their lives. They thought that it was necessary only for others. The parable, though small and simple, is powerful and has many applications for people then, and for the present.

5

The Parable of the Tenants

The parable of the tenants is the second one to prove that the Jewish leaders and the Israelites following them denied the authority of God over their lives. If in the first parable in the series, the parable of two sons, the Lord charged them that they denied God's filial authority, in the second one, the parable of the tenants, the Lord would charge them with the accusation of the denial of God's legal authority. As servants, we need to discharge our duties to the Lord.

This parable is recorded in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18.

Israel as a nation was chosen as God's servant. The following passages make it very clear.

"So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

"So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn" (Exodus 4:23).

"And you shall say to him, The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness'; but indeed, until now you would not hear!" (Exodus 7:16).

"And the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me" (Exodus 8:1).

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go into Pharaoh and tell him, 'Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me" (Exodus 9:1).

"So, Moses and Aaron came into Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me" (Exodus 10:3).

"*But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away*" (Isaiah 41:8-9).

Though Israel was chosen as a servant to do the work the Lord had given to them on earth, they failed miserably in discharging their duties. See what the Lord tells through Malachi, *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'"* (Malachi 1:6).

If the vineyard represented Israel, the husbandmen or farmers in the parable represented the Jewish leaders.

The Story of the Parable

The parable is about a householder who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it. Installed a wine press in it for extracting wine from the produce. He built a watchtower also for security. All that was needed for it to grow as a fruitful vineyard was done to it. Then he goes to a far country. To look after the vineyard in his absence, he let it out to tenants and went. He might have gotten into an agreement with them to give him part of the fruit of the vineyard. It may take four or five years for the vineyard to start producing fruit. Then the time to collect the fruit came. He

sent his servants to collect it. The tenants dealt very badly with the servants. Jesus said, "*And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him"* (Matthew 21:35-39). This kind of action is unusual for a man to do. The first lot of servants were mistreated, and they even killed one of the servants. Then, normally, the owner of the vineyard must not send another contingent of servants. But that is what the owner of the vineyard did. He sends other servants to them. The tenants did the same thing to them also. They were ill-treated, and some were killed or stoned. But the owner of the vineyard did not give up. He went on to do something which no human being would do. He sent His son to them. The description of the son is interesting. Matthew says, "*His son*", v. 37, Mark says, "*one son*" (12:6), and Luke says, "*beloved son*" (20:13). Then, what might be expected, happened. When they saw the son, the heir, coming, they said, "*This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance."* This was like what is seen in Genesis 37:20. The Lord was not telling about what man would do. He was talking about the mind of God in sending His Son, the only begotten Son, to the world.

The tenants cast out the son from the vineyard and killed him. The Israelites shall do this to the Lord also. He told this parable at the beginning of the Passion Week. At the end of the week, the Lord suffered death outside the city gate.

The Lord, then, posed a question to the Jewish leaders. *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"* (Matthew 21:40). The Jews answered Him rightly. They said, "*They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons'"* (Matthew 21:41). The words of the Lord following this are

important. *"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."* (Matthew 21:42-44). Matthew adds this note about the Jewish leaders, as their response to what the Lord told them. *"Now, when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet"* (Matthew 21:45-46).

The parable gives various practical lessons and relates to many important events and passages in the Bible.

The Vineyard of God

The metaphor of vine or vineyard is an Old Testament usage for the people of Israel. The prominent passage is Isaiah 5:1-7.

"Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:

My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.
He dug it up and cleared out its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.

He built a tower in its midst,
And also made a winepress in it;
So He expected it to bring forth good grapes,
But it brought forth wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.
What more could have been done to My vineyard
That I have not done in it?

Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes,
Did it bring forth wild grapes?

And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:
I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;

And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
I will lay it waste;

It shall not be pruned or dug,
But there shall come up briers and thorns.
I will also command the clouds
That they rain no rain on it."

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.

He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help" (Isaiah 5:1-7).

In this song about the vineyard, we see God's concern for His people. He planted it with great expectation. He did all that was necessary for the vineyard to bear good fruit. But contrary to the expectation of the owner, it produced wild grapes. God, the Owner of the vineyard, the Israelites, is asking, *"What more could have been done to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?"* The answer is that there was nothing more to be done. Everything necessary for it to be a fruitful vineyard was done. But what disappointment, it produced wild grapes!

The passage also gives us its interpretation. "*For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant."* The vineyard represents Israel and Judah. The fruits that Jehovah God looked for were justice and righteousness. But what they yielded was oppression and a cry. These indicate the unrighteousness and wickedness that filled the land.

In the parable we are considering, the parable of the tenants, the vineyard represents the people of God, and the tenants represent the Jewish leaders. The fruits the Lord expects from His people are the same as it was in the Old Testament. They were righteousness and justice. Righteousness is the quality of life one exhibits because of the right relationship one has with God. Justice is the expression of righteousness in our dealings with others.

The Land Owner and the Tenants

The landowner, before going to the far country, planted the vineyard and gave it to the tenants to look after. All that could have been done, he did. He might have removed all stones from the field after ploughing it well. He dug a winepress. He might have cut this in a rock, which was the common practice in ancient times. A tower was raised for the watchmen to take care of the vineyard. Then he goes to the far country. The letting out of the vineyard to the tenants reminds us of the conquest of the land of Canaan and the planting of the people of Israel there. It was given to the people to live righteously and justly. They were expected to be faithful to the responsibilities vested in them.

The time for bearing fruit might be about three or four years. All those years, the tenants might have looked after the vineyard. Nothing is told about the visits the owner made during these years. Probably, as he went to a far country, he did not make any such visits. This might have given the tenants the inclination to think about the vineyard as their own. Probably, they might have had to spend money also on the upkeep of the vineyard. Thus, though an agreement for giving part of the produce was made, they no longer wanted to honour the agreement. They now wanted to make it their own. To make their claim over the vineyard, they misbehaved with the servants whom the owner sent to collect his part of the yield.

The servants who were sent to the tenants remind us of the prophets whom God sent to the people of Israel from time to time. They were sent to instruct them in their duties, to exhort them in their responsibilities, to reprove them of their sins, to stir them up to repentance, and to bring forth fruits meet for it. But when the servants came to take the part of the yield, the tenants took them, beat one, and killed another. This language indicates the general treatment the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, received at the hands of the Israelites. This kind of attitude of the tenants did not deter the landowner from sending more servants to them. The passage says, "*Again he sent other servants, more than the first*" (Matthew 21:36). This indicates the larger number of prophets God sent to the people

of Israel, leading up to John the Baptist. The sending of the son of the landowner followed this. The tenants put him out of the garden and killed him. This pointed to the death of the Lord Jesus outside the city of Jerusalem.

The sending of the owner's son is interesting. Humanly speaking, a sane person cannot send his son to the place where his servants were rejected and killed. But that is what happened here. He sends his son to the wicked tenants. The Lord said, "*Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son'*" (Matthew 21:37). Here, the Lord was unveiling the mind of God. He was saying how God sent His only begotten Son into the world. Though the people of Israel turned their backs on God, God did not give up on them. He still had hope in them. He hoped that they would turn to Him.

Notice the way the son was sent. "*Then, last of all, he sent his son to them.*" When the Lord said this, He was talking about the nature of His sending and coming to the world. The coming of the Lord was the final act of God in saving man. It does not mean that He was sent when all other options failed. There was no other option for redemption but through the Lord Jesus. Anything done before or instituted earlier was only preparatory to this, as far as the redemption is concerned. The Law was given. But it was given only to prove that man cannot work out his salvation. It only brought him to the Saviour. The phrase "*Last of all*" brings before us another truth. It is about the manifestation of the invisible God in person or revelation. Hebrews 1:1,2 says, "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). God sent His prophets with His word. But those revelations came in instalments. They were never complete. It was in part. Paul says, "*For we know in part and we prophesy in part*" (1 Corinthians 13:9). This means the revelation of the Word of God came in parts. But the revelation through Christ is final. The New Testament is the full and final revelation of God. There was no other revelation to be given after the Book of Revelation. This matter is important, as some teach that it is not final and the book of

Islam is the final one. Each faith that comes up later would make this same claim. But the Bible makes this claim to itself. John, in closing the book of Revelation says, "*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"* (Revelation 22:18-19). The Bible is the full and final revelation. After sending His Son, there is no other Person to be sent. And the sending of Jesus Christ and all He accomplished through His death is perfect and complete.

There are other truths also to be gleaned in this parable. It connects us to certain other important topics and events in the scripture. These are the mentions of certain stones here: the stone that is rejected, the stumbling stone, and the falling stone. These connect us to some of the important truths in the Bible.

The Rejected Stone

The Lord quotes from Psalm 118. "*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."* (Matthew 21:42). There is a story that comes from the Jewish tradition which gives the background for this verse. When Solomon's Temple was constructed, the stone-cutters sent a huge stone of a particular measure to the site. But the builders rejected it and rolled it down the mountain. They said it was not the measure they wanted. Later in their construction, they needed a stone for a cornerstone. They send the measure, asking for a stone from the quarry of that particular size. Then the reply from the quarry stated that this stone had already been sent. Then they remembered the stone they had rejected and rolled down the mountain. They went in search of it. They found it down the mountain, covered with creepers and mud. They took it and cleaned it, and to their surprise, it was the same measure they wanted for the corner. They took it and set it as the cornerstone. "*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."*

Primarily, and literally, it applies to the nation of Israel. It is only a tiny dot on the world map. It is of no value in the eyes of the mighty and great men of the world. They are rejected and condemned. Despite their rejection, they have attained eminence. They are the peculiar treasure of God, the people of God. They are now worthy to be reckoned with any other nation in the world. They have become the '*head of the corner.*'

Secondarily, the verse applies to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. He is the Stone the builders rejected. They thought they did not need Him, and they went on building without Him. They put Him on the cross. But God raised Him from the dead. He is the preeminent One. He is given a name higher than all other names. As a type of Christ, we see this verse applicable in the life of David also. Jesse did not consider him a candidate for king. But he was chosen as the king. In the words of the Lord Jesus in the parable, it applies primarily to Himself, the Messiah (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7; Ephesians 2:20).

The Stumbling Stone

The Lord mentioned about another stone also. He said, "*And whoever falls on this stone will be broken*" (Matthew 21:44). '*Falling on this stone*' is sometimes taken as surrendering to the Lord in repentance and contrition. David says, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise*" (Psalms 51:17). But a better way to understand is to take the Lord as a stumbling stone for the Jews. A stumbling block is lying on the floor. It pictures the humiliation of Jesus in His incarnation. He took the form of a servant. He was found in fashion as a man. He was a stumbling block for the Jews. They expected a Messiah, not in humiliation, but a royal Messiah. John says, "*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*" (John 1:11). Paul says, "*But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). The Jews stumbled on Him. But there is another truth here. Those who stumble can still rise from there. Israel, in its

present state, is in unbelief. They are blinded. They did not recognise the Messiah. But they shall turn to the One they crucified. They shall see the One they pierced and turn to Him as a nation. When it happens in the future nationally, in the present, they can individually and personally turn to Christ in faith, like any other person. Romans 9 to 11 tells us about the present rejection and future restoration. About the present state of Israel in unbelief the Lord said, "*Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it*" (Matthew 21:43). This indicates the present position of the New Testament believers who are the privileged people in the present time.

Luke records another statement, the Jewish leaders said, which neither Matthew nor Mark records. He says that when Jesus said that the kingdom shall be taken and given to another nation that shall give fruit in its right time, they responded, "*Certainly not!" Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone?"* (Luke 20:16-17). This shows that they did not want to acknowledge the judgment that was going to come on the nation.

The Falling Stone

Jesus said further, *"But on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder"* (Matthew 21:44). Here, we get the picture of a falling stone. It is falling from above. It shall grind to powder anyone upon whom it falls. This gives the picture of the Lord coming in His judgment. The idea is seen in the Book of Daniel. In interpreting the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said, "*You, O king, were watching; and behold a great image! This great image, whose splendour was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest, and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind*

carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:31-35). Here, a stone is seen coming from above and smiting the kingdoms of the earth. This denotes the coming of the Lord and the setting up of His kingdom on earth.

J D Pentecost, commenting on verses 43 and 44, says,

> "Christ described the judgment on that generation: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:43-44). There were to be two parts to this judgment. First, the offer of the kingdom would be withdrawn from that generation: 'The kingdom of God would be taken away from you.' Second, the kingdom would be 'given to a people who will produce its fruit.' This may be understood in two ways. The 'people' may refer to the future generation in Israel to whom the message, 'The kingdom of heaven is near,' will again be preached (24:14). This would anticipate a future offer of the kingdom to another generation in Israel. An alternate interpretation would be to understand 'the people' as a reference to Gentiles."[1]

This must not be understood as a replacement of Israel with another 'people,' as some do, but only a postponement in the programs of God with Israel.

The above discussion in the parable of the tenants teaches how Israel and its leaders denied God's legal right over their lives. At the same time, the parable touches many other truths, especially about the Lord Jesus. Matthew concludes with this statement, "*Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet"* (Matthew 21:45-46). Mark adds, "*So they left Him and went away*" (Mark 12:12).

6

The Marriage Feast

This is the third parable the Lord uttered to the Jewish leaders in response to their question on authority. The Lord cleansed the Temple and taught with authority. Thus, they asked about His authority. They assumed power over the Temple and all that happened there. They understood the actions and activities of the Lord there as a usurpation of their authority. The Lord was responding to their charges. In answer, the Lord gave the three parables: the parable of the two sons, the parable of the tenants, and the parable of the marriage feast. Here, we are considering the third parable, the parable of the marriage feast. Among these three parables, the first one teaches that the Jewish leaders denied God's filial authority over their lives. In the second parable, the Lord stated that they rejected God's legal authority. In this third parable, the parable of the marriage feast, the Lord would argue that they denied God's royal authority. God was their King. But they did not submit to His supreme authority. Only Matthew records this parable (Matthew 22:1-14).

Similar charges, of denial of God's authority over their lives, are seen in the words of Malachi also. The prophet says, "*But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished— for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, 'And My name is to be feared among the nations'"* (Malachi 1:14). In verse 6 Malachi says, "*A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where*

is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'" (Malachi 1:6). In these verses, Jehovah God is demanding reverence from His people. It is the same thing these parables also demand from the Jewish leaders and the people of Israel.

The Story of the Parable

In the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus is presented as King, it is only appropriate for this parable to be recorded. The story, as recorded by Matthew, is seen as follows.

"*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore, go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matthew 22:2-14).

There is another parable very similar to this in Luke 14:16-24. It is often called the parable of the Great Supper. Some consider both as the same. But a closer look at both these parables

would make it clear that they are not the same. The differences between these are more than their similarities. The contrasts between the parables may be put in the following lines.

The parable of the Great Supper was uttered while Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. Luke 13:22 says, *"And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem."* Luke 17:11 indicates that they had not reached Jerusalem. It says, *"Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee."* They were probably still in Galilee. This makes it clear that the Lord told this parable in Galilee. But the parable of the marriage feast Jesus told while He was in the Temple at Jerusalem. Matthew says, "*Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?'"* (Matthew 21:23). In answer to this question, the Lord told the parable. Thus, it was uttered in the Temple at Jerusalem.

The occasions for uttering the parables are also different. The parable of the great feast was told in response to what a man at the feast stated. He said, "*Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'"* (Luke 14:15). The Lord was responding to him in uttering the parable of the great feast. The context of the parable of the marriage feast was entirely different. The Pharisees and the Elders of the Jewish people questioned Jesus about His authority to do the things He was doing in the Temple. They asked, "*Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?'"* (Matthew 21:23). Jesus was answering this with the parable of the marriage feast.

Apart from the differences stated above, in the details of the parables, there are other distinctions. When the great supper is arranged by "*a certain man*" (Luke 14:16) the marriage supper

is arranged by *"a certain king"* (Matthew 22:2). While one is just a *'great supper'* (Luke 14:16) the other one is a marriage supper (Matthew 22:2). In the parable of the great supper there is no punishment given to those who denied the invitation. He got angry and told them that the deniers shall not taste the supper (Luke 14:21,24). In the case of the other parable, the king comes on the deniers with wrath and destruction (Matthew 22:7). The parable of the great supper does not have the person without the wedding garment. The parable of the marriage feast furnishes the king coming to the man without the wedding garment and deals with him accordingly (Matthew 22:11-14). When the feast of the great feast demands humility to enter the kingdom, the parable of the marriage feast accuses the Jewish authority of abusing the divine authority, and the parable has a dispensational character. There are major differences between these two parables, showing that they are two different parables.

Jesus Spoke by Parables

Matthew introduces the parable with the introductory statement, *"And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said"* (Matthew 22:1). Notice the word, *'parables.'* It is in plural. But it follows only with one parable. This is explained in any of the following two ways. Firstly, the Lord might have told other parables also with this parable. Matthew records for us only one of them. Secondly, Wm Barclay gives a different explanation, stating that this parable of the marriage feast has two parables in it. He suggests verses 2 to 10 as the first parable and verses 11 to 14 as the second parable.[1] The former explanation looks more natural and acceptable.

Matthew says that this parable is an answer to the Jewish leaders. But in fact, we do not see any question they asked Him. Of course, they had asked about the authority of Jesus. It was answered in the first two parables. Probably, we may take this as Jesus' further answer. Moreover, this may be taken as the answer Jesus gave to their attitude. This we see at the end of the earlier parable. Matthew says, *"Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking*

of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet" (Matthew 21:45-46). They heard His words and perceived what He said. Instead of responding to it positively, they sought to lay their hands on Him. But they did not do that as they feared the people. Mark adds another step in their response. He says, "*So they left Him and went away*" (Mark 12:12). This was their wilful, conscious decision. They left Him and went away. Or they turned their back on Him. Before they left, Jesus told them this parable. In this parable, He reiterated the judgment that shall come upon them for their rebellion.

Jesus opens the parable with this remark, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king"* etc. (Matthew 22:2). It may also be rendered as "*The Kingdom of heaven is become like…*" (Darby). It means it turned out to be what was not originally intended. The realm of God's reign has become the place of rebellion. The people of Israel were supposed to be under God's rule. But they turned away from God. Thus, the realm of God's rule has become a place where the enemy rules. This is also told in Matthew 13. In the seven kingdom parables therein, we see how the kingdom has become a mixture of all things. Four kinds of grounds, unnatural growth of the mustard seed, birds making it their roosting place, the leaven present, the tares, inedible fishes in the dragnet, and other details denote the condition. Albert Barnes explains this condition of Israel,

> "The phrase here means, "God deals with man in his kingdom, or regarding the dispensation of the gospel, as a certain king did," etc. This parable refers undoubtedly to the rejection of the Jews and to the calling of the Gentiles. The gospel, with all its privileges, was offered to the Jewish people; but through their wickedness and pride, they rejected it, and all its blessings were offered to the Gentiles and accepted."[2]

Thus, the parable shows the outreach of God to His people in grace, and how they spurned the love of God and chose judgment for themselves.

Jewish Custom of Marriage

To understand the parables involving marriages, like the parable here or elsewhere, it is essential to have a fair idea about the customs of Jewish marriages. An agreement to marry a son or a daughter to another family can happen even before the children are born. Both families might be close enough to desire a closer relationship. Thus, they decide to get into a marriage bond. After the children have grown up and are of marriageable age, they conduct the betrothal. For the Jews, a betrothal agreement is as sure as the marriage bond. Once a betrothal agreement is broken, it is like a divorce from a marital bond. There will be a twelve-month gap between betrothal and marriage. During this time, the bridegroom prepares a house for living together after marriage. Often, it is an extension of his parental home. During these months, the boy and the girl are not allowed to have any direct contact. Communication would be through a common friend, called the 'friend of the bridegroom.' When the invitations are sent for the betrothal, marriage invitations are also given. In ancient times, there were no diaries or electronic gadgets to record events and appointments in advance. Thus, it becomes necessary for the invitees to be reminded when the marriage comes near, maybe even a few hours before the event.

Marriage, normally, would be a private function, most probably, in the house of the bride. The bridegroom goes to the bride's house with his close relatives. In an inner chamber, the father of the bride places her hand in the bridegroom's or his father's arm. There will be a small function in the bride's house. After that, the bridegroom leaves with the bride for his house. The marriage feast is conducted there. There would be people appointed to receive them. Mostly, these happen at night. If the bridegroom is late to come, the guests may go to sleep. The people receiving them shall be awake. When the bridegroom comes, with songs and music, he is welcomed. The feast follows this. The number of days for the feast depends on the wealth of the bridegroom. The wealthier the groom, the longer the marriage feast.

The Invitees Reminded

In verses 2 to 4, two reminders are sent out to remind those who were invited to come to the marriage feast. *"Servants"* are bondslaves. Though they were reminded they would not come. Matthew says, "*And they were not willing to come"* (Matthew 22:3). But, it seems, the preparations went on. After everything was ready, the king sent his servants again to remind them to come. Now the reminder was more intense. Notice the message he sent to them. "*Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding'"* (Matthew 22:4). The reminder was intense. The preparations were generous. And the reminder was gracious. Robertson explains the invitation and the reminders.

> "The prophets of old had given God's invitation to the Jewish people. Now the Baptist and Jesus had given the second invitation that the feast was ready."[3]

But to these earnest reminders, their response was cold-hearted.

Rejection of the Reminders

The Parable tells how they rejected the invitation and the reminders. "*But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city*" (Matthew 22:5-7). They did not take the king's invitation seriously. It is not a light matter to ignore the marriage invitation of a king. Some of them went to mind their earthly pursuits, like business or farming. Certain others went to the extent of ill-treating the servants and even killing certain of them. That was not like silently neglecting the invitation and going to their matters. But it was almost like declaring war against the king. Those invitees who went to their earthly pursuits chose matters of their interest over the king's invitation. They missed the best for the ordinary. Against the murderers, the king sent his army and destroyed them and the cities that belonged to them.

Extension of Invitation

When the guests reject the invitation, the king sends the invitation to other unworthy people in the sight of others. "*Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore, go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests*" (Matthew 22:8-10). By rejecting the royal invitation, they proved that they were unworthy of such a call. Now the invitations go to the highways and byways. In the parable of the Great Supper, Luke includes the hedges also (Luke 14:23). The royal invitation was now going to people who might never have expected such a call.

Conditions for Entry

Though the invitation went to all people, to whosoever would come, it was not without any condition. The verses following make the condition clear enough. "*But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matthew 22:11-14). This reminds us of the outreach of God's grace unto the ends of the earth, beginning with the Lord and continuing with the apostles through whom the gospel was preached. In verse 13, the word for '*servants*' is *diakanos,* which means ministers, often used for public servants.

All were invited to the marriage feast. But the condition for entry was that those who came must have the wedding garment. None was allowed to come in without it. We must remember that it was the royal marriage feast. When all were seated for the feast, the king came to meet the guests. He saw a man without a wedding garment. The king called him and asked how he got entry without the wedding garment. That may indicate that the

garment was provided at the venue at the entrance itself. Those who enter by the proper entrance will get it. This man might have come in by some other way. He was bound and cast into the outer darkness. The call was for all. But those who are chosen are those who come in the right way and accept and put on the wedding garment provided there.

God's Plan Revealed

This parable was primarily told to the Jewish leaders with the accusation that they denied the authority of God over their lives. This was said in response to the charge the Jewish leaders brought against the Lord. Though that was the primary reason, there are other truths also revealed in this parable. God's dispensational dealings with His people, Israel, are seen here. Apart from this, their rejection, God's plan of reaching out to the Gentiles, the extension of the kingdom of God, and the condition for salvation to all are seen in the parable.

Israel was chosen for the blessings of God. God speaks to Israel, *"Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last"* (Isaiah 48:12). They are the bidden or the invited ones. They were called by the name of God and were called the people of God. They were chosen as His kingdom. They were a peculiar treasure to Him. To fulfil all the promises given to the patriarchs, the Lord, as their Messiah, came to them. John records, "*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him"* (John 1:11). They rejected Him and put Him on the cross. Israel was the 'bidden' or 'invited' guest. They proved unworthy.

There are two 'reminders' here. One, before the day of the feast. Second, after the feast was prepared. These two reminders remind us of the ministry of the gospel before the cross. They were done through John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, and the apostles, as recorded in the Gospels. The second reminder represents the ministry of the apostles as seen in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is about this extension of the kingdom we see in John 1:12. *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe*

in His name." The Lord's Great Commission foresaw this. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20). The Lord had also outlined the progress of this outreach of grace. "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). In the Acts of Apostles, we see the spread of the gospel in this same order. If the evangelisation was limited among the Jews in the first seven chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, from chapter 8 onwards we see the gospel going to Samaria, and to all of Judea and Caesarea. From chapter thirteen onwards, the gospel goes to the ends of the earth, especially through the ministry of the apostle Paul.

The chosen ones are those who enter through the door. They are given the wedding garment. Entrance through the door may indicate the necessity to come according to the Word of God. To approach God, we must come according to His terms. Man cannot make his terms for salvation or service. God has given us the Word. We must adhere to the Word. The man without the wedding dress might have gotten inside in some other way. He might have jumped the fence or crept in. He was found out. The servants, the *diakanos,* bound him and cast him into the outer darkness. This indicates the ministry of the angels at the consummation of the ages.

But, in the present times, it is the responsibility of the believers to go to the highways and byways and the hedges and call all the people to the feast of the Great King. We must tell the whole world that the feast is prepared. The Lord, by the death of the cross, has done all that was necessary for the salvation of all humanity. God's chosen ones are still there to enter. The condition for salvation is faith alone. Such shall be given the cloak of righteousness. As the bondslaves of the Lord, it is our bounden duty.

7

The Wisdom Incarnate

While Jesus was in Jerusalem, in the last week of the Lord's life on earth, we see all the enemies of the Lord coming against Him to trap Him in His words, and He, as the Wisdom Incarnate, fielded all questions and answered them. One startling thing to notice here is that, even at this stage, we see the Lord not only answering the questions but also showing them the way to God. He goes beyond giving answers to their questions. In this, we see the grace of God manifested.

We have four questions here. Three questions were posed by the Jewish leaders to the Lord, and one question was posed by the Lord to them. These questions were about tax payments (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26), on resurrection (Matthew 22:22-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38), and about the Law (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). These were followed by a question Jesus asked them. It was about the Messiah (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:39-44). We may term these questions as political, theological, ethical, and supreme.

Going the Second Mile

In answering their questions, Jesus was showing them their error and sharing truths to lead them to God. This effort to gain them is seen in all His answers. This effort to gain them was in the time when they would try to put Him on the cross. He knew all that would happen. Still, the Lord was giving them a chance to turn to God. The Lord was going the extra mile for them. In

His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had taught others to do this. He said, "*And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two*" (Matthew 5:41). Now, the Lord was practising this in His own life. But the sad thing to notice is that the people whom He tried to gain showed their backs to Him. They were not ready to come to Him. See what the Gospels say about their response at the end of His answers. Matthew says, "*And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore*" (22:46). Mark says, "*And the common people heard Him gladly*" (Mark 12:37). This indicates that the leaders turned away from Him. Luke says, "*Then some of the scribes answered and said, 'Teacher, You have spoken well.' But after that, they dared not question Him anymore*" (Luke 20:39-40). But the important thing we need to understand is that the Lord was not trying to win an argument with them. He was not trying to close their mouths. He wanted them to think and make corrections wherever necessary. But they did not respond in that manner. They tried to keep away from Him. We may take these as their last chance to turn to Him; the chance He gave them before He went to the cross. But because of their rebellious nature, it did not work for their good. The sad truth is even the final sign, which He had told them that He would give them, the sign of Jonah, even that would not do any good to them. That sign was His death and resurrection. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, they said that they would believe if He came down from the cross. However, He did not come down from the cross. He came out of the grave, alive. That was a greater sign than what they demanded as a condition to believe. Still, they did not turn to the Lord. The Lord told the Jews on another occasion. "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; I will raise him up at the last day*" (John 6:44). How well this fact applies to many who were convinced about truth but never turned to God!

A Combined Attempt

The questions of the Jewish authorities and the Lord's answers to them, most probably, happened on the third day after the Triumphal entry. Just before this, the Lord gave His discourse

on authority, in answer to the question of the Jewish leaders about the Lord's authority to cleanse the Temple and teach the people there, or any other things He did there. This answer is recorded in Matthew 21:23-22:14. The answer includes three parables accusing the Jewish leaders of denying the authority of God over them as Father, Owner, and King.

The enemies of the Lord who wanted to trap Him in words were not acting independently, but were combined in their efforts. In Matthew 22:15,16 we see the Pharisees and the Herodians coming together against the Lord. "*Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians."* These two groups held different teachings on religion and politics. The Pharisees were a religious group, whereas the Herodians were a political group. These two saw each other as enemies. But when it was a matter against their common enemy, here the Lord Jesus, they put their differences behind and combined their energy to fight against the Lord in unison. Mark also notes about the Pharisees and the Herodians coming together against the Lord (12:13). In Mark 11:27, a larger union is seen. That was of "*the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.*" These were a conglomeration of diverse ideas. The chief priests were mostly of the Sadducean sect. They did not believe in resurrection, life after death, or angels. They were the rationalists of their times. The scribes were the copyists of scriptures, and the elders were the ones who led the people in their religious matters and social life. All these we see united in their fight against the Lord. The three questions they brought against the Lord are the result of their united counsel and effort. They decided to unite, most probably, because they knew that the fight to finish Him would not be an easy task. They did not want to do it alone. Thus, even at the risk of their prestige and positions, they came together and put their heads and hands to fight against Christ. The questions they brought to the Lord were from the realm of tax, resurrection, and the Law.

Question on Tax Payment

Luke gives the background for the questions. "*And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on*

Him, but they feared the people, for they knew He had spoken this parable against them. So, they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor" (Luke 20:19,20). They were laying a snare in subtlety. Their earlier attempt to stop the ministry of the Lord was direct. They came and asked the Lord about the authority He exercised. The Lord answered them and exposed them. Now they were putting their efforts subtly. "*That very hour"* shows that they acted immediately after hearing the words of the Lord. These were their response to what He told them, His sermon on authority. The record of Matthew shows that all these questions came on the same day. "*Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk"* (22:15). "*The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him"* (22:23). "*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together"* (22:34). "*And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore"* (22:46). These show that all the questions came the same day, one after the other. They wanted somehow to finish Him.

They could have done anything to Him, then and there. Their anger was fuming against Him. But they feared the people. Thus, they decided to find ways to deliver Him to the civil authorities and get Him eliminated. For this, they would need some solid charge against Him. They sent expert spies to spy on Him. They went after Him, pretending that they were spiritual men. If they get something from Him that is against the civil authorities or the establishments, then they could hand Him over to the governor. These were well-thought-out schemes, planned after watching Him carefully and closely.

The question on tax payment and the Lord's answer are recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26). According to Matthew, we see the following record. "*Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true,*

and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So, they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him and went their way." The records of Mark and Luke are also almost the same.

Since the time of Julius Caesar, all emperors of Rome were called Caesars. When the Lord was doing His public ministry, Tiberius Caesar was ruling. Romans ruled over Palestine through various Herods of the Idumean dynasty. The prominent among them was Herod the Great. In BC 37, he consolidated his rule over Jerusalem and Judea. At his death in BC 4, the Romans divided the domain among his three sons. Antipas was given Galilee and Perea. Philip was given Trachonitis, Iturea, and Abelene, which comprise North-East Palestine. Archelaus was given Judea and Samaria. The cities of Ashdod, Jabneh, and Phasaelis were given to Salome I, Herod's sister. Later, Archelaus was removed from power as he was displeasing to the Roman Emperor. Thus, Judea came under the direct rule of the Romans. This place was ruled directly by Roman procurators. Even taxes were collected directly by the Romans.

Those who were religious among the Jews were against paying taxes to the Romans. The reason for their objection was the belief that the land and the people were under God's authority. They belonged to God. He ruled over them. Then why should the Romans collect taxes? This was the argument of the religious among them. The less religious had no qualms about the payment of taxes. As the Romans were ruling, they might collect taxes, they thought. Both these views existed among the Jews in Jesus' time.

Wm Barclay lists the taxes the Romans levied on the Jews and various rates they exacted. There were three kinds of taxes.

Firstly, the ground tax. Under this, people were supposed to pay one-tenth of the grains, one-fifth of wine, and other fruits. They may pay in cash or kind. Secondly, the income tax. Under this, one hundredth of a person's income was to be paid to the government. Thirdly, the Poll tax. This was imposed upon all men and women. All men of the age group of 14 to 65 and all women from 12 to 65 were expected to pay this tax. The amount to be paid was one denarius, which was about a man's wage for a day. It seems that the question was about the third class of tax, the Poll tax.[1] The learned commentator Ellicott gives the following explanation. Explaining the word for "taxes," he says,

> "The original gives the Latin 'census,' ie, the poll tax of a denarius per head, assessed on the whole population, the publicans being bound to transmit the sum so collected to the Roman treasury. As being a direct personal tax, it was looked on by the more zealous Jews as carrying with it a greater humiliation than export or import duties, and was consequently resisted (as by Judas of Galilee and his followers) by many who acquiesced more or less readily in the payment of the customs (Acts 5:37)."[2]

A Strategy Well-Set

They wanted to entangle Him in His talk. Normally, people fail in areas where they are well-versed. When they watched Jesus Christ, they understood that He was good with words. Then, they thought that He could be entangled in His talk than in any other area. And, they might have expected Him to answer that they should not pay tax, as they knew of His commitment to the Word of God and spirituality. Along with their disciples, they sent the Herodians also, with the expectation that He would answer negatively. Herodians were political people. They were people who favoured the Roman rule. They advocated payment of taxes. Thus, the trap was well set. If Jesus had spoken favourably to the tax payment, the Pharisees could have jumped on Him, and if otherwise, the Herodians could have had the opportunity to deal with Him. As Luke records, they desired to get Him caught by the Roman authorities (20:20).

Albert Barnes notes the notoriety of the question in the following lines. Explaining about the Herodians, he says,

> "It is not certainly known who these were, it is probable that they took their name from Herod the Great. Perhaps they were first a political party, and were then distinguished for holding some of his peculiar opinions. Dr Prideaux thinks that those opinions referred to two things: the first respecting subjection to a foreign power. The law of Moses was, that a stranger should not be set over the Jews as a king, De 17:15. Herod, who had received the kingdom of Judea by appointment of the Romans, held that the law of Moses referred only to a voluntary choice of a king, and did not refer to a necessary submission, where they had been overpowered by force. They supposed, therefore, that it was lawful in such cases to pay tribute to a foreign prince. This opinion was, however, extensively unpopular among the Jews; and particularly the Pharisees, who looked upon it as a violation of their law, and all the acts growing out of it as oppressive. Hence, the difficulty of the question proposed by them."[3]

They began with flatteries. Matthew says, "*Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men*" (22:16). They called Him Rabbi. They said that He was true and spoke only the truth. They also referred to His boldness against anyone. The question was framed to persuade the Lord to make some bold statements against the tax payments. Any human being would have fallen for such high praise. They pretended as if they were genuine men.

Matthew says that Jesus knew their wickedness. "*Jesus perceived their wickedness" (22:18). Mark says, "He, knowing their hypocrisy*" (12:15). Luke reports, *"But He perceived their craftiness"* (20:23). They were wicked, hypocrites, and crafty. The understanding of Jesus, of their state and intentions, shows His omniscience.

Wisdom Incarnate Answers

In answer, the Lord asked them, "*Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"* (Matthew 22:18). With the guise of reverence, they were asking this of the Lord. Their malice and deceit were designed for his overthrow. But he, as the omniscient One, saw through the veneer, the cunningness of his enemies and perceived the wickedness that prompted them thus to assault him. The people

around might not have perceived their wickedness. And the Lord's disciples might have been puzzled about how Jesus would respond. But, as in all other trying circumstances, Jesus himself knew what he would do. His enemies, too, might not have expected such a question as Jesus now asked them: *"Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?"*

Those who questioned Jesus might have thought that they had disguised their real identity and purpose so cleverly. But they must have been surprised to have their masks so quickly torn from their faces, and to be exposed to public gaze, in their true character. Jesus compared them to stage-players, men who would disguise themselves with the intent to deceive. As one has rightly said, "Rightly did he name them hypocrites, and wisely did he say to them, 'Why tempt ye me?'"

In answer, Jesus said further, *"Show Me the tax money. So, they brought Him a denarius"* (Matthew 22:19). The Lord was asking them to show a Roman coin. This was the money in which the taxes were paid. The tribute for the temple service was paid in the Jewish shekels. For the Roman Government, it was not acceptable. S.W. Jennings intimates that there was no image of the emperor or anybody else on the Jewish coins.[4] In ordinary transactions, the Roman coins were used. Wm Barclay notes that "Jesus did not possess one."[5] The One to whom all creations owe their beings and all they possess did not have a coin to show them. He asked them to bring one to make His point clear. Here, it is worth remembering what Paul says, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Matthew tells, "*So they brought Him a denarius"* (22:19). The statement indicates that even they also did not have one with them. The reason must be that they were then in the Temple precincts. Roman coins were not accepted in the Temple. It had the inscriptions of the emperor. On the one side, it read, 'Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the divine Augustus'. On the reverse side, it was inscribed, 'Pontifex Maximus, the High Priest of the Roman nation.' These were not lawful or palatable for the religious Jews.

Pointing to the inscriptions on the Roman coin, the Lord Jesus asked, "*Whose image and inscription is this?" And they answered rightly and said, "Caesar's"* (Matthew 22:20-21). Their answer was just one word. This seems to indicate their disappointment. They might have sensed that things were not going in the direction they wanted. They understood that the Lord is taking the situation under His control. At the same time, they could not stand there without answering. They made the one-word answer. Probably, knowing the direction things were taking, they wanted to escape. Jesus then completed His answer and said, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21). The word '*Render*' means 'to give back.'[6] The word indicates obligation. The tribute money they owed to their government authorities. It bears the image of Caesar. Similarly, humans owe their being to God, as they bear the image of God. About the creation of man, scripture says, "*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them"* (Genesis 1:27). Jesus was referring to this truth. As he is God's image bearer, He owes his being to God. This was a call to give them fully to their Creator God. As noted before, even here we see the Lord putting forth His invitation to turn to the Lord. We see His grace shining even against the background of man's wickedness and hypocrisy.

Response to the Answer

Those who asked the question did not respond as Jesus desired. The Lord wanted them to give themselves to God and to fulfil their obligations to the civil government as well. But Matthew says, "*When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him and went their way*" (Matthew 22:22). They heard the words of Jesus, marvelled at those words, and instead of giving themselves unto obedience, they left Him and went their ways. This was a sad conclusion to the episode. Mark says, "*And they marveled at Him"* (Mark 12:17). Luke puts it differently, in saying, "*But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent"* (Luke 20:26). 'To catch Him in His words' was their purpose in

asking the question. But they were caught by the Lord. He called them to fulfil their duties to God and man. But instead of giving themselves to their highest duties, they slipped away from the scene.

Adam Clarke comments on the answer and says,

> "This answer is full of consummate wisdom. It establishes the limits, regulates the rights, and distinguishes the jurisdiction of the two empires of heaven and earth."[7]

The Lord, in simple terms, was asking them to surrender to secular and supreme authorities.

The passage also talks about the person of the Lord Jesus. The first thing that startles us is His wisdom. They came to catch Him in His words. But they were caught in His answers. Anyone could only wonder at the wisdom of the Wisdom Incarnate, with the great apostle Paul, "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*" (Romans 11:33). Paul is here unravelling the wisdom of God in His work of redemption. But it is evident in everything that He says and does! We also see the omniscience of Jesus. He perceived their intentions. He understood from afar what was in their minds. Such knowledge can be attributed only to God. He knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. In a very wonderful way, we see the two natures of the Lord coming together. Matthew records, "*But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?'*" (Matthew 22:18). Jesus perceived their wickedness. As explained, He knew what was in them. Here, His omniscience and deity are evident. At the same time, they could 'tempt' Him, as they could do to anyone else. In this, His humanity is evident. Thus, the two natures of the Lord Jesus come together here, His deity and humanity. Further, the sovereignty of the Lord is also seen in the words, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Matthew 22:21). It is almost like a command, uttered in His sovereign power.

The command Jesus gave here to be obedient to the civil authorities is also seen in the teachings of the epistles. Paul says,

"Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:1-7). Peter also teaches in the same line. *"Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good"* (1 Peter 2:13-14). The command to give ourselves to God is also seen elsewhere. Paul says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service"* (Romans 12:1). This demands our whole being. When there is a conflict between the demands of the civil authorities and the Supreme Authority, God, the latter authority should be acknowledged. This is evident from the words that Peter said to the Sanhedrin council. *"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'"* (Acts 5:29). This rule must overrule all our decisions when there is a conflict of interests. We owe all to God. There is no higher authority than His authority over our lives. Thus, the words of the Lord must be heeded and obeyed in all situations we are in. "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21). We can only say amen to this rule and acquiesce unto His authority.

8

Question On Resurrection

The next group of people who came to Jesus was the Sadducees. They were the rationalists of their time, rejecting anything supernatural. They only accepted as facts those things they could prove empirically. Regarding their beliefs, Luke says, *"For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit"* (Acts 23:8). They are generally regarded as the descendants of the high priest Zadok. Smith's Bible Dictionary states,

> "The origin of their name is involved in great difficulties, but the most satisfactory conjecture is that the Sadducees or Zadokites were originally identical with the sons of Zadok, and constituted what may be termed a kind of sacerdotal aristocracy, this Zadok being the priest who declared in favour of Solomon when Abiathar took the part of Adonijah."[1]

But this suggestion need not be taken as conclusive. Adam Clarke gives another suggestion for their origin in his comment on Matthew 16:1.

> "The Sadducees had their origin and name from one Sadoc, a disciple of Antigonus of Socho, president of the Sanhedrin, and teacher of the law in one of the great divinity schools in Jerusalem, about 264 years before the incarnation. This Antigonus having often in his lectures informed his scholars, that they should not serve God through expectation of a reward, but through love and filial reverence only, Sadoc inferred from this teaching that there were neither rewards nor punishments after this life, and, by consequence, that there was no resurrection of the dead, nor angel,

nor spirit, in the invisible world; and that man is to be rewarded or punished here for the good or evil he does."[2]

This explanation is that they originated from someone named Sadoc, but not the high priest of a similar name mentioned earlier. Their origin, or antecedents, need not be a cause for concern. Here, what matters is the question they posed to Jesus and how He responded.

The question of the Sadducees and the answer the Lord gave them are recorded in Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, and Luke 20:27-40.

Matthew records the episode as follows. "*The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise, the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her."*

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching" (Matthew 22:23-33).

These arrived on the same day that the Herodians and the Pharisees came with questions about tax payment. They probably coordinated among themselves to bring these questions to trap Him in some way.

Contention Over Resurrection

The matter of resurrection was a cause of contention in ancient times. It was not only a problem outside the church, but there

were people in the early Christian circles who also doubted the reality of resurrection or understood it in different ways.

Paul mentions certain people who taught in the early church that the resurrection had already passed. *"And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some"* (2 Timothy 2:17-18). We do not know what meaning they gave to resurrection. Probably, the transformation that happens in the believer's life or spiritual experience of becoming a new creation by faith might have been interpreted as resurrection.

Among the Corinthians, some doubted the reality of resurrection. Paul refers to them in the great chapter on the doctrine of resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15. Some among them said, there is no resurrection. "*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* (1 Corinthians 15:12). There are other questions also dealt with in the chapter. *"But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"* (1 Corinthians 15:35). These show that there were questions and doubts among the believers about resurrection.

Sadducees were not believers. They did not believe in the reality of the resurrection. They did not accept the entire Hebrew Bible as inspired scripture. They regarded only the Pentateuch as the Word of God. But when the Lord answered their question, He answered from the Pentateuch itself. It shows that even the Pentateuch, which they accepted as the Word of God, they did not fully understand. They might have been stunned to know that in the scripture, which they held as true, there was a sufficient answer for their question.

Woman with Seven Husbands

The Sadducees made up a story and came to Jesus. The story they made up was based on the provision given in the Old Testament for Levirate marriage. The Latin word '*Levir*' means 'brother-in-law' or husband's brother. The Law says as follows, "*If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son,*

the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

S W Jennings states,

> "Normally it was forbidden to marry a sister-in-law (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21), but this liberty in the case of no children was allowed by God."[3]

It was provided for maintaining the name and inheritance of the deceased brother. Taking this provision as the basis, they made up a story and came to the Lord to trap Him in His answer.

They opened their talk with Jesus in a very acceptable manner. Matthew says, *"Teacher, Moses said"* (Matthew 22:24). But Mark and Luke are more complete here. They recorded, *"Teacher, Moses wrote to us"* (Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28). In fact, Moses wrote to their ancestors. But, here, they acknowledged rightly that what was told to their forefathers was for them. What Moses gave centuries before was for all Israel. Sadducees used to accept the Pentateuch as their scripture. But they were very selective. They did not take the entire Pentateuch as the inspired Word. It is necessary to acknowledge all the scriptures in the same manner. The Sadducees, while in the presence of the Lord, pretended as if they were sincere. This way of introduction, starting by saying that what Moses spoke was for them, was a way of showing that they were spiritual and sincere in God's word. By saying this, they gave the impression that they took the scriptures very seriously in life. They might have thought that they could blindfold the Lord by such pretensions. But though they gave such pretensions about the Word of God, how short they fell in their understanding of the Lord, the Living Word!

The story they made up to tell Jesus was, in normal situations, impossible to happen. It was about a woman. She married a man. But he died childless. The deceased husband's brother married her to fulfil the Levirate duty. The same experience was

repeated in this marriage also. The husband died before they had any children. This continued until she married seven times. She was the wife of all seven brothers. In these marriages, she did not have any children. And, at last, she also died. Now the question was, in the resurrection, whose wife, out of the seven, she would be. To make the story seem real, according to Matthew's narrative, they also said that the woman lived among them. Matthew says, "*Now there were with us seven brothers"* (Matthew 22:25). This addition would give the impression that they knew this episode closely and were witnesses to the episode. The question they put forth was, "*Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her"* (Matthew 22:28). By making this story and presenting Him with this question, they were trying to debunk the doctrine of resurrection. Their strategy was well thought out and well-conceived. They might have expected an easy win over the Lord. They might have thought that the Lord would not be able to answer this question.

Strategy of the Sadducees

They knew that Jesus believed in the doctrine of resurrection. He had taught about it publicly. "*Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*" (John 5:25-29). At the raising of Lazarus, "*Jesus said to her,* (Martha) *'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live'"* (John 11:25). But unto the Sadducees the teaching was foolishness. To show the incompatibility of the doctrine of resurrection, they concocted a story, taking the provision for the Levirate marriage. They wanted to prove that the resurrection of the dead was impossible.

Furthermore, apart from attacking Jesus or the Mosaic Law, they would show their supremacy over the Pharisees. These two groups among the Jews were always fighting to show their supremacy. Pharisees believed in the doctrine of resurrection. The Sadducees wanted to prove that the Pharisees were wrong. Both these groups were present there to question Jesus. Matthew records, "*The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him"* (Matthew 22:23). Later verse 34 says, "*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together"* (Matthew 22:34). These show that both the rival groups were present. The question was mainly to show that they held the right views, and the ideas the Pharisees held were incompatible. They wanted to prove their supremacy over others in theological matters.

The Pharisees, to prove their view on resurrection, used to quote Numbers 18:28. "*Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest."* According to their interpretation, this was a permanent instruction. If what Israel gave was for Aaron, then it assumes that Aaron lived forever. Thus, based on this verse, they proved life after death. Further, see what God says, *"Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand"* (Deuteronomy 32:39). This says that He makes alive. The Pharisees take this as evidence for resurrection. The Lord told Moses, "*Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them"* (Deuteronomy 31:16). The phrase '*you will rest with your fathers'* is taken as a proof for life after death. The Sadducees rejected all these outright. According to them, there is not a single verse to attest to the reality of the doctrine of resurrection in the Law.[4]

Answer to the Sadducees

As seen before, the Lord was not just answering the questions that were brought against Him, but was trying to lead them to God. He was not trying to shut their mouth or show their folly. But even in the last week of His sojourn in the world, He was going the extra mile to bring them to the fold.

There are three things the Lord was trying to do with the Sadducees in answering their question.

Firstly, Jesus exposes their error.

Matthew says, "Jesus answered and said to them, "*You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22:29). Mark says, "*Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?"* (Mark 12:24). In essence, both these are the same. The only difference is that the first is in an indicative manner, whereas the other is in the interrogative form. The Lord exposed the ignorance of the Sadducees. They did not know the scriptures. They had not even experienced the power of the Word of God. They erred by not knowing these.

Secondly, Jesus answered their question.

He said, "*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven*" (Matthew 22:30). Luke gives more details. *"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*" (Luke 20:34-36). The Lord is the one who could answer questions about life beyond death. He alone came from beyond the world. He only came from heaven. Thus, He could only say about life after death. The answer contrasts between *"this age"* and "*that age.*" What shall be in "*that age"* would be beyond the conception of those who are in the present age. Pentecost says,

> "The current popular idea with reference to the future life was that the resurrection would restore to men their former bodies, appetites, passions and the usual material conditions and relationships."[5]

Human beings who are only accustomed to the life of the present world cannot go beyond these ideas.

From the answers of the Lord, there are other truths also evident about life beyond.

Firstly, the Lord said that they are *"worthy."* Or they are counted worthy for the coming age, that is, the kingdom age. This worthiness to enter the kingdom age is not in oneself. But the Lord's worth is put on their account. Peter says, *"Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious"* (1 Peter 2:6-7). The Lord is precious. "*Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious,"* literally, it means, 'to you who believe, is this preciousness.' His worth is accounted as our worth. This is the worthiness we have that makes us eligible for the coming age and kingdom. "Nothing in our hands we bring, simply to His cross we cling; naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace; fowl I to the fountain fly, wash me Saviour or I die." It is He alone who makes us worthy to be considered good to enter the age of blessing.

Secondly, they are partakers of "*the resurrection from the dead"* (Luke 20:35). This is a new revelation from the Lord in the New Testament. The hope of resurrection is taught in the Old Testament, but 'resurrection from the dead' provides additional information. The Lord, while coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, spoke about this for the first time. Mark says, *"Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So, they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant"* (Mark 9:9-10). *'Rising from the dead'* was a new revelation to them. This is explained in other passages. There shall be the rising of the just and the sinners. The former shall happen before the kingdom is set up, and the latter, after the kingdom period. When the righteous are raised to life to be with the Lord, the dead bodies of sinners shall remain in their graves. Thus, the rising of the just shall be resurrection from the dead.

Thirdly, they shall be with spiritual bodies. This is indicated in the fact that they shall be "*sons of God.*" It means a spiritual nature, just as God is a spirit.[6] Mortality relates to corporeality. As we shall be with spiritual bodies, we shall never die. There is a need for care here. When we say that we shall possess God's nature, it does not mean all divine attributes would become our possession. There are attributes in God that cannot be shared with human beings, His creation. They are omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc. These belong to God alone. They are incommunicable. But when we say that we shall be like Him, it means we share in God's communicable nature, which includes love, grace, long-suffering, etc. As there shall be no death for such 'sons of God' or 'children of God,' there shall be no need for, as Cor Bruins says, "perpetuation of human race."[7] This means, even without procreation, humanity shall exist forever, as they shall have won forever the victory over death and the grave.

The Lord further said, *"Neither marry nor are given in marriage."* The language here indicates that the male-female distinction may continue even in the age to come, in the resurrection bodies. Women are said to be 'given in marriage.' And males are told 'to marry' women. Here, when it says that they neither marry nor are given in marriage, it seems that it denotes that the male-female distinctions shall continue in the world to come. But these shall not be for marriage or marital life, as there shall be no procreation. All shall be "*equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.*"

Thirdly, Jesus addresses their problem.

Now the Lord is going beyond to help them understand the truth. By stating that there is life beyond death, by sufficient explanations, the Lord could have concluded His talk with these Sadducees. But the Lord continues to speak to them. He says, "*But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him"* (Luke 20:37-38). This is a reference to the conversation the Lord had with Moses

on the Mount of Horeb. The Lord God said, *"I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God"* (Exodus 3:6). It was repeated to Moses when he asked His name to answer the Israelites in Egypt, if they asked him who sent him. He said, "*Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations'"* (Exodus 3:15). The Lord was referring to this episode while speaking to the Sadducees in answering their query. When this encounter occurred on Horeb, between God and Moses, the patriarchs had been dead and gone for many years. Abraham was dead 329 years before this event. Isaac was dead 224 years before these conversations on Horeb, and Jacob was dead 198 years before this. But when the Lord spoke to Moses, He said, "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" If these patriarchs who were dead had ceased, God would have said, 'I was the God of your fathers…' But He said, *"I am the God of your fathers."* This shows that the fathers, though they died, existed in another place. Thus, the statement God made proves without doubt that death is not a cessation, but only a shifting. Absent here and present in another place.

But notice how the Lord presented this argument before the Sadducees. He said, "*But even Moses…"* As stated before, the Sadducees had accepted the Pentateuch as genuine. They believed it was the inspired word of God. "*Even Moses*" means, 'even the writings accepted by you as the genuine Word of God attest life after death.' The Lord told these truths to them so that they might give up their error and receive the truth.

Mistaken in Ignorance

Matthew says that the Sadducees became silent after hearing the words of the Lord. *"But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together"* (Matthew 22:34). This statement shows the response of the Sadducees and

Pharisees. The Sadducees became silent, and the Pharisees gathered for their next salvo of questions. About the multitudes, it is told, *"And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching"* (Matthew 22:33). The purpose with which the Lord answered them was not to silence them. He wanted them to come to the Lord and receive the truth. But they wanted to continue in their errors.

Choosing error for truth is a dangerous situation. The Lord said, "*You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). Explaining the term '*mistaken*' or '*err,*' Dr Justus Samuel says,

> "The Greek word is plano, going round and round the space, not finding the way, or in the modern space terminology, getting into orbit. If a spacecraft is caught in this situation, it is bound to crash and cause damage to others."[8]

When this is the situation of the leaders of the people, how dangerous and damaging the effect of it would be! Sadducees were Jewish leaders. They were an aristocratic group among the people. The chief priests were mostly from among them. They controlled the decisions of the Sanhedrin. How important it is for the leaders of the people to have the right knowledge of the Scriptures and personal experience of its power.

9

Question on the Law

When the Lord silenced the Sadducees with His gracious but stunning answer, the Pharisees, the opposite of the Sadducees, took notice of the way that the Lord answered them. They gathered and thought of the way ahead. One among them, *'a lawyer,'* as Matthew puts it, or *'one of the scribes,'* as Mark puts it, took the responsibility of questioning Jesus. He comes with an ethical question. This is recorded only by Matthew and Mark. The narrative is more complete in Mark's Gospel (12:28-34). Matthew records it in chapter 22:34-40.

We quote the passage from the Gospel of Mark. "*Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now, when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him,

"You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him" (Mark 12:28-34).

A Scribe or a Lawyer?

Mark says that it was a scribe who came and questioned Jesus. But Matthew says that it was one among the Pharisees, a lawyer. "*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"* (Matthew 22:34-36). He was a Pharisee and a lawyer, that is, an expert in the Mosaic Law. The lawyer and the scribe may be taken as the same person, or they may be two different persons.

Notice what Albert Barnes says. Explaining the term 'Lawyer,' he says,

> "This does not mean one who practised law, as among us, but one learned or skilled in the law of Moses. Mark calls him "one of the scribes." This means the same thing. The scribes were men of learning, particularly men skilled in the law of Moses. He had heard his reasoning with the Sadducees and perceived that he answered them well, and he was thought to be better qualified to hold a debate with him (Mark). This man was probably of a candid turn of mind; perhaps willing to know the truth; and not entering very fully into their malicious intentions, but acting as their agent, Mark 12:34."[1]

But Jennings gives a different explanation. He says,

> "In all probability, there were two men who approached the Lord at this time with this ethical question. One was against the Lord, and Matthew wrote of him, the other one was sincere and is taken up here in Mark."[2]

A scribe is a copyist of the scripture. He could also be a lawyer, an expert in the Mosaic Law. Such a person may be from the sect of Pharisees. The suggestion of Albert Barnes sounds tenable. But from the passages in Matthew and Mark, it looks like two different persons came with one question, as Jennings suggests. The man in Matthew's narrative comes to Jesus to test Him, which is characteristic of the Pharisees. This man came as an

agent of the Pharisees. After answering the question, we do not see the Lord saying anything further to him. But the person in Mark looks sincere. He responds to Jesus' answer positively. And to him, Jesus says, "*You are not far from the kingdom of God"* (Mark 12:34). This cannot be said about a person who came to Jesus to test him. Thus, taking the questioner in these narratives, in Matthew and Mark, as two different men sounds more reasonable.

Matthew focuses more on the one who opposes Jesus as he is presenting the nation of Israel as the rejector of the King, whereas Mark's interest is in him who was loyal to the Master, which is apt for his Gospel, where servanthood is the theme.

The First Commandment of All

Adam Clarke makes valid observations on the questions and the people who brought the questions to the Lord.

> "We see here three kinds of enemies and false accusers of Christ and his disciples, and three sorts of accusations brought against them.
>
> 1. The Herodians, or politicians and courtiers, who form their questions and accusations on the rights of the prince, and matters of state, Mt 22:16.
> 2. The Sadducees, or libertines, who found theirs upon matters of religion, and articles of faith, which they did not credit, Mt 22:23.
> 3. The Pharisees, lawyers, scribes, or Karaites, hypocritical pretenders to devotion, who found theirs on that vital and practical godliness (the love of God and man) of which they wished themselves to be thought the sole proprietors, Mt 22:36."[3]

In the above quote, the questioners in Matthew and Mark are assumed to be the same person.

Matthew says, "*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together"* (Matthew 22:34). For the Pharisees, the situation had a mixed effect. It was a 'sour and sweet' situation for them. On the one side, their rivals, the

Sadducees, were silenced. They might have felt happy about this. But on the other side, it was their common rival, Jesus, who silenced them. This might have given them some bitter feelings. That means they cannot just ignore the situation. They gathered to set a strategy for their next moves. Matthew says, "*Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying"* (Matthew 22:35). The lawyer, one among the Pharisees, came with a question. Probably, the Pharisees gave this duty to him as he was a lawyer, an expert in the matters of the Law. They might have decided to test the Lord in the area of His expertise, as, humanly speaking, men are prone to act with carelessness in their field of proficiency. This expert in the Law was given the duty of testing the Lord in matters of the Law.

As discussed before, a scribe also might have joined him in questioning Jesus. He had a certain right understanding of the Lord. Mark says, *"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?"* (Mark 12:28). Seeing how this scribe behaved to Him and the answer He gave him, Jesus said, *"Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"* (Mark 12:34). He was a man of wisdom and he was near to the kingdom. The questioners had different natures and standing in spiritual matters.

Pentecost tells about the theological context in which the question was asked. He says,

> "The Pharisees had codified the Law into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. These 613 precepts were imposed by the Pharisees on their followers as their obligation."[4]

This question was often asked among the people, "Which is the first commandment of all?" There may be circumstances when it becomes difficult to submit to a command. For example, if a gospel worker is hiding in our house and the enemies of the gospel come to us hunting for his life and enquire whether he is in the house. Then, if we say, 'Yes,' we are delivering the Lord's servant into the hands of the enemies. Thus, we become party to whatever ensues. No sane believer would do that. Naturally, he would

consider which is a greater sin, to say he is not in his house, which is a lie, or handing him over to their hands. He would commit the lesser sin of telling a lie. In similar situations, when there are occasions to decide which sin to commit, this question has been asked often. Some had given more importance to the Law concerning sacrifices, some to circumcision, and others to various purifications. This problem in society made the scribe ask the question. The scribe seems to be sincere. But the Lawyer, one among the Pharisees, came to test the Lord and put Him in trouble. The Lord handled their question wisely and did not give them any chance to catch Him in His words. He manifested Himself as the wisdom-incarnate.

In the answer the Lord gave, He not only answered their query, but He also addressed their root problem. He spoke with the desire that they would turn to follow the truth. The Lord's wisdom and glory are seen clearly in the Lord's response. It is Mark who gives the answers more fully.

Firstly, He answers their query.

Mark records, "*Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:29-31). Verses 29 and 30 are quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4,5. This is the beginning of the part of the scripture called 'Shema.' This word means to 'hear.' The passage begins with these words, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). All little children in Jewish homes are made to memorise this passage. The basic beliefs of the Jewish faith are embedded in this passage.

The Lord began by saying these words, "*The first of all the commandments is."* Matthew puts it differently. He says, *"This is the first and great commandment"* (Matthew 22:38). This

statement in Matthew comes after the Lord quoted from the Shema (v.37). The phrase "*First of all*" may be understood in different ways. It may mean 'first in the sequence' of the commandments. It may indicate that it comes as the opening of the Shema. It may also mean that it is the one command that Jewish children learn early in their lives. Any of these ideas indicates the primacy of the command Jesus quoted.

Mark 12:29 is the basis of the Jewish monotheistic theology. Properly understood, the verse allows the teaching of the Trinity in the Godhead. 12:30 demands our whole devotion to God. *"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment"* (Mark 12:30). In analysing and expounding this verse, Wm McDonald says that there are four human faculties mentioned here. "*Heart"* points to the emotional nature. *"Soul"* refers to our volitional nature. "*Mind"* implies our intellectual nature and *"strength"* refers to the physical nature.[5] Beginning from "*Heart,"* we see a progression, culminating in "*Strength,"* indicating a complete devotion of our whole being, in loving the Lord.

Secondly, the Lord addresses the root problem.

In Mark 12:31, the Lord goes beyond the answer and corrects them about their wrong understanding of the scripture. Here, the Lord quotes from Leviticus 19:18. "*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD"* (Leviticus 19:18). The Pharisees had misinterpreted this verse. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:43-45). The Lord was here referring to the way the Pharisees interpreted the verse. The passage never said that they should hate our enemies. They misinterpreted the word

"neighbour" also. Neighbour, for them, was only the Jews who lived next door. If it were a Gentile who lived next door, they did not consider him a neighbour. Thus, they evaded the duty of loving them.

This wrong interpretation of the word 'neighbour' is evident in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). An expert in the Law came to Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what the Law said. In answer, he quoted Leviticus 19:18. The Lord commended him for the answer. The Lord said, *"You have answered rightly; do this and you will live"* (Luke 10:28). Apart from loving the Lord, loving the neighbour was also demanded in the quote. The Lawyer asked further, trying to justify himself, "*And who is my neighbour?*" (Luke 10:29). Apparently, the question may sound silly. Knowing our neighbour is not a difficult task. The one living next door is whom we call a neighbour. But the fact is, the question comes from the faulty interpretation of the word 'neighbour' in Jewish understanding. Probably, he had a Gentile neighbour whom he did not love as a neighbour. Otherwise, he had held the wrong interpretation, which excluded the Gentiles from its purview. Thus, he wanted to justify himself. In answer to this question, the Lord gave the parable of the good Samaritan. The main lesson of the parable is that, instead of asking who my neighbour is, we must become neighbours to others. There are people around us who always need our attention and care. We must be helpers to them. The Lord masterfully turned the tables on the man who asked the question. The Lord's lesson to him was, 'Be a neighbour, rather than asking who my neighbour is.'

The two commands the Lord quoted show our Godward and manward relationships. They demand our love for God and love for humans. Jesus said, "*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 22:40). "*Hang*" means 'suspended.' All the commandments of the Law pertain either to the first or the second of these relationships. Even the decalogue, the Ten Commandments, has these twofold divisions. It is understood that the first four of the Ten Commandments were about our duties toward God, and the remaining six

commandments have to do with our relationship with man. Paul says, "*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law*" (Romans 13:8-10). Paul writes to the Galatians, *"Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"* (Galatians 5:13-15).

'Well Said, Teacher'

Only Mark gives us a detailed conclusion to this question and answer. He says, "*So the scribe said to Him, 'Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' Now, when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' But after that, no one dared question Him"* (Mark 12:32-34). The Scribe agrees with what the Lord said. Yet, the Lord said that he was outside the kingdom of God. The Lawyer came to test Him. But the Lord exposed his condition. He was speechless. When we attempt to test Jesus, we stand tried and tested, and our folly is brought to light.

A group of tourists was visiting an art gallery, where ancient paintings were on display. A guide was leading them and describing the paintings. One member of the group was making funny comments about the paintings. It was distracting the people. The guide was annoyed at his comments. He turned to the man and said that he should refrain from making such comments on the paintings. He informed that they were painted by great artists of ancient times. They had come down to them having stood the

test of time. When we judge such artworks, those works are not sullied, but we are passing judgment on ourselves. How true it is in connection with the attitudes humans have about the Lord Jesus! When we pass judgment on Him, we stand judged. When we try to test Him, we stand exposed in our ignorance. The men who came to test Jesus were silenced, exposed by the Lord.

Jesus Questions the Pharisees

The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and Herodians were all silenced. They could not trap Jesus in His words. In the answers the Lord gave, His intention was not to silence them and win the argument. He was trying to lead them to the truth. He wanted them to leave their misunderstandings. But they were now avoiding the Lord.

The scribe commended Jesus for the answer He gave to his question. He said, "*Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*" (Mark 12:32-33). Probably, there were other scribes also with him (Luke 20:39). But after giving Jesus this commendation, they all became silent (Mark 12:34; Luke 20:40). When the scribes gave up their plan to trap Jesus, the Pharisees did not give up. They gathered to set a trap to catch Jesus (Matthew 22:34,41). They were together to plan their next strategy when they saw Jesus silencing the Sadducees. Now the Lord is coming to them with a question. He did not want to give them up. He continues to share the truth with them. In this, we see the grace and love of the Lord extended even to the enemies.

Jesus now moved toward the Pharisees, who were gathered. Matthew says, "*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them*" (Matthew 22:41). The scribes also were there with the Pharisees (Mark 12:35). In Matthew's and Marks's narratives the question was asked to the Pharisees (Matthew 22:41; Mark 12:35). In Luke's narrative, the question is addressed to the scribes, but it concerns the Pharisees (Luke 20:39-41). While

speaking to the scribes, He asks, "*How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David?"* (v.41). "*They*" here refers most probably to the Pharisees.

The Supreme Question

The Lord asked them the most pertinent question. It was a Messianic question. It was a question which, if they had rightly and sincerely answered, would have helped them to sort out their spiritual darkness. It would have brought them to the path of the truth. The supreme question was, "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"* (Matthew 22:42). This He asked the Pharisees. *"They said to Him, "The Son of David"* (Matthew 22:42). The Lord questioned them further and asked, "*How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"'? If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"* (Matthew 22:43-45). In Mark, the Lord is asking this question to the Pharisees (Mark 12:35,36). In Luke, He asked this of the scribes (Luke 20:41-44). Probably, Jesus might have asked the question separately to each group and further checked with one group about the other group.

The belief that the Messiah would come in the line of David was held by the Jews right from ancient times. It was based on promises and references in the Old Testament, ranging right from the time of David (2 Samuel 7:12,13,15,16; Psalm 89:3,4,20,21,27-29; Amos 9:11; Ezekiel 37:21-25; Jeremiah 23:5,6; Isaiah 11:1,10). Jesus is referred to as the Son of David in many verses in the Gospel of Matthew (1:1,6; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30; 21:9,15,16). These show that it was a well-accepted fact that the Messiah would come as the descendant of David.

Adam Clarke enlightens us with more information related to the matter. On the one hand, he says that times were such that it was impossible to ascertain anyone's ancestry. He asks,

> "Their families are now so perfectly confounded that they cannot trace back any of their genealogies with any degree of certainty: nor have they been capable of ascertaining the different families of their tribes for more than sixteen hundred years. Why, then,

> should the spirit of prophecy assert so often, and in such express terms, that Jesus was to come from the family of David; if he should only make his appearance when the public registers were all demolished, and it would be impossible to ascertain the family?"[6]

At the same time, he also says that there were sufficient sources wherein anyone could have referred to ascertain the genealogy of Jesus. He concludes,

> "The evangelists, Matthew and Luke, were so fully convinced of the conclusiveness of this proof that they had recourse to the public registers; and thus proved to the Jews, from their own records, that Jesus was born of the family mentioned by the prophets. Nor do we find that a scribe, Pharisee, or any other, ever attempted to invalidate this proof, though it would have essentially subserved their cause, could they have done it. But as this has not been done, we may fairly conclude it was impossible to do it."[6]

Now, Jesus questions them on this count.

Response to the Question

The question Jesus asked was about the relationship of David to Christ. The question comes from a Messianic psalm of David. It was commonly understood that Christ is the Son of David, as He would be born in his lineage. But in Psalm 110:1, David addresses Him as his Lord. How could He be his son and Lord at the same time? The answer is found in the dual nature of Jesus Christ. He is God, and at the same time, He is also human. He is the perfect God and the perfect man. He is the God-man. Thus, if they had tried to answer the question sincerely, they would have known the truth about the Lord Jesus and could have turned to Him. But they did not want to go that far!

The Pharisees rightly answered that the Messiah would be the Son of David (Matthew 22:42). But they did not want to think about the second question that Jesus raised. They did not want to understand why David called the Messiah his Lord. If they had come to consider that, they would have known that the One who was speaking to them was the Messiah. But they did not want to come to light. They continued in darkness.

Matthew says, "*And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore"* (Matthew 22:46). Mark says, "*And the common people heard Him gladly*" (Mark 12:37). This means, the leaders did not want to converse with Jesus any further.

There are certain other truths also in the passage. In answer to various questions the Jewish leaders asked, Jesus referred to passages of the Old Testament. He quoted from Genesis (Matthew 22:20, 21), Exodus (Matthew 22:32), Leviticus (Matthew 22:39), Deuteronomy (Matthew 22:37), and Psalms (Matthew 22:44). This indicates how conversant Jesus was with the whole counsel of God.

The conversation also shows that Jesus believed in the divine origin of the scriptures. Jesus asked them, "*How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord?'"* (Matthew 22:43). Mark 12:36 also states the same thing. This shows that David spoke those words "*in the Spirit.*" When the Sadducees came to Jesus with questions on marriage and life after death, they said that the scriptures were given by David. However, David himself had written that all scriptures were given by the Spirit. Peter also says, "*No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:20-21). The same idea is also seen in various other passages (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:13, etc.).

The passage also talks about the present position and ministries of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is seated in heaven as the Accomplished One (Hebrews 1:3; 10:11,12). In the Old Testament, we do not see any high priest seated. There was no arrangement in the Tabernacle or the Temple to sit. Those who served there had to continue standing, indicating that their ministry never brought anybody to perfection. Of course, we see Eli sitting. But he fell backwards and died (1 Samuel 4:13-18). '*Seated at the right hand of God*' presents the Messiah as the most honourable person, in the highest office in heaven. '*Right hand'* was also understood as the place of pardon. In the Sanhedrin Council, when any matter came for hearing, there

would be two scribes near the high priest who would preside over the council. The one on the right hand would read a verdict of acquittal, and the scribe on the left hand would read out the verdict of judgment. Thus, Jesus is at the place of pardon. Anyone coming to Him by faith could find pardon and forgiveness for all sins. The quotation also takes us to the time when all things shall be brought under the feet of the Lord. His enemies shall be His footstool.

The question the Lord brought before the Jewish leaders is rich with truths concerning the glory of the person and work of the Lord. But they turned their back on Him. They would not enter the blessings by faith.

10

Use and Abuse of Authority

In the Synoptic Gospels, this is the last public ministry of the Lord Jesus. It is only Matthew who gives it in somewhat full length (Matthew 23). Mark and Luke summarise it in a few words (Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47). The Lord is bringing up the question that the Jewish leaders had asked Him earlier. Matthew says, *"Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"* (Matthew 21:23). Through the three parables that followed, the parable of the two sons, the parable of the tenants, and the parable of the royal marriage feast, the Lord had told the leaders that it was they who denied the authority of God over their lives. In the meantime, certain religious sects, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, came to the Lord with questions, testing Him, and He provided answers. Hearing the answers the Lord gave to them, they all became silent. But Jesus did not let them go. He gave a scathing indictment of them for abusing the authority they had as leaders. Following this, He would further expose their evil intentions.

Jesus silenced all His enemies. Matthew states, *"And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore"* (Matthew 22:46). Mark intimates, *"But after that, no one dared question Him"* (Mark 12:34). Luke

also makes a similar statement. These mean that none dared to ask Him any more questions, testing Him. They gave up on Him, so to speak. They might have concluded that they would wait until another opportune time. But the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). The Lord continued to speak to those who would listen to Him.

Mark says, "*Then He said to them in His teaching*" (Mark 12:38). This He spoke to those common people who would listen (v. 37). Matthew says, *"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples"* (Matthew 23:1). Matthew segregates the people as multitudes and disciples. Luke makes it clearer. He says, *"Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples"* (Luke 20:45). This makes the matter clearer. Though He was speaking to the people who were around, the words were mainly directed towards the disciples. He was training them to be the future leaders in the ministry. They must learn how to use their derived authority. He also wanted them to know how the Jewish leaders were misusing their authority. He wanted the public to be aware of these matters. Thus, it was directed to all those who would heed.

Assumption of Authority

"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat'" (Matthew 23:1-2). A scribe was a copyist of the scriptures, whereas Pharisee was the name of a sect among the Jews. They were both experts in the law and teachers of the law of Moses.

John F MacArthur Jr. says,

> "An ancient Jewish saying holds that God gave the Law to angels, angels gave it to Moses, Moses gave it to Joshua, Joshua gave it to the elders, the elders gave it to the prophets, and the prophets gave it to the men of the synagogue who were later called scribes. Over the course of years, these synagogue scribes became responsible not only for copying and preserving but also for teaching and interpreting God's Law."[1]

Based on available records, Ezra is the first Jewish scribe of this kind.

The Pharisees were a religious sect among the Jews. They

originated in the period between Malachi and Matthew. Those were difficult times for the people of Israel. In the former days, the Pharisees were committed to the scriptures and preserved them, and suffered for the cause. But in the time the Lord was on earth, the Pharisees had lost the character and vision they had at the beginning. The Lord called them hypocrites. They were objects of His rebuke very often.

Mark Woods says, referring to the Jewish Talmud, that the Pharisees were divided into seven groups. They were the 'shoulder Pharisees', who wore their good deeds on their shoulders for everyone to see. Then there were the 'wait-a-little' Pharisees, who always found an excuse for putting off a good deed. Thirdly, the 'bruised Pharisees.' These always run into walls because they are so busy avoiding the sight of women. The next kind is the 'pestle or hunched-over Pharisees.' These walked bent over in pretended humility. Then we have the 'ever-reckoning Pharisees.' They always weighed their good deeds against their bad deeds. The 'fearful Pharisees' are the ones who are frightened of doing any wrong. Finally, there was also a type of Pharisee who was called 'God-loving Pharisees.' They loved God from their very heart and took delight in His Law. [2]

The scribes and the Pharisees are often seen in the Gospels, coming against the Lord, to test and trap Him in His words. The Lord said that they sit in Moses' seat. The 'seat' or 'chair' is *'kathedra'* from which the word Cathedral comes, which is a seat or place of ecclesiastical authority. Sitting in the seat shows assuming authority. Sitting posture was the teaching posture for the Rabbis. They were also interpreters. Moses was the giver and the interpreter of the Law. They thought of themselves as the successors of Moses. These were not appointed by God. They were elected by the people and are given duties.

Abuse of Authority

They made a mockery of the authority they assumed. The Lord speaks about that in scathing words. He warned, *"Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them*

on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi'" (Matthew 23:3-7). There were two ways in which they abused their authority.

In explaining how they abused their authority, the Lord said that they did that by their lives and by their perverted motives. The way they abused their authority in their lives was seen in verses 3 and 4. Their wrong motives are detailed in verses 5 to 7.

Profession without Practice: Jesus said, "*Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."* What a contrast with Ezra the scribe, their predecessor. About him it is recorded, "*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel"* (Ezra 7:10). Before teaching the people, he sought the Law of the Lord to do it or to practice it. This is the right order. Even in the life of the Lord Jesus, we see this order kept. Luke says, "*The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen*" (Acts 1:1-2). Jesus did and then taught. First, the doing and then the teaching. This must be the order always. We should not instruct others to do what we do not have in our own lives, or at least desire to have in our own lives. The scribes and the Pharisees only taught the Law, but never had the mind to practice it.

Jesus said, "*For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*" (Matthew 23:4). The 'burdens' mentioned here are the burden of the Law (Acts 15:10). None could fully bear it. By their interpretation of the Mosaic Law, the Jewish leaders made the Law more burdensome. But they had no intention of moving it, even with their fingers. Jesus said, "*Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and*

do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:3). Commenting on "*whatever they tell you to observe,"* Adam Clarke says,

> "Besides, as our Lord speaks here in the past tense-whatsoever they HAVE commanded, he may refer to the teaching of a former period, when they taught the way of God in truth, or were much less corrupted than they were now."[3]

Albert Barnes also expresses the difficulty in understanding what the Lord said. He says,

> "All that they teach is consistent with the law of Moses; all the commands of Moses, which they read to you and properly explain. The word all could not be taken without such a restriction, for Christ himself accuses them of teaching many things contrary to that law, and of making it void by traditions, Mt 15:1-6."[4]

As seen before, there was a time when these people, Pharisees or scribes, taught rightly from the scriptures. The Lord was saying that what they taught then should be observed. They taught the right doctrines. So, the Lord asked the people to observe whatever they taught.

Another version, Scripture Direct, renders it, "Everything then whatever they say to you do it and obey it." 'Do it and obey it' is 'Do and observe.' 'Do' speaks of immediate action or obedience. 'Observe' speaks of continuing action. These mean that we must obey the Word of God and continue to obey it. But at the same time, the Lord warned the people and the disciples that they must abhor their ways of life, as they did not care to obey what they taught others. The Lord said, "*Do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."* The interpretation they give of the law is mainly correct, but their lives did not correspond with their teaching. It is not the duty of men to imitate their teachers unless their lives are pure. But they must obey the law of God rather than frame their lives by the example of evil men. These leaders abused authority in their lives.

Doing right things with Wrong Motives: In the service of God, our motives are important. The One who knows all the intents and thoughts of minds knows with what motive we serve. The

Lord speaks about the motives of the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord said, "*But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi'*" (Matthew 23:5-7). Everything, they were playing to the praise of men. They wanted others to see them doing these works and extol them. Self-aggrandisement was their motive. This is an evil motive that must not be seen in any of our actions. The Lord exposes the motives of the Jewish leaders. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had clearly told us to keep away from such intents. He said, "*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 6:1). He enumerates about six deeds they used to do to receive praise from men.

"*They make their phylacteries broad."*

"Phylacteries" were leather capsules or boxes containing passages from Torah. The scripture portions, thus engraved were Exodus 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. These tiny scripture portions were hung on their head or fastened to their left arms. They did this in literal keeping of Deuteronomy 6:6-8. It says, "*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes*" (Deuteronomy 6:6-8). Solomon also says this. He says, "*My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck*" (Proverbs 6:20-21). These instructions of Moses or Solomon, they took very seriously. But they took them literally and hung them on their foreheads and arms, for others to see and take them for pious people.

"*Enlarge the borders of their garments."*

They also did this in literal obedience to the Law. The Law says, "*Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God*" (Numbers 15:38-40). The blue tassels that Jewish people had on the borders of their robes were a reminder of the commandments. Jesus might have had this blue border on His robes. This may be the place where the woman with the flow of blood came and touched (Matthew 9:20). Albert Barnes explains,

> "This refers to the loose threads which were attached to the borders of the outer garment as a fringe. This fringe was commanded to distinguish them from other nations, and that they might remember to keep the commandments of God, Nu 15:38-40; De 22:12. They made them broader than other people wore them, to show that they had peculiar respect for the law."[5]

This indicates their desire to be seen as pious men in the sight of others.

"They love the best places at feasts."

To understand this statement, it is necessary to know the custom among the Jews for eating food. They reclined on couches. There would be three dining tables placed to form a square, with a clear space in the midst, and one end would be open. On the sides of the table were placed cushions, capable of accommodating three or more persons. On these, the guests reclined, leaning on their left side. With their feet extended from the table, their head naturally reclined on the bosom of another person, sitting adjacent to him. The chief seat, or the uppermost one, which is the best place, was the middle couch at the upper end of the table. This seat, the Pharisees loved, was a seat of honour.

They love *"the best seats in the synagogues."*

A T Robertson says,

> "These chief seats (*Zuchermandel*) were on the platform looking to the audience and with the back to the chest in which were kept the rolls of scripture."[6]

The seats in the synagogues, nearest to the spot where the sacred books were kept, were regarded as the most honourable.

They wanted "*greetings in the marketplaces*"

They sought marks of respect shown to them in public places. Markets were places where multitudes of people assembled. They were pleased with the particular attention from the multitude. They desired that all should show them respect.

They like "*to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'*"

Albert Barnes explains,

> "This word literally signifies great. It was a title given to eminent teachers of the law among the Jews; a title of honour and dignity, denoting their authority and ability to teach. They were gratified with such titles and wished it given to themselves as denoting superiority. Every time it was given to them, it implied their superiority to the persons who used it; and they were fond, therefore, of hearing it often applied to them. There were three titles in use among the Jews—Rab, Rabbi, and Rabban—denoting different degrees of learning and ability, as literary degrees do among us."[7]

Each of these terms has its special meaning. Rabban implies much more than Rabbi, and Rabbi much more than Rab.

Arthur Clarke states,

> "None of the prophets had ever received this title, nor any of the Jewish doctors before the time of Hillel and Shammai, which was about the time of our Lord; and, as disputes on several subjects had run high between these two schools, the people were of course divided; some acknowledging Hillel as rabbi,-infallible teacher, and others giving this title to Shammai. The Pharisees, who always sought the honour that comes from men, assumed the title, and got their followers to address them by it."[8]

This explains the craving of the scribes and Pharisees for the title 'Rabbi.' They wanted to honour them by calling them with this title of honour.

Right Use of Authority

Jesus said, "*But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Matthew 23:8-12). Notice how Jesus emphatically dissuades them from following the path of the scribes and the Pharisees. He said, "*But you, do not be…*" (v. 8). Verse 11 begins with the words "*But he who is….*" The Lord was calling them to be different from these Jewish authorities. These disciples to whom He was speaking were trained to be leaders for the future work of the Lord. He wanted them to make a difference by the way they conducted themselves as the leaders of the work of the Lord.

Firstly, they should have the right motives in their ministry.

The Lord told the disciples, *'One is your Teacher, the Christ,' 'One is your Father,' and 'One is your Teacher, the Christ.'* But in certain other versions, "the Christ" in verse 8 is omitted. The NET reads, *"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers. And call no one your 'father' on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ"* (vv 8-10). NIV, Darby, HCSB, etc. follow a similar rendering. Taking these versions into consideration helps us to identify the Persons implied in the verses. '*One Teacher*' in verse 8 refers to the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. *'One Father'* refers to God, the Father in heaven. '*One Teacher'* in verse 10 refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the verse explains. Thus, we have all three Persons in the Trinity mentioned here. These verses call us to give all glory from life and ministry to the Triune God alone. Not self-

aggrandisement, but the exaltation of God alone, should be the goal for the disciple of Jesus Christ.

The comment Albert Barnes gives here is worth taking note of.

> "The Saviour did not forbid them giving the title to others when it was customary or not regarded as improper (comp. Acts 26:25;) but they were not to receive it. It was to be unknown among them. This title corresponds with the title "Doctor of Divinity," as applied to ministers of the gospel; and so far as I can see, the spirit of the Saviour's command is violated by the reception of such a title, as it would have been by their being called Rabbi. It is a literary distinction. It does not appropriately pertain to the office. It makes a distinction among ministers. It tends to engender pride, and a sense of superiority in those who obtain it, and envy and a sense of inferiority in those who do not, and the whole spirit and tendency of it is contrary to the "simplicity that is in Christ."[8]

In these days when titles have become the measure and symbol of authority, even in the spiritual world, this instruction is very relevant.

Glory belongs to God alone. He says, "*I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images"* (Isaiah 42:8). "*For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another"* (Isaiah 48:11). Paul instructs, *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1 Corinthians 10:31). Anything done without this as the goal, the Lord is not pleased with.

Secondly, they should have the right actions for their ministry and life.

Jesus said, *"But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant"* (Matthew 23:11). The word for '*servant'* is *diakanos*. From this Greek word, the English word deacon is derived. He executes the commands of another, especially of a master. It means a servant or an attendant. It is a ministering office. Jesus said that those who are the greatest must consider themselves as the servants of others.

According to worldly standards, those who are the greatest desire or demand to be served by others. But the Lord said that they must serve others. The ultimate model for this is Jesus Christ. The Lord said, "*And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:27-28). He exemplified this in the upper room when He was with the disciples. It was the evening before His crucifixion. They were there to have the Passover meal. Somebody had to wash the feet of all who gathered there before they could eat. Jesus rose from the seat and started washing the feet of the disciples. This was something the world has never known. In every other situation, it is the lesser who washes the feet of the greater. But here, the Greatest One washes the feet of His followers. The call of the Christian is to emulate this action of the Master. When the Lord bid His followers to do this, it meant that they must serve others in whatever way they could. On another occasion, Jesus said, *"For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves"* (Luke 22:27). Paul gives this in a doctrinal statement. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"* (Philippians 2:5-8). A glance at His humility would put us to shame and expose and rebuke us for the lack of this supreme virtue.

Thirdly, we should possess the right attitudes.

Here, the attitude of humility is demanded from His people. Jesus said, "*And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Matthew 23:12). In Christian life, the way up is always the way down. "*Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:5-7). We often interpret and apply verse 7 in the wrong way. *"Casting all your care upon Him"* is used frequently in the context of suffering in life. Of course, Psalm 55:22 says in the context of suffering. But Peter is speaking in a different context. He says this to the young people. They must be in submission to the elders. God knows when to exalt them. Until then, they must be under God's hand, in submission. He will exalt you in due time. The 'care' here is the care for progressing in life and acquiring social acceptance from others. This craving we must learn to cast on the Lord. He cares for us, and exaltation comes from Him.

These are important instructions for those in leadership ministry. Having the right motives, action, and attitude is of utmost importance.

11

Woe Upon the Hypocrites

All kinds of people could come to Jesus at any time and converse with Him. All were welcome. Thus, the tax collectors who were hated by the Jewish people, sinners, and the harlots could come to Him in any situation. They were all welcome to Him. But certain people He never tolerated were the Pharisees and the scribes. The reason was their hypocrisy. He was very harsh on them, always. In Matthew 23:13-36, we have His fiercest attack on them. Jesus utters His eight woes on them in this chapter. In some manuscripts, as the woe is not included in verse 14, the number of woes is only seven.

A similar pattern of uttering woes is seen in Isaiah 5 and 6. Here, there are seven woes uttered. "*Woe to those who join house to house"* (Isaiah 5:8). "*Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink"* (Isaiah 5:11). "*Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity*" (Isaiah 5:18). "*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil"* (Isaiah 5:20). "*Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes"* (Isaiah 5:21). *"Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink"* (Isaiah 5:22). "*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts"* (Isaiah 6:5). The first six woes, Isaiah pronounced, on others. The last one he pronounced on himself. What a contrast we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. He uttered all seven woes on others. He did not say any woe on Himself, nor did he have anything in Him to utter any curse on Himself. Further,

if the Lord pronounced curses on the hypocrites, on those who would come unto Him in repentance and faith, He offers blessings in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-9). The beatitudes are also seven in number.

The Lord calls the scribes and Pharisees 'hypocrites.' This word is often explained as a word taken from the stage plays. The word means one who wears a mask. Just think of those who play in a drama, enacting the roles of various people. One may take the role of a king; another may take the role of a queen. All will be putting on costumes accordingly. Those who act in the role of a king will wear the mask of a king. But when they leave the stage, they are just ordinary men. The word '*hupokrites*', from which the word 'hypocrites' is derived, has the meaning of 'wearing a mask.' The Pharisees and the scribes pretended as if they were pious and godly men. But inside of them, they were evil men. Jesus exposed them fully in the passage under consideration. The Lord never tolerated them in His presence.

The seven charges and condemnations the Lord pronounced are the following.

Firstly, they prevented entrance to the kingdom, v. 13.

Jesus said, *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves nor do you allow those who are entering to go in"* (Matthew 23:13). On another occasion, the Lord uttered similar woes about the lawyers as well. He said, *"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered"* (Luke 11:52). Wm Barclay mentions a tradition that says Jesus talked about the Jewish leaders, saying that "The key of the kingdom they hid."[1] This saying is one of the unrecorded sayings of Jesus.

The way they kept others from entering the kingdom of God was likely due to the wrong interpretations they gave to the Old Testament scriptures. They had specific expectations about the coming of the Messiah. As a result, they misinterpreted the Scripture to suit their expectations. Because of this, they did not

recognise the Messiah when He came, and as a result, they could not enter the kingdom. Additionally, they misled the people from recognising the Messiah. A right understanding of the Scripture is essential to identify the Messiah and enter the kingdom. Paul states about the Scripture, *"The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). If the means of attaining salvation is through the Scripture, then correct interpretation and understanding are critically important. Wrongly interpreting them can only lead others away from entering the kingdom. These Pharisees and scribes, whom the Lord pronounced woes on here, fall into this category.

Jesus had told the Jewish leaders about their error. He said, *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). *"You are mistaken"* or 'You do err' means 'You go round and round wandering.' Those who have wandered away from the right path cannot be expected to lead others on the right path.

Secondly, they devoured properties by pretence, v. 14.

Jesus said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation"* (Matthew 23:14). There are some manuscripts and versions that omit this verse. Yet, as the parallel passages in Mark and Luke include similar statements of the Lord, it is more appropriate to include them, rather than omitting them (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

To give the impression that they were men of prayer and piety, they made long prayers. Tradition says that the length of their prayers was about three hours. Albert Barnes says, quoting Lightfoot,

> "One rule among them, says Lightfoot, was to meditate an hour, then pray an hour, and then meditate another hour- all of which was included in their "long prayers or devotions."[2]

Piety is a good garb to seize on others' properties in subtlety. Especially, through such pretence of spirituality, they took the

properties of the widows. They were women who had no one to care for. In ancient times, their existence was miserable. Thus, they fall easy prey to men with pseudo-spirituality. Their long prayers will give the impression that they care for them. The helpless widows fell for such subtleties. Such hypocrites are many, at any time and in any place. They are always around. Paul also warns about such people (1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 3:5).

Thirdly, they perverted men with foolish zeal, v.15.

Jesus continued, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves"* (Matthew 23:15). A proselyte was one who, coming from some other faith relinquishing idols, the way they worshipped, and turned to the one true and the living God. They were of two kinds. One was those who only professed to believe and worship one God, though they did not embrace the Jewish religion. They were allowed to live among them and called him a proselyte of the gate. Others embraced the Jewish faith and fold, and were considered as one among them. They were given circumcision. These, they called proselytes of righteousness.

The scribes and Pharisees travelled to distant places to proselytise. Once a person is gained and the rituals administered, they do not care to teach them or disciple them. Without a proper growth in spiritual knowledge, they become worse than what they were before. Jesus told the scribes and the Pharisees that they "*make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*"

Barnes explains,

> "To be a child of hell was a Hebrew phrase, signifying to be deserving of hell, to be awfully wicked. The Jewish writers themselves say that the proselytes were "scabs of Israel," and "hindered the coming of the Messiah" by their great wickedness. The Pharisees gained them either to swell their numbers, or to make a gain by extorting their money under various pretences; and when they had accomplished that, they took no pains to instruct them, or to restrain them. They had renounced their superstitions, which had before somewhat restrained them. The Pharisees had given them

> no religion in its place to restrain them, and they were consequently left to the full indulgence of their vices."[3]

They had an interest in increasing their number, but never cared to improve the proselytes in faith.

The above woes Jesus pronounced on these hypocrites were for their wrong and evil conduct with others. They prevented the entrance of others into the kingdom, devoured the properties of the widows, and misled the proselytes.

If the three woes mentioned above have to do with the deeds of these hypocrites, the following four woes have to do with their character.

Fourthly, they lacked sincerity in words, vv. 16-22.

Jesus rebuked them, saying, *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it"* (Matthew 23:16-22).

Jesus calls them '*blind guides*' and *'fools and blind.*' They were blind and foolish. Those who are outwardly blind may still be good guides and teachers to others. But those who are foolish, though outwardly they have the power of sight, are blind within them. They cannot be of any help to others. These scribes and Pharisees, whom the Lord exposed here, were both blind and foolish, thus incapable of guiding anybody in spiritual matters.

The Lord here is referring to the system of oath-taking that the Jewish leaders had developed for their gain and convenience. According to the system, they could consider certain oaths as invalid and insignificant. They gave more importance to material things than spiritual matters.

J D Pentecost explains as follows.

> "They would distinguish between swearing by the temple and by the gold of the temple, or between swearing by the altar and a gift on the altar, or between swearing by God's throne and the God who sits on the throne. By making such distinctions, the Pharisees were able to take an oath, but then absolve themselves of responsibility for fulfilling the oath. The one uninitiated in the distinctions would accept the oath of the Pharisee, not knowing that the oath had been couched in such phraseology that the Pharisee did not consider himself bound by it."[4]

They made the system function in their favour.

Jesus had criticised the Jewish leaders in His Sermon on the Mount, as their words were unreliable. He said, "*Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one*" (Matthew 5:33-37). These are echoed in James 5:12. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul claims faithfulness and reliability of his life and words, in referring to the reliability of God (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

Fifthly, they lacked sincerity and obedience, vv. 23,24.

Jesus continued, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*" (Matthew 23:23-24). Jesus is pointing to their strict, legalistic, Law-keeping. Here, it is about the law of tithing. Tithing was commanded in the Old Testament. "*You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year*" (Deuteronomy 14:22). "*And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD*" (Leviticus 27:30). These tithes the people

brought to the presence of the Lord were given to the Levites as an inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The scribes and the Pharisees were not negligent about the tithing. But the problem with them was that they were selective in their obedience to the Law. In tithing, they were careful, but in more important matters, they were negligent. So, the Lord said that they neglected the weightier matters of the Law.

They were careful in tithing even in mint, dill, and cummin. These are normally cultivated in the kitchen garden. They are produced in small quantities. All these are used in cooking. Dill and cumin have medicinal value. Moses had not said anything about these herbs. But even on these insignificant items, these Jewish leaders were careful to tithe.

Robertson says, quoting Vincent,

> "The Talmud tells of the ass of a certain Rabbi which had been so well trained as to refuse corn of which the tithes had not been taken."[5]

Such strictness they had in tithing. Even their animals knew about it!

The Lord told them that they should have given importance to *"the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith."* These were neglected. *'Justice'* is fairness to others, which people such as magistrates, neighbours, and citizens must exhibit. It is giving everyone their just dues. *'Mercy'* is compassion and kindness to the poor and miserable. *'Faith'* is our confidence and trust in God. Faith means that we are to give to God what is His due; as mercy and justice mean to do to our co-beings, in all circumstances, what is right toward them. Faith shows what we should be in our relationship with God. All these virtues emerge from our relationship with God, our upward relationship.

To show their wrong priorities, the Lord here uses a proverb. He said, "*Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*" (v. 24). The gnat has its origin in water. But not in rivers, but in pools and marshes. In the stagnant waters, they appear in the form of small larvae. These larvae retain their form for about three weeks. After that, they turn into chrysalids, and after three

or four days, they take the form of gnats. They have sharp stings. The Lord here probably refers to this insect as it exists in the larva form before it appears in the form of a gnat. Water is then its element, and those who drink it, would strain out the gnat. But the paradox is that those who strain out the gnat have no qualms at swallowing the camel. The Jewish leaders who were careful in tithing the little herbs had no care for keeping the higher duties of God's people. The proverb was thus apt for them. Convenience and gain were their motives.

Sixthly, they lacked inward purity, vv. 25-28.

Jesus said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*" (Matthew 23:25-28). There are two woes uttered here. As the matters Jesus said about them are similar in both the woes, we may take them together.

The Lord, in these verses, exposed the hypocritical lives once more. Inwardly, they were evil. But outwardly, they showed as spiritual. Profession without practice. They had no sincerity about what they taught. They taught just for the sake of teaching. The Lord uses very familiar and apt illustrations to expose their condition. Firstly, He gives illustrations of cups and dishes. These are very familiar illustrations. These are examples from domestic lives. These Jewish leaders were careful to maintain a decent exterior and to practice outward duties as far as human inspection could reach. But they paid no attention to the state of their heart, the seat of imagination or affections, so that avarice, pride, and sensuality reigned with uncontrolled dominion in their inwards. If the utensils are clean only outwardly, then they are good only for display. They are not good for any other use.

The other illustration is about the whitewashed tombs. They appear beautiful outwardly. But inside, it is full of dead men's bones and uncleanness. It emits a stink from inside. No one can walk that way. Jesus compares the scribes and the Pharisees to such tombs. During the festivals, many people from various places go to Jerusalem. They may travel together as families and friends. On the way, they give utmost care to avoid touching anything unclean. That would make them ceremonially defiled. On the way, there would be tombs also. When they are travelling at night, they may sit on any structure along the way to rest or to take food. Sitting on a tomb may make them ceremonially unclean. To avoid this, they whitewash the tombs on the way to Jerusalem. Thus, it would be visible even at night. So, even at night, they can avoid any ceremonial contamination. Such tombs are taken as an example. If such whitewashed tombs are broken in some places, it gives a bad smell. Jesus said that these scribes and Pharisees were of this kind. Outwardly, they appeared holy, but inwardly they were filled with all manner of wickedness.

Seventhly, they were murderers, vv. 29-36.

The Lord was very harsh in this final pronouncement of the curse. He said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' "Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*" (Matthew 23:29-36). The Lord uses strong, scathing words in rebuking these hypocrites. He calls them sons of murderers!

Their forefathers murdered the men whom God sent to them with His Word. Stephen also accused that generation of the murder of the prophets and men whom God sent to them. "*Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers*" (Acts 7:52). Also, see what is told about the men of faith in the Old Testament time. "*Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented"* (Hebrews 11:35-37). The history of Israel is infamous for the mistreatment of the men of God. The generation to whom the Lord was speaking, built up and decorated the tombs of such men who were martyred. In doing this, they were admitting the sins their fathers had committed. They claimed that they would not have done such atrocities on God's messengers if they were alive then. The Lord challenges them to add to their sins. He calls them *'serpents, brood of vipers.'* This address is important. J. D. Pentecost gives these verses an interesting connotation. He says,

> "Eve was deceived by Satan, who came in the form of a snake (Gen. 3:1). Without doubt, the snake that approached Eve was beautiful to look upon externally; nevertheless, it was the vehicle through which Eve was deceived. Christ appropriately called the Pharisees snakes, for while their externalism may have been attractive to people, the system that they proclaimed deceived people and kept them from Christ."[6]

Like these Jewish leaders, all the false teachers and heretics who come up to trouble the church from time to time come under this same category.

The Lord warned them of judgment that would come upon that generation. He said, "*All the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar,"* should come upon them. The record of Abel's murder

is narrated in Genesis 4. *"Zechariah, son of Berechiah,"* is probably the Zechariah son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20,21). Then Berechiah may be his grandfather or another name for Jehoiada. There is no record which says that Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, in Zechariah 1:1, was ever murdered. According to the order of the books in the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis is the first book, and the last book is 2 Chronicles. Thus, the phrase "*from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar*" means all the martyrs whom they had murdered in biblical history. All the blood, Jesus said, would come upon that generation.

This judgment, which the Lord prophesied, came upon that generation in AD 70, when the Romans plundered Jerusalem and burnt it down. That generation was scattered to all corners of the earth. They received what they deserved. Yet, God, who cannot lie, who is faithful to all His covenants and promises, would fulfil all that He has promised to His people Israel.

12

A Case Study on Giving

The third day of the Passion Week was a long day. It was very eventful. On the first day, the Lord entered the city of Jerusalem triumphantly. He looked around and assessed the situation there. He returned to Bethany. The next morning, the Lord arrived at the Temple again. On the way, He cursed the fig tree. Arriving at the Temple, He cleansed it. Then, He taught in the Temple. On the third day, they returned to the Temple, and the disciples brought to Jesus' attention the fig tree, now dried. This led the Lord to teach them about prayer. This was followed by questions from Jewish leaders: Pharisees, scribes, Herodians, and others. They questioned Him about the authority with which He cleansed the Temple and taught in the Temple. In response to this question, the Lord said that it was they who denied God's authority over them and went on to explain how they abused the authority vested in them. To make the nature of their denials clear, Jesus told three parables. This was followed by the pronouncement of seven woes on the Pharisees and the scribes. Jesus would now give them a case study on giving to the Lord.

The teaching on giving, which He gives in the backdrop of the offering of a poor widow, is recorded in Mark 12:37-44 and Luke 20:45-21:4.

The chapter and verse divisions in the Bible are not inspired. It was originally written without any punctuation or divisions. These divisions were added later. We must be thankful to the men who invested their time and effort in doing these. Just

imagine how difficult it would have been to open any Bible passage without these divisions. The chapter divisions for the Bible were given by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, in AD 1227. The divisions into verses were done later. The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by Rabbi Nathan in AD 1448, and Robert Estienne (Stephanus) divided the New Testament chapters into verses in AD 1555. Wm Barclay says,

> "The verse divisions of the New Testament were first inserted by Stephanus in the 16th century. It was said that he put them in while riding from his house to his printing factory."[1]

The above statement, it seems, was made to indicate that inaccuracies could be expected in the divisions. We do not know about the care they exercised while making these divisions, but at the same time, we assume that they might have given reasonable care, as they were godly men and they knew they were dealing with the Scripture. However, there are places where divisions are wrongly given.

The division of chapter 20 of Luke's Gospel seems to be wrongly done. The beginning of chapter 21 should have been with chapter 20. Similarly, the last portion of Mark 12:37, *"And the common people heard Him gladly,"* should have been added to verse 38. What is recorded in the verses following is what Jesus spoke to the common people.

At the beginning of Matthew 24, the Lord departs from the Temple for the last time. *"Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple"* (v.1). But before the Lord left the Temple, there were certain other events that happened. A comparison with other Gospel passages helps us to draw out a synopsis. Accordingly, the following are the events that occurred before Jesus departed from the Temple.

Teaching on giving, with the backdrop of the poor widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4). Meeting with the Greeks (John 12:20-36). Jesus' comments on the Jewish unbelief (John 12:37-50). Jesus cries over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39).

The Widow's Two Mites

As noted, the passage is closely related to the earlier passage. Jesus had warned about them, saying, *"Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation"* (Mark 12:38-40). Also see Luke 20:45-47. The Lord had warned about the scribes and Pharisees, saying that they seized the properties of the widows, pretending piety and care for them. Immediately after that, Jesus talks about this widow who honoured the Lord with what she had. Mark gives more details of the episode.

"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (Mark 12:41-44).

When the Jewish leaders stopped asking questions to Jesus, the common people heard Him gladly. He taught them (Mark 12:37,38). But at the same time, Luke indicates that the teachings were mainly aimed at the disciples (Luke 20:45). After Jesus taught them against the love for praise (Mark 12:38), prominence (12:39), and profit (12:40), He tells them the right basis for greater commendation from God. He teaches with the example of the widow. When the Pharisees and the scribes shall receive greater damnation, the poor widow shall receive greater commendation. This is a lesson that all must take to heart, especially in these days when there are lots of outward shows without any reality within, just for the praise of men.

Jesus at the Treasury

The time of questions and answers was over. Jesus sat at the treasury. This was the area where thirteen large chests were kept for people to put offerings. Wm Barclay explains,

> "Between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the women, there was the Gate Beautiful. It may well be that Jesus had gone to sit quietly there after the arguments and the tension of the Gentiles and the discussions in the cloisters. In the court of the women, there were thirteen collecting boxes called 'The Trumpets' because they were so shaped."[2]

Two of these collection boxes were for the offering of half a shekel. Every Israelite pays this according to the law (Exodus 30:12,13). The purpose of the remaining eleven was inscribed on them. The people cast in them accordingly.

Marks says, *"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury"* (Mark 12:41). Luke says, *"And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury"* (Luke 21:1). These indicate that He looked up with interest and looked on watching how they put. He did not see how much they put. More than that, He was seeing what was invisible, their attitude. Campbell Morgan intimates that,

> "The Temple treasury was really a wealthy thing. When presently Pompey came, he found, using our coinage, and expressing value, two million sterling stored away in riches."[3]

This indicates that there was a lot of money involved. But Jesus saw how people put money there.

It is said that the court could accommodate about 15000 people. Due to the Passover, we may assume that the place was full. It is interesting to note that the Lord was observing how people gave to the Lord. Mark says that many who were rich cast in much. One matter to note here is that not all the rich gave, though 'many' gave. They gave 'handfuls of coins.'[4]

A Certain Poor Widow

Jesus observed all movements in the treasury. Here, we are introduced to a widow who threw in two mites.

Adam Clarke explains the mite the widow cast into the offering box. The money put into the treasury, even by the rich, is termed by the evangelist as *calkon*, copper money, probably that species of small copper coin called 'prutah' among the Jews, two of which

make a farthing - the twenty-fourth part of a silver penny. This is called a mite, from the French *miete*, which signifies a crumb, or a small morsel. The 'prutah' was the smallest coin in use among the Jews. There was a rule among the rabbis that no person shall put less than two 'prutahs' into the treasury. This poor widow would not give less, and her poverty prevented her from giving more.[5] This shows how little the offering was. But in contrast, Mark says, *"And many who were rich put in much."* This need not be taken to mean that the rich put 'much' money into value. This may only refer to the number of the 'prutahs' which they threw in. These rich men only threw in a handful of half-pennies. The value may not be great. The woman put two mites, and these rich men put many mites. The total, most probably, might not have added up to a big amount. But as their hands were full, people could see it and wonder.

Though there were many people of all sorts, rich and poor, the Lord saw this widow who cast just two mites. His eyes were upon her also. The lives of widows, in ancient times, were difficult. Women did not have a life independent of their husbands. In India, there was a practice called 'Sati,' where at the death of the husband, the wives jumped into the fire where the body of the husband was burnt, in the Crematorium. The idea is that she has no existence without her husband. Such was the situation when men were the sole breadwinners. For this reason, the Mosaic Law provided for the sustenance of the widows in Israel and the strangers. Jesus saw this widow and took note of what she contributed and commended her for the act.

Mark says, "*Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.*" He was explaining the mites to the Roman readers. The quadrans is a Roman coin.

Commendation for the Widow

The Lord commended her giving and said that what she gave was more than what all others contributed. It is because of the character of her giving, which in turn came from her character. It is the being that produces the doing. If the being is right, doing also shall be right. Thus, she was worth the Lord's commendation.

The value of the woman's gift was measured, not by quantity, but by its quality; in quantity, it was just two mites, in quality, it was the gift of all that she had. From considering the corrupt character of the Pharisees, Jesus must have turned with pleasure to look upon the beautiful heart of this devout widow!

The following truths may be told about her giving.

It was a complete surrender. Jesus said that she "*put in all the livelihood that she had"* (Luke 21:4). That was all that she had.

It was an urgent act. Quoting Plummer, Geldenhuys says,

> "According to the Jewish Law at that time, it was not permissible to cast in less than two gifts."[6]

When she got the minimum required money to go to the Temple, she went with it. The Lord said that the amount she gave was her livelihood. That means she did not have any mites remaining with her. She waited till she had two mites to go to the Temple, and as soon as she got them, she rushed to the Temple. Herein we see her urgency in the action. When she got the minimum required amount to come to the presence of the Lord, she rushed to the Temple.

It was a fulfilling act. The money she gave to the Temple is used for the needs of the priests, upkeep of the Temple, and to help the poor and needy. Thus, it met the needs of men and God, so to speak. All duties of men can be broadly divided into two divisions, Godward and manward. The Ten Commandments can be divided into two sections. The first four have to do with our Godward duties, and the remaining six commandments have to do with duties to men. All the Law falls into these two divisions-loving God and loving humans. She was contributing towards these two-fold duties.

It was an act of faith. She gave to the Lord all that she had. It shows that for her future needs, she fully trusted God alone. This is amazing faith. In this, we see the Abrahamic faith reflected. Abraham trusted God, left his own country and all his kindred, and obeyed God. God honoured the obedience and blessed Abraham.

This widow was poor and needy. However, she can be placed in the succession of godly men and women such as Simeon, Hanna, Mary, and others. Outwardly, very ordinary, she was. Yet in her actions, she proved to be above the ordinary. What a contrast we have here in the widow from the Pharisees and the other Jewish leaders. She surpassed their righteousness!

Samuel Jennings, quoting Harold St John, says,

> "Harold St. John …. suggesting that the woman's action summed up the Lord's ministry for that day. 1. She gave God fruits as in the Vineyard parable, which Israel failed to do. 2. She rendered to God the things that were God's and was therefore better than the Herodians. 3. God was her God, and she believed that she would be recompensed in the resurrection. In this action, she cut across the unbelief of the Sadducees. 4. She loved the Lord with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength as set forth in verse 20."[7]

Though a small episode, we see this widow in all her glory and beauty. The Lord sat at the treasury; she served Him with what she had, not knowing that she was watched. Herein we see selfless love and service. The Lord saw her devotion and commended her to the disciples. What she did was more in proportion to her means. Thus, it was pleasing to God and acceptable to God. He does not mean that this was more valuable or of more worth than all those others had put in, but it showed more love for the sacred cause, more self-denial, and, of course, more sincerity in what she did. It is the same rule by which God rewards us also.

What a challenge she presents before all who give for self-glory from their riches and pretend as if they gave all. It contrasts with what Ananias and Saphira did (Acts 5:1-11). We see a similarity of this quality in the case of the Macedonian assemblies. Paul says, *"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). All the qualities we saw in this widow are seen in what these assemblies did.

This selfless giving is seen in God. He is the greatest Giver. None can outdo God in giving. He gave His only begotten Son. Paul says, "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*" (2 Corinthians 9:15). The Son also loved us and gave Himself for us. "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Here we see the Lord's selfless, sacrificial giving. Only that which reflects the seal of Heaven's sacrifice is acceptable at Heaven's exchange!

"Jesus sat over against the treasury." Ironside says, "He does this still!"[8] He is still watching how we give. Heaven's computing methods are not like those of the world. The Lord said about her, "*This poor widow has put more in*" (v.43). The Lord was not looking at what she gave. But He was seeing how much was remaining with her. The value of what we contribute depends on how we give. We owe our wealth, health, and time to Him. It must be utilised faithfully as stewards of all these.

Paul warns, *"Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is"* (1 Corinthians 3:13). What is going to be tested is not how much, the quantity, but the quality, what kind it was. Paul says, "*For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Corinthians 6:20). Paul pleads, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:1-2). Blessed are all those who heed this call to give.

13

'We Would See Jesus'

The time of Jesus's crucifixion was drawing very near. The city would be crowded with people from around the world. Jews were commanded to come to Jerusalem for Passover. Among them, Gentiles who had reverence for Jehovah also would join. In our current consideration, we see certain Greeks approaching. They approached Philip for a chance to meet Jesus. They said, *"Sir, we would see Jesus."* Jesus saw this as an opportunity to share with them and the people around Him certain truths about the upcoming death on the cross. These words spoken at a time when the shadow of the cross was looming large over Him are very significant.

The cross is the ultimate revelation of the invisible God. All of God's divine attributes are demonstrated there. The love of God is shown through the crucifixion, as the Son of God was crucified for all humanity. In that act, God's love was displayed in a way not seen anywhere else. His holiness is also revealed in the crucifixion, as He died to cleanse the sins of all who believe in Him. The power of God was made evident on the cross, serving as the means to deliver people from sin's grip. The wisdom of God, along with His long-suffering, mercy, and grace, was fully expressed there. Therefore, it was only fitting to direct the Greeks, who sought to see Jesus, to pay attention to the cross. They needed to catch a glimpse of the truths it holds and allow those truths to work in their lives and transform them. Only then could their lives have real meaning and purpose. Isaiah says, *"Look to*

Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22). He pointed them to the cross in His conversation with them.

Before attending to the conversation the Lord had with the Greeks, it would be helpful if we understood the scheme of truths presented in these chapters, as shown in the Gospel of John. Scofield, in the New Scofield Reference Bible, notes the following patterns of truths in these chapters. He notes,

> "Chapters 12 -17 are a progression according to the order of approach to God in the Tabernacle types. Chapter 12, in which Christ speaks of His death, corresponds to the brazen altar of burnt offering, a figure of the cross. The next step between the altar and the Most Holy place is the laver (Exodus 30:17-21), corresponding to chapter 13, where Christ washes the disciples' feet. In chapters 14 to 16, with His now purified believer-priests (1 Peter 2:5), the High Priest enters into and shares the blessed fellowship of the holy place. In chapter 17, the High Priest enters alone into the most holy place to intercede for His blood-purchased people (Hebrews 7:24-28). That intercession is not for the salvation but the keeping and blessing of those for whom He prays. His death (assumed as accomplished, 17:4), has saved them."[1]

This is a very valuable observation in the comparative study of the New Testament with the Old Testament.

The approach of the Greeks to Philip and their request to Philip to facilitate their meeting with Jesus and the Lord's answer to them, are seen only in John 12:20-28. The Synoptic Gospels omit this altogether.

Request of the Greeks

About the arrival and the request of the Greeks, John says, *"Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn, Andrew and Philip told Jesus"* (John 12:20-22).

Two words are translated as 'Greeks' in the New Testament. They are *'Hellenes' and 'Hellenistae.'* The former means 'Greek

proselytes,' which means they are the Gentiles who have accepted Jehovah as their God and become Jews. The latter word means 'the Greek-speaking Jews.' Explaining the word "Greeks," William MacDonald says,

> "The Greeks who came to Jesus were Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism. The fact that they came up to worship at the feast shows that they were no longer carrying on the religious practices of their ancestors. Their coming to the Lord Jesus at this occasion pictures the fact that when the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus, the Gentiles would hear the gospel and many of them would believe."[2]

A description like this is seen of a woman who came to Jesus for healing. Mark says, *"The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter"* (Mark 7:26). Here, '*Greek*' means a Gentile. She was a Syrian of Phoenicia.

We do not know where these Greeks came from. They came and first approached Philip. The reason for approaching Philip first is not clear. But it seems that the explanation John provides here about Philip indicates this. John says, *"Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee."* Andrew was also from Bethsaida (John 1:44). The residents of this town were mainly Gentiles. For this reason, Galilee was sometimes known as the Galilee of the Gentiles. The names, such as Philip and Andrew, were also Grecian. Thus, for these Gentile seekers, Philip might have been more accessible. Just as the Syro-Phoenician woman who came to Jesus for the healing of her daughter, these Greeks also might have been from the same locality, from Tyre and Sidon, Syro-Phoenician cities. Probably, they knew Philip earlier. To be of use to others, it is necessary to be accessible and available. Philip seems to be a person of this quality. If these are of Syro-Phoenician cities, they came from the North-West of Israel. If that is so, we may state that if at Jesus' birth wise men came from the East, near to His death, men came from the West!

Philip might have had doubts about whether Jesus would entertain Gentile seekers. When the Lord had sent the disciples

to the Galilean cities, He commanded, "*Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans*" (Matthew 10:5). Another time He talked about His mission, "*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 15:24). These might have put doubt in his mind about the probable response of Jesus to these Gentiles. For this reason, Philip consulted with Andrew, another in the clan with a Greek name, and a very sociable person.

The Greeks came and asked Philip, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" Probably, Jesus was still at the treasury (Mark 12:41). He might have been watching how the people were casting money into the treasury. Thus, these Greeks were hesitant to reach out to Him directly, and they decided to approach through Philip. They expressed their desire to him. "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" They presented their need to him with much respect.

Jesus Responds

If it were any other leaders or teachers in the world, they would have seized this opportunity to speak to these foreigners. That would enlarge the area of their activities. But Jesus responds in an otherworldly manner. He says, "*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified"* (John 12:23). Apparently, these words sound very odd. Jesus was responding to their desire, knowing their intentions. These might have come to Him to hear His wisdom or see some miracles performed. But for Jesus, His glory was not in any human methods, but by the cross. Thus, Jesus was turning their eyes to the coming cross.

From the early chapters of the Gospel of John, we see references to the '*hour.*' Unto Mary, His mother, Jesus said, *"Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come"* (John 2:4). In His conversation with the Samaritan woman He said, *"Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father"* (John 4:21). He added, "*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him"* (John 4:23). To His brothers He stated, "*My time has not*

yet come, but your time is always ready" (John 7:6). John says, "*Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come"* (John 7:30). John reiterates and says, "*These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come"* (John 8:20). Later, in His intercessory prayer He would say, "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You*" (John 17:1). All these referred to the cross that was anticipated. It was through the death on the cross that He would manifest his glory. For the Greeks, their idea of glory was different. Paul says, "*For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). The Greeks came to see His glory, and Jesus drew their attention to the cross.

Jesus often used the term *"Son of Man"* to Himself. In the Gospels, this title is repeated. This was the favourite title He used for Himself. In the Hebrew Bible, the term is used of the Messiah. The book of Daniel says, "*I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him"* (Daniel 7:13). RSV renders it as "a son of man," which is a better translation here. William Barclay informs that according to the Book of Enoch, a *pseudepigrapha*, "The Son of man is a tremendous figure," and he was held in leash by God. Thus, people expected the Son of man to be "the undefeatable world conqueror."[3] Jesus used this honourable title for Himself. He said, "*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified."*

Unlike worldly ideas, for the Lord Jesus, the way to glory was through suffering. In the Christian experience, the way upward is by going downward. Before exaltation is humility, and before entering glory, He should have suffered. This order of events is evident in various passages of the Scripture. The following verses make this fact very clear.

"*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*" (1 Peter 1:10-11).

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9).

"*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"* (Colossians 2:13-15).

"*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*" (Galatians 6:14).

"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

While Paul writes to the Galatians, he makes it clear that it was the preaching of the cross that saved them. He says, "*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*" (Galatians 3:1).

For the world, the cross is a sign of disgrace and ignominy. But the Lord took the symbol of foolishness and made it the means of glory. As Paul says, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:*

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Illustration From Nature

The Lord now takes up an illustration from nature. He said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*" (John 12:24). The Lord always took up illustrations from the surrounding and explained spiritual, practical truths to the people. Here, He talks about the seed of wheat. A seed is not for safekeeping. It is for sowing in the earth. Then only its purpose is fulfilled. It must fall to the ground. It must dry and die. Then, when the moisture comes on the seed, it sprouts and grows. Then it bears fruit. If it were not put on the earth, this would never happen. The seeds must be sown.

By the illustration of the grain of wheat, the Lord was teaching about an important principle of our lives. Our lives are not an end in themselves. We received it from the Lord to use it for others and the glory of God. These cannot be accomplished unless it is allowed to fall. If we love it and keep it for our enjoyment, the purpose is not fulfilled. Think about all the achievers in the world, in whichever field they are. Whether in sports, academics, or spiritual life, without sacrifice, there cannot be any achievement at all. The pioneers and the martyrs of Christian history are examples. Fruit comes only where there is sacrifice or death. Of course, the Lord was not talking about principles in general. He mentioned the imminent death and was pointing to the outcome

of it. Without His death, redemption would not occur. But if He falls and dies, He shall rise from the dead, and those who would be saved shall rise with Him. Jesus was looking forward to the blessed outcome of His death, which this illustration explains.

Isaiah mentions the outcome of the cross. He says, "*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge, My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities*" (Isaiah 53:10-11). He tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:10).

Call to Service and Honour

The Lord gives a call to the hearers to follow in His footsteps and serve God. He said, *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour"* (John 12:25-26). The Lord was not giving this call to the Greeks alone, but to all who were listening to Him. This is clear from the words in the invitation. "*He who loves," "he who hates," "if anyone serves,"* etc., make this clear. All were called to follow Him and serve Him.

In the path that the Lord called the people to follow, there are four steps. Firstly, they must hate their lives. One cannot follow Christ unless one denies oneself. This fact was told even before this. "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*" (Luke 9:23). Denial of oneself was the first step. One cannot serve oneself and the Lord at the same time. When a person accepts Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord, control of his life is given to Jesus. In the unconverted state, his life was for himself alone. But when he is converted, the self is removed from the throne, and Jesus is enthroned. Jesus the Lord becomes his first love. Compared to

the love of Jesus, the love of self becomes negligent to such an extent that one could call it hatred. Thus, Jesus demanded that those who follow Him must deny themselves. Secondly, we must follow Him. This is a call to discipleship. A disciple is a learner. He follows the footsteps of the master. Jesus said, "*Let him follow Me.*" He wanted them to emulate Him. This is the call of a Christian. The imagery of 'taking up the yoke upon' has this same idea. Jesus said, "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:29). This was a call He gave unto those who came to Him for relief from the burden of sin. Such should follow Jesus daily. They must learn from Him. This denotes the duty of studying the Word of God. God's Word has Jesus as its content. Those who have come to Christ for salvation must learn about the Lord Jesus. Only this helps Him to grow in the Lord. He finds joy and peace in the Lord. This is the experience of a child of God. This defines the life of a disciple. It is to such a life that the Lord calls His followers. Thirdly, we must serve Him. Jesus said, *"If anyone serves Me."* The Lord mentioned this twice, in the same verse (v.26). The word '*serves*' means, "render assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature."[4] This shows a servant's relationship to his work. On the contrary, the word *doulos* indicates a relationship with the master. He is bound to his master. But a *diakonos* is a servant in general. He serves for his wages or salary in whatever the master has entrusted him. Fourthly, there is honour awaiting those who serve Him faithfully. *"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour."* What an honour it shall be to be seated with the Lord in the place where He sits! This is the portion of all who serve Him. Further, He shall be honoured by the Father also. All these may point to that day when the Lord shall reward all those who serve Him. But the fact is, the measure of honour shall be, as per the faithfulness in service now. With these words, the Lord was showing to those who came to see Him, the Greeks, and other people, more than what they sought.

Father, Glorify Your Name

In John's Gospel, the agony of Gethsemane is not recorded. The Spirit directed the writer to omit those experiences of the Lord from this record. This may be because of the nature of the Gospel. It presents Jesus as God. Thus, the experiences of His humanity are not detailed. But in these verses, we are given a glimpse of those experiences of the Lord. Here, He is in agony. The Lord says, "*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."*

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (John 12:27-28). His words in verse 27 sound almost like His words in the Garden, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, where the Lord prayed that this cup might pass away. Just as it was done there, here also the Lord yields to the will of the Father. He asked the Father to save Him from the hour of agony. But at the same time, He submitted to Him, saying that He came for this very reason of suffering. Then, He submitted to the will of the Father, saying, "*Father, glorify your name.*" He would later say, in the Garden of Gethsemane, that the will of the Father should be fulfilled.

In the Gospel records, we have three circumstances when a 'voice' uttered from heaven, in connection with the Son, is heard. The first instance is in Matthew 3:17, at the baptism of the Lord. The Father said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). The Father uttered this to John the Baptist about His well-beloved Son. This utterance happened at the beginning of the public ministry of the Lord. For thirty years, He manifested His Father through His life and ministry. We might call it His prophetic ministry. The second instance is the utterance of the Father in Luke 9:35. The Father said, "*This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"* (Luke 9:35). Here, the Lord was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Elijah and Moses also appeared with Him. The Lord unveiled His glory before the disciples. In his excitement, Peter said that he would set up three tents, one each for the Lord and the heavenly visitors. The Father spoke these words in

response to this. The vision on the Mount of Transfiguration was a preview of the kingdom to come. Thus, the Lord was in His royal glory. Thus, Jesus Christ is king here. The third utterance is from the Passion Week, recorded in John 12:28. This happened against the backdrop of the crucifixion. The shadow of the cross was looming large. He would offer Himself as the one sacrifice for all humanity. Christ is seen here in His priestly glory. The three utterances from the Father were in the context of these three offices of Jesus Christ. Thus, the three utterances together present Jesus in three offices: prophet, priest, and king. The title Christ or Messiah, which means anointed, comprises these three offices.

The Greeks just expressed their desire to see Jesus. But to this sincere desire, how great were the truths revealed to them, and others, about Himself! This shall be the response of the Lord to anyone who would see Jesus. The ultimate manifestation is on the cross. The cross is the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no greater pursuit for anyone, here on earth or in eternity.

14

Final Address to the Public

Three and a half years of public ministry of the Lord Jesus were coming to an end. The Lord and the disciples had saturated the land with the gospel, the message of the kingdom. Now Jesus must move on. He should give His life for the redemption of the whole world. Before He moves on, He gives His final and concluding invitation to the public to put their faith in God. This is recorded in John 12:29-50. The corresponding synoptic passages are Matthew 23:37-24:1 and Mark 13:1. These passages denote a withdrawal from the public. While Luke does not mention this breakaway from the public, John records it in more detail.

The Voice From Heaven

In His answer to the Greeks, the Lord had drawn their attention to the cross. And He prayed to the Father that He would glorify His name. The Father answered and said, *"I have both glorified it and will glorify it again"* (John 12:28). The people could not understand the words of Jesus. John says, *"Therefore, the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him"* (John 12:29). When Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest the Christians and bring them to Jerusalem, he was arrested by Heaven, so to speak. At that time utterances from heaven to Saul had occurred. But his companions did not understand them. Luke says, *"And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one"* (Acts 9:7). About the same event later Saul

reports, *"And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me"* (Acts 22:9). Later, to the King Agrippa he said, *"At midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me"* (Acts 26:13). Thus, the people with Saul could only see the light, but could not hear what was uttered. However, in the present instance, the Greeks could hear a sound from heaven, but could not understand what was said. So, some said that it thundered. And others said an angel spoke to Jesus.

J C Ryle comments,

> "Some think that the Greeks before mentioned, not knowing the Hebrew language, in which probably the voice spoke, fancied the voice was thunder, and the Jews of the crowd thought it was an angel's voice."[1]

These indicate the attitudes of people toward the Word of God. Some would neglect it, saying it is meaningless. Others would say that it is not for them but for others. Both these attitudes are seen here.

Jesus corrects their wrong attitude toward the utterance from heaven. He said, "*This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake*" (John 12:30). The Lord said, "*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name"* (John 12:27-28). Luke says, "*Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again*" (John 12:28). About these words from the Father, the Lord said that it was for their sake and not for His sake, as they thought it was. There was no need for Him, for any audible utterance. It was given to the people who were standing around.

This is followed by the Lord's description of the glories of the cross, its nature, and its outcome. In explaining the cross, Jesus said, "*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die"* (John 12:31-33). Jesus was telling them

the meaning of the cross. The cross was the means of glory for Him. This was the reason why the Lord spoke about the cross to the Greeks who came to see Him.

The Lord told three truths about the cross, or His impending death.

Firstly, crucifixion was the '*judgment of the world.*' This judgment is taken in various ways. Adam Clarke says that certain people think that it is about the Jews. He says,

> "The judgment spoken of in this place is applied by some to the punishment which was about to fall on the Jewish people for rejecting Christ."[2]

This divine judgment upon the Jews happened in 70 AD, with the destruction of Jerusalem. Mathew Poole, in his commentary, after stating that it is not about the final judgment, says,

> "Others do therefore here, by judgment better understand, the dispensation of Divine Providence, by which a great change or catastrophe was to be made in the world by the reformation of it; the beginning of the time of the restitution of all things, (Acts 3:21). But it seems best to be understood of the deliverance and vindication of mankind from the power of the devil, who had a long time held mankind in an unjust possession."[3]

Jamieson Fausset Brown opines,

> "The world that 'crucified the Lord of glory' (1Cor 2:8), considered as a vast and complicated kingdom of Satan, breathing his spirit, doing his work, and involved in his doom, which Christ's death by its hands irrevocably sealed."[4]

By this, it means that with the rejection of the Lord, the world sealed its doom. Another meaning is that the cross was the judgment upon the sins of the world. As the death of Christ was for the sins of the whole world, this judgment may be taken as God's judgment upon the world, with the sense of His punishment upon its sins, rather than limiting it to the Jews.

Secondly, by the crucifixion, the prince of this world is cast out. He is called Satan, or the devil (John 14:30; 16:11). He is also called *the god of this world* (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians

6:12): "*The rulers of the darkness of this world,"* that is, the rulers of this dark world. This is a well-known Hebraism. He is called *"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"* (Ephesians 2:2). There are other names also given in the Bible for Satan, showing His nature or works.

The prince of the world shall be *"cast out."* This means His kingdom shall be destroyed and his rule shall come to an end. It does not mean that his reign over all men would cease immediately. The cross would be the crisis, the grand conflict in which he would be vanquished, and from that time, his kingdom would begin to decline, until it would finally cease, and then all creation would be free altogether from his dominion.

This casting out shall be a process. As a first step, Satan shall be defeated by the cross. This is evident from verses such as Hebrews 2:14, 15; Colossians 2:15; Luke 11:21, 22; Revelation 12:7-17, etc. In the second advent, the Glorious Appearance, he shall be put in the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:6; Romans 16:20). Finally, he shall be confined to the eternal hellfire (Revelation 20:10). When the Lord stated that he shall be '*cast out,'* He might have intended all these events awaiting the devil.

Thirdly, by the cross, all men "*shall be drawn to Him.*" The Lord said, "*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself"* (John 12:32). As a note to this verse, about the phrase "*lifted up,"* the Geneva Bible Notes states that,

> "Christ used a word which has a double meaning, for it signifies either to lift up or to get out of the way: for he intended them to think of his death, but the Jews seemed to take it another way."[5]

It is amazing to note that what the Jews did to eliminate Jesus from the way, the crucifixion, became the ground for the salvation of all humanity.

In explaining the word "*draw,*" Robertson says,

> "Jesus had already used this verb of the Father's drawing power (John 6:44). The magnetism of the Cross is now known to all men, however little they understand the mystery of the Cross. By

> "all men" (*pantas*) Jesus does not mean every individual man, for some, as Simeon said (Luke 2:34) are repelled by Christ, but this is the way that Greeks (John 12:22) can and will come to Christ, by the way of the Cross, the only way to the Father (John 14:6)."[6]

This miracle of drawing others unto Himself began to be fulfilled at the crucifixion itself. It was fulfilled in the conversion of the thief on the cross. "*Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'"* (Luke 23:39-43). By witnessing the crucifixion, a Roman centurion was enlightened. Luke says, "*So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!'"* (23:47). The centre stage, the crucifixion, and the resurrection have in the world history, has been attested by the restoration of the sinners saved by faith, down the centuries, whose identities only eternity shall reveal fully. The attraction of the cross continues.

The comment John gives as a conclusion of the passage indicates that the Lord was giving them the meaning of the cross and its glory. John says, "*This He said, signifying by what death He would die"* (John 12:33).

'Believe in the Light'

Now that Jesus had told the public about the cross, it was time for them to decide. An alternative to a decision is discussion. The public takes this option for them. They wanted to evade a decision and commitment. They ask Him questions, and Jesus gives them the final call to believe in Him. John says, *"The people answered Him, 'We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up?' Who is this Son of Man?' Then Jesus said to them, 'A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the*

light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light'" (John 12:34-36).

The people said that they had heard that the Messiah must live forever. The fact is, the Law does say that He shall live forever. But what they failed to understand was the sacrificial death of the Messiah. They could see through the eyes of the prophets the mountain tops far away in the prophetic horizon of the kingdom truths, but the valley experiences of the Messiah, they could not visualise. There was no part of the Law nor of the Scripture that said the Messiah should not die. But several passages say as expressly as they can that Christ must die for the sins of the world. Isaiah 53 says,

> "*For He was cut off from the land of the living;*
> *For the transgressions of My people, He was stricken.*
> *And they made His grave with the wicked—*
> *But with the rich at His death,*
> *Because He had done no violence,*
> *Nor was any deceit in His mouth.*
> *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;*
> *He has put Him to grief.*
> *When You make His soul an offering for sin,*
> *He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,*
> *And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.*
> *He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied.*
> *By His knowledge, My righteous Servant shall justify many,*
> *For He shall bear their iniquities.*
> *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,*
> *And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,*
> *Because He poured out His soul unto death,*
> *And He was numbered with the transgressors,*
> *And He bore the sin of many,*
> *And made intercession for the transgressors."* (Isaiah 53: 8-12).

Daniel also had prophesied about the death of the Messiah. He said, "*And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself"* (Daniel 9:26). Psalm 22 is clearer than any

other portions, giving even the utterances from the cross. But Israel failed to understand these clear revelations. However, as several passages spoke of the perpetuity of his reign (Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 7:14), they probably confounded the one with the other and thus concluded that the Messiah cannot die. Their response to Jesus' final call to the public to believe in Him was determined by this misunderstanding.

Two Responses to Jesus

Verses 37 to 43 narrate the responses that came from the people. They were divided in their understanding of the Lord Jesus. Some were outright in their rejection of the Lord. But others were not that outright. They had an intellectual assent to what Jesus said. But they did not commit themselves to the Lord in faith.

About those who rejected Him outright, John says, "*But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?' Therefore, they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him'*" (John 12:37-41). Jesus gave them evidence attesting to His claims. Those signs should have helped them yield to the claim of Jesus. But they did not mix faith with their hearing or seeing. They hardened their hearts. John compares them to the people in the time of Isaiah. He quotes from two portions of Isaiah. Verse 38 is quoted from Isaiah 53:1, and verse 40 is quoted from Isaiah 6:9,10. Both passages show the unbelief of the people of God. "*Therefore, they could not believe, because Isaiah said again,"* does not mean that they could not believe because Isaiah talked about their unbelief. It only means that Isaiah said about them in His prophetic spirit, knowing that they would not believe. The first passage quoted is about their unbelief. It shows that they rejected the words that

came to them. They hardened their hearts. The second passage talks about God hardening their hearts. *"These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him"* indicates the time of the utterance (Isaiah 6).

The second group is the leaders of the people. John says, "*Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (John 12:42-43). The 'rulers' may be the members of the Sanhedrin council or the leaders of the people in general. They loved respect from people. They did not want their reputation to be tainted. The fear of losing this became a hindrance to coming to the Lord Jesus. Solomon said about these rulers aptly. He said, "*The fear of man brings a snare"* (Proverbs 29:25). This was true of them. Fear of men ensnared them. The Lord, on another occasion, had told the Jews about this evil. He said, *"How can you believe, who receive honour from one another and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God?"* (John 5:44). This statement indicated that those who are after honour from others can never believe in Jesus. They cannot come to Him. The teachings of Jesus are contrary to the ideas of men. The Pharisees could not digest them. They could not tolerate anyone who accepted the teachings of Jesus. These rulers who extended their intellectual consensus to Jesus could not commit themselves to the Lord fully.

As John stated, quoting Isaiah 6:9,10, the Jews were blinded lest they see the glory of God. This was punitive or judicial. Similar action from God is seen in the matter of Pharaoh. He hardened his heart and did not obey God's word that came through Moses to release God's people from slavery. There were sufficient signs given to prove that the words spoken were from God. Pharaoh did not give heed to the word of God. As he hardened his heart, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This method of God's dealing could be seen in His dealings with the Gentiles who did not believe. What could be known of God is manifest in creation and the human conscience. Paul says, *"Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became*

futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things" (Romans 1:21-23). The verses that follow show God's response to them. He gave them up. This punitive action of God is mentioned three times in the chapter (vv 24,26,28). As the passage from Isaiah is cited here, we can assume that God acted against the people of Jesus' time, in the same way He did to Israel in unbelief and to the Gentiles who rejected the evidence given to them. Being given up by God is the worst thing that can happen to anybody.

Final Call to Believe

Verses 44 to 50 are solemn. These are the final words of the Lord Jesus to the public. After this, His words were mainly to the disciples, teaching them and preparing them for the future.

John said, "*Then Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak'*" (John 12:44-50).

The solemnity of the words of the Lord here is seen in the way He uttered these words. It says, "*Then Jesus cried out and said.*" Similar statements we find only in four more places in the Gospels. They are the following.

Matthew says, "*And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit*" (Matthew 27:50). Mark provides more

details. He says, *"And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"* (Mark 15:37-39). Another instance is seen in the fourth Gospel. John records, "*Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple"* (John 7:28). Immediately after this, in the same chapter, John gives another instance where He cried out and spoke. He said, "*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink'"* (John 7:37). Now, we hear His cry in John 12:44 also.

The passage, from verse 44 to 50, might be part of the words He spoke to the public, which is seen till verse 36. We are told that He hid Himself from the public. He might have spoken these before He hid from them. In these final words, about His person, He makes unique claims.

Jesus claims that He is sent by the Father, v. 44

This is a fact that Jesus asserted always. In fact, in John's Gospel, in almost all the chapters, this truth is mentioned, either directly or indirectly. In this, the distinction of His person from that of the Father is assumed.

Jesus claims equality with the Father, v. 45

This is also stated repeatedly by the Lord. He is coequal, co-substantial, and co-existent with the Father. Another time, the Lord even said that He who has seen Him has seen the Father. He is, in every aspect, equal to the Father.

Jesus proclaims the purpose of His coming, vv. 46,47

He came as the light of the world to bring those who are in darkness to light. This is a fact He had told at the beginning of His ministry in the Sermon on the Mount. That is asserted here again. *"To save the world"* was His motto for life.

Jesus lays down the condition for entering the benefit of His coming vv. 46,47

In verse 47, the Lord asked them to '*hear'* and '*believe*.' The Christian faith is not a 'blind leap into darkness.' He wants us to

hear first. Then to weigh the truth and accept it. It is not even just an intellectual consensus that is desired. But what He demands is a complete surrender to Him. That alone is a saving faith.

Jesus warns about the judgment that shall come upon those who deny Him, v. 48.

"*I judge him not"* in verse 47 does not mean there is no judgment upon the unbelievers. Further, it does not mean that He never judges. It only means that the purpose of His first coming was not to judge. But, as seen in other passages in the scripture, in His second coming, He shall bring judgment upon the wicked. All judgment is given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus asserts equality with the Father in His words, vv. 49,50

He says all that He spoke are the words of the Father. William MacDonald explains the phrase, *"What I should say and what I should speak,"* thus.

> "There is a difference between the two. The expression "what I should say" refers to the substance of the message; "what I should speak" means the very words which the Lord should use in teaching the truth of God."[7]

Even in this last moment of His life on earth, when all things about Him were going to take a difficult turn, and though He knew every detail of them in advance, there was no change in His ideas or words. Now, He reiterated all that He spoke before. Just as He never changes, His words also never change. There is no need for any fresh editions to update His words.

IV

The Olivet Discourse

"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"
Matthew 24:3

15

On the Mount of Olives

Jesus and His disciples moved to the Mount of Olives. He often resorted to this place for relaxation or to spend the night. Luke says, "*And in the daytime, He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet*" (Luke 21:37). In chapter 22 verse 39, Luke says that going in the evenings to the Mount of Olives, when He was in Jerusalem, was His custom. He gave His final address to the public, and now He ascended this mount to commune with His disciples alone. Bethany was on the slope of this mountain. Jesus with His disciples might have gone to the home of Martha and Mary to spend the night.

How Jesus left the city and the Temple also calls for our attention. He uttered woes upon the Jewish leaders, the hypocrites (Matthew 23:13-36). Jesus cried, that is, raised His voice and spoke His final words to the public (John 12:44). As He was leaving the city of Jerusalem, He looked at it and grieved over it. He said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'*" (Matthew 23:37-39). The utterance, though heavy with grief over the rebellious nature of the city, gives them hope that He would turn to them again with blessing if they repent and turn to Him. Matthew says, "*Then Jesus went out and departed from the*

temple" (Matthew 24:1). This was a punitive action. Jesus turned away from them in judgment. He was turning His back on a people who had turned their backs on Him.

This kind of action is also seen in Matthew 13. In Matthew 12, the leaders of the people said that Jesus was doing all the miracles with the help of Beelzebub. In response to this rejection, Jesus said, "*For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* (Matthew 12:50). Then He left them and went out of the house. Matthew says, "*On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore"* (Matthew 13:1-2). This was symbolic of the rejection of Israel and acceptance of anyone who would care to receive Him. A similar scene is seen towards the end of His public ministry. He left the Temple and went to the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is one of the mountains that surround Jerusalem. This mountain is located east of Jerusalem. It is closely connected with some of the important events in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The flight of David, the idolatry of Solomon, and the agony and betrayal of Christ happened here. It is more than a mile in length, running in general directions north and south, covering the whole eastern side of the city. It is close to the city walls. In between the City and the Mountain lies the valley of Kidron. It is 300 feet higher than the Temple Mount. It has four independent summits. They are "Viri Galilaei", "Mount of Ascension", "Prophets", and "Mount of Offence." Of these, the "Mount of Ascension" is the most important. There are three spots here that are important. They are Gethsemane, the spot from which the Lord ascended, and the place of the lamentation of Christ over Jerusalem. The 'Prophets' is the place where there are the 'Tombs of the Prophets.' Probably, the Lord referred to this in Matthew 23:29. The 'Mount of Offence,' or Scandal, or Corruption, is the place where Solomon erected the high places for the gods of his foreign wives. 'Viri Galilaei' is just 400 yards from the 'Summit of Ascension.' The word means 'Men of

Galilee,' derived from Acts 1:11. The Mount of Olives was rich with foliage of Cedar trees, olive trees, and date palms.

When they were on the Mount of Olives, disciples came to show the beauty of the Temple. It seems that they showed the beauty of the Temple twice. Mark records, *"Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!'"* (Mark 13:1). Matthew says, *"Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple"* (Matthew 24:1). In the record of Mark, a disciple showed Him the beauty of the Temple while He was leaving the Temple. But in Matthew's record, it seems it happened later, after leaving the Temple. And it was not one disciple who showed Him the Temple, but His disciples together. Luke combines both these instances and records, "*Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, "These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down*" (Luke 21:5-6). The beauty of the Temple, the Lord had seen before. There was no need for anybody to show that to Him. All the Jews were familiar and proud of it. But they were showing its beauty now to Jesus because of their kingdom expectation. They thought that the Kingdom would be set up immediately. If it begins, then Jerusalem should be its capital, and the House of His Father, the Temple, should be His palace. Thus, they were showing the beauty of the place where Jesus was going to rule. Jesus' response to their misplaced enthusiasm might have immediately dampened their spirits.

'When Will These Things Be?'

The enthusiasm of the disciples, in showing the beauty of the Temple, was dampened by the answer. Notice what the Gospels say about the location where Jesus and the disciples were sitting. Matthew says, *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives"* (Matthew 24:3). Mark is more specific. He says, *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately"* (Mark 13:3). This shows that they

were sitting opposite the temple. When they showed Him its beauty, He spoke about the destruction that would come upon the Temple and the city. Mark names the four disciples who came and asked the question: Peter, James, John, and Andrew. These four seem to be the best among the Twelve. They are always the first four names in all the lists of the apostles. They were the ones who came up with the question. The question was, "*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matthew 24:3). Mark says, "*Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"* (Mark 13:4). Luke reports, "*So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?"* (Luke 21:7).

These questions make clear that they knew these things were going to happen. After they showed the beauty of the temple, Jesus told them about its destruction. This might have put them initially in doubt and disappointment. However, the questions indicate that they had now come out of the initial disbelief. Probably, they might have referred to their scriptures to understand the credibility of what Jesus stated and saw that it is according to the Scriptures. This may be the reason they came and asked these questions. They asked them with acceptance as if it was going to happen. They believed them to happen because Jesus said so, and that it was according to their scriptures. Now they wanted to know only the time when these shall occur.

The Old Testament spoke about the judgment that shall come upon the city of Jerusalem. Zechariah 12:1 to 14:3 describes God's ways with Jerusalem in the last days. He shall come upon them in judgment. He shall bring the gentile nations against it. They shall lay siege to the city. At the same time, when they repent and turn again to God, He shall restore them, cleansing their sins and iniquities. These shall have their ultimate fulfilment before the coming of the Messiah. It had its precursors, such as partial fulfilments in the past. When the Lord spoke about the coming destruction upon the city, they might have initially become upset. Now from the scriptures they have come to know that it

should happen. This understanding and realisation might have brought them to the Lord with these questions. Pentecost says,

> "They called attention to the temple buildings that Herod had begun fifty years before and that would not be completed for another generation. Herod, a master builder, had planned for his buildings to outlast the pyramids. What he had constructed seemed very permanent. How the permanence of these buildings could be reconciled with Christ's message concerning judgment was the question in the minds of the disciples."[1]

When the Lord told them that the temple would be destroyed, they, in wonderment, came to Him with queries for more information on the matter.

The questions they asked were three. Firstly, they asked Him about the destruction of the temple. Luke reports, "*So they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?'*" (Luke 21:7). Just before this question, Luke says, that Jesus had told them about the destruction of the temple. *"Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, "These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down*" (Luke 21:5-6). Thus, the question pertains to the destruction of the temple. Secondly, they asked Him about the sign of His coming. Matthew says, *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matthew 24:3). Jesus talked about His coming in Matthew 23:39. *"For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* (Matthew 23:39). This indicates that He would come again. Now, they asked for His sign, the sign of His coming. Thirdly, they asked Him about the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). Mark records, "*And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"* (Mark 13:4). This may be the same as the end of the age. The answers to the second and third questions are the same. This age shall culminate with the coming of the Lord in His glory, the Glorious Appearance.

The answer to the first question, the time of the destruction of the temple, is seen in Luke 21:20-24. *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"* (Luke 21:20-24). Some of the prophetic utterances have double fulfillment - an immediate fulfillment and an ultimate fulfilment. The immediate fulfilment happened in AD 70 when the Romans razed the temple to the ground. However, its ultimate fulfilment is in the end times, during the time of the Great Tribulation. Matthew and Mark record it with the events in the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-18).

AD 70 – Immediate Fulfilment

A brief look at the capture and destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem would be worthwhile. A glimpse of it would show that the words of the Lord about these were fulfilled exactly as He said.

Jerusalem was captured by the Romans in 63 BCE under the Roman General Pompey. As they knew the sensitive nature of the Jews, they did not want to rule over them directly. They gave the rule to the Herodians, who were of the Idumean dynasty. Conflicts between the Jews and the Gentiles were common. When the Jews were monotheistic, the Gentiles mostly were polytheistic. The Romans also imposed hefty taxes on the people of Israel. Other reasons could also ignite an uprising suddenly. The first Jewish revolt happened in AD 66. The Jewish revolt was successful for some time. They could expel the Romans from the city of Jerusalem. A local Jewish government was formed. The rule was mainly in the city and extended to nearby areas. Roman emperor Nero sent Vespasian to suppress the uprising. He

successfully confined the rebels within the limits of Jerusalem. Vespasian became the Roman emperor in AD 69.

The Roman general Titus came against Jerusalem in April, AD 70. The time of this invasion coincided with the Passover. In their tactics to contain the Jews, they allowed the people to enter the city to keep the feast, but they did not allow them to go out. The strategy was to cause a scarcity of food and water in Jerusalem. The Romans laid siege to the city. Supplies were cut off from outside, and the Jews inside the city were starving. The various Jewish factions, trapped in the city of Jerusalem, could not unite and resist the invaders. Some attempts at negotiations also failed. As time passed, the situation in the city worsened.

Titus, with the Roman soldiers, destroyed all Jewish defences and massacred many Jews. The Roman soldiers razed the Temple down. Except for the Western Wall, all the rest were demolished. The Western Wall, still extant, is a pilgrimage site and a place for prayer. The atrocities the Jews were made to undergo were without equal. Historians have recorded them for generations.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that eleven lakh people were massacred during this siege of Jerusalem. The number rose to this level as people from around the world, for the keeping of the Passover, had gathered. The Romans killed people who were armed, unarmed, young, or old. About a lakh were taken captive. Many were sold as slaves to various nations. About forty thousand who survived were allowed to go wherever they wanted. The figures given by Josephus are unacceptable to some.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, states, "The total number of the besieged of every age and both sexes was six hundred thousand; there were arms for all who could use them, and the number ready to fight was larger than could have been anticipated from the total population. Both men and women showed the same determination, and if they were to be forced to change their home, they feared life more than death."

The Romans celebrated their victory. In the victory parade, they displayed the items they brought from the Temple, like the Menorah and the table of the showbread. To commemorate the

victory, the Romans built the Arch of Titus. About seven hundred Jewish soldiers were also paraded in the victory procession. Among them were Simon Bar Giora and John of Giscala. Simon Bar Giora was judged a traitor and rebel and was thrown to his death from the Tarpeian Rock at the Temple of Jupiter. John of Giscala was sentenced to life imprisonment.

In response to the amazement of the disciples at the sight of the Temple, Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down*" (Matthew 24:2). These words of the Lord were fulfilled just as He told. Albert Barnes, quoting historical records, says,

> "Maimonides, a Jewish writer, has also recorded that "Terentius Rufus, an officer in the army of Titus, with a ploughshare tore up the foundations of the temple," that the prophecy might be fulfilled, "Zion shall be ploughed as a field," Micah 3:12. This was all done by the direction of Divine Providence. Titus was desirous of preserving the temple, and frequently sent Josephus to the Jews to induce them to surrender and save the temple and city. But the prediction of the Saviour had gone forth; and, notwithstanding the wish of the Roman general, the temple was to be destroyed. The Jews themselves first set fire to the porticoes of the temple. One of the Roman soldiers, without any command, threw a burning firebrand into the golden window, and soon the temple was in flames. Titus gave orders to extinguish the fire, but, amidst the tumult, none of his orders were obeyed. The soldiers pressed to the temple, and neither fear, nor entreaties, nor stripes, could restrain them. Their hatred of the Jews urged them on to the work of destruction; and thus, says Josephus, the temple was burnt against the will of Caesar."[2]

The words Jesus uttered cannot fail or fall. It was all fulfilled to the last detail. However, there is one fact to be stated here. This was only the immediate fulfilment. The ultimate fulfilment is still in waiting. The Jews are now gathered again as a nation. They are now a prosperous nation. But a time shall come when they shall be scattered by the invading Gentile nations once again. This shall be in the Tribulation period. But when they are in their extreme distress, the Lord shall come as their Restorer. The Olivet Discourse gives prophecies in connection with these tribulations and restoration.

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The Great Tribulation

The questions the disciples asked were the signs for the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, His coming, and the signs of the end of the age. The answers to the second and third questions, the signs for the coming of the Lord and the end of the age, are the same. The Lord's coming shall bring the end of the age. That is yet in the future. But the events of the destruction of the city and the Temple are fulfilled in AD 70. The atrocities the people of Israel went through were narrated before, and we had a glimpse of their sufferings. But that was only the immediate fulfilment. The final, ultimate fulfilment is still in future, in the time of the Tribulation period.

Now, the Lord goes on to say about the sufferings that shall come upon Israel during the time of Jacob's trouble, the Tribulation period. This would take the major part of the Olivet Discourse.

Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse concentrates on the events in the Tribulation period, during the first three-and-a-half-year period and the second three-and-a-half-year period. The disciples asked for the signs of the end of the age. When Jesus answers the question in verses 4 - 14 of Matthew 24, certain phrases are used that indicate the progression of the answer. After mentioning certain signs He said, *"but the end is not yet"* (v.6). And then He added *"All these are the beginning of sorrows,"* (v.8). He continued with, *"Then shall"* (v. 9) and went on to add many other signs of those days. And He concluded the passage

with the words, *"Then shall the end come"* (v.14). These indicate that in these verses (vv. 4-14) the Lord answers, in an orderly manner, the questions they asked.

The Beginning of Sorrows

Matthew 24, verses 4 - 14 divide into two parts. The statement, "*All these are the beginning of sorrows"* (v. 8) indicates this division. Verses 4 - 8 are the first part, the beginning of sorrows, and verses 9 - 14 make the second part, giving the events of the second part of the seven years of tribulation. Then shall the end be.

The two-fold division of the Tribulation period is also indicated elsewhere by Daniel. Daniel 9:24-27 is considered the backbone of prophetic studies. Unless a clear understanding of these verses is gained, one would not be able to understand the prophetic programs in the Scripture. In this passage, God was revealing His plans in connection with the people of Israel. God told Daniel, "*Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. "And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war, desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week, he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."* Here, the seventy weeks determined for the people of Israel are prophesied. Its divisions are provided in these verses.

The seventieth week started with the edict of Artaxerxes for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2). The sixty-

ninth year of this period ended with the Triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem. This marked the beginning of the Passion Week. With the rejection of the King, the nation is now temporarily rejected. In the present age, the Lord is building up His church. He is gathering a company of people unto His name (Acts 15:14). With the Rapture, this church age shall end. The Lord shall turn again to His people Israel. The blindness of the people and their rejection are only temporary. But their restoration shall not be without punishments. Jacob's trouble shall be experienced in the seventieth week.

Divisions of the Week

The revelation given to Daniel tells that the seventieth week is divided into two parts.

"*Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering*" (v. 27). The '*one week*' is calculated as seven years, taking one day for a year. This shall be the seven-year period of the Tribulation. The phrase *"in the middle of the week"* divides the period into two, the first half and the second half. The seven-year period is the subject of Revelation 6 to 19. Though figuratively portrayed, this period is given in some detail in these chapters. This division is indicated here also.

"*Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days*" (Rev. 12:6).

"*But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent*" (Rev. 12:14).

"And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5).

These periods mentioned in the above verses indicate a three-and-a-half-year division. These refer to the second half of the Tribulation period, which shall be the real time of tribulation.

This will be the time in which the Enemy shall open all his armoury on the people of God. This shall be the time when God shall pour His judgment on the world. These are narrated in the book of Revelation.

Signs of the First Half

Matthew says, "*And Jesus answered and said to them: 'Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows'"* (Matthew 24: 4-8).

The signs in the first half of the Tribulation period are seen here. Firstly, many would come, claiming they are Christ. This has already started happening. There are now a few, here and there, claiming they are Christ. The number shall increase as times go forward. Secondly, there shall be no peace. This should be for the wars and rumours of wars. Nations rising against nations are foretold, and so are kingdoms going against kingdoms. These indicate peaceless times and restlessness. Thirdly, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are mentioned as signs. The number of natural disasters is increasing at a great pace. Fourthly, these occurrences shall lead to deaths.

The signs that Jesus mentioned in the discourse are also seen in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 6:1, 2, a white-horse-rider is seen. He has a bow in his hand and a crown on his head. He comes conquering and to conquer. This portrays the coming of the Antichrist. In 6:3,4, a red horse rider is seen. He takes away peace from the earth. In verses 5 and 6, a black horse rider is seen, who comes with a weighing balance in his hand. This indicates the coming famines. The pale horse rider, in verses 7,8, is called death. His coming indicates the deaths that shall happen in various ways in the end times. There shall be a loss of human lives for many reasons, by natural calamities

or due to man-made disasters. The coming of all these, which tell about various disasters in the first half of the Tribulation period, are given in the same order as seen in the Olivet discourse.

Signs in the Second Half

The second half of the Tribulation period shall be more severe than the first half. These are given in Matthew 24:9-14. Matthew says, "*Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations, for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*" These signs, which the Lord said would happen, shall happen in the second half of the Tribulation period. The times shall be difficult for the people of Israel.

The signs highlighted here are the following. The people of God shall be hated. They shall be delivered into the hands of the authorities to be put to death. Then, by the subtlety of the false teachers, many shall be deceived, and by departing from the faith, they shall prove themselves to be apostates. Apostasy shall become rampant. The next sign shall be lawlessness. People shall become unruly. Along with these comes lovelessness also. Despite all these problems arising in this period, the work of the Lord shall progress. Jesus said, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations.*" The gospel of the kingdom is the message about the coming of the kingdom. It was preached by John the Baptist. Jesus and the disciples at the beginning of the public ministry. Now, before the setting up of the Millennial kingdom, it will be preached again.

J D Pentecost says,

> "The gospel of the kingdom as preached in the Tribulation will have two emphases. On the one hand, it will announce the good news that the Messiah's advent is near, at which time He will introduce the messianic age of blessing. On the other hand, it will

> also offer men salvation by grace through faith based on the blood of Christ. This gospel will be preached by 144,000 set apart from the tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:1-8)."[1]

He further says about the salvation of these 144,000 who shall be witnesses during the Tribulation time. He says,

> "They evidently will be brought to faith in Christ the same way Saul of Tarsus was brought to faith in Christ on the Damascus Road. They will be given a revelation of the person of Christ, and they, like Saul, will be set apart to be God's messengers to the Gentiles."[2]

The number of the witnesses given, 144,000, need not be taken literally. It should be taken symbolically for the whole company of the Israelites who shall be faithfully witnessing for the Lord in the Tribulation period. During this time, there shall be two other witnesses also (Revelation 11:1-12).

If the Lord spoke about the events of the second half of the Tribulation period in direct speech, in Revelation 6 - 19, the events of this time are explained symbolically.

This passage is concluded with the statement, "*Then shall the end come"* (v. 14). The *'end'* mentioned may be understood as the end of the age, which the apostles asked. That shall be the end of the Tribulation period. This shall be with the appearance of the Lord Jesus in His glory.

This end shall be the end of the *'Times of the Gentiles'* also. This is a significant period in the prophetic studies. It began with the overthrow of Jerusalem. The first invasion occurred in 606 BC, and the second invasion happened in 597 BC. The final destruction occurred in BC 586. In the following centuries, the nation was ruled by the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The Times of the Gentiles started with the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar and will continue until the Glorious Appearance of the Lord Jesus. Then shall the Lord come like the Smiting Rock in Daniel's vision (Daniel 2:34,35,45) and would destroy the nations and take the reins of the rule of the whole world and reign for a thousand years. The period following shall be the golden years for the people of Israel. The city of

Jerusalem shall take the centre stage in the world again. The Lord shall rule from Jerusalem. With the removal of the Gentiles' rule from the earth, and with the deliverance the people of Israel shall experience from the rule of the Gentile powers, the Times of the Gentiles shall end (Luke 21:24). This shall be the beginning of the blessedness of the whole creation.

Abomination of Desolation

While listing the signs of the end times, Jesus mentioned one sign that shall be prominent, which was prophesied by Daniel. This has to do with the emergence of the Antichrist and the abomination he shall do in the Holiest of All of the Temple. Jesus said, "*Therefore, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, 'standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened"* (Mt. 24:15-22). The Lord was speaking about an important event that must occur in the middle of the Tribulation period, sometime after they have gone through the first three and a half years.

During the Passion Week, the Jewish leaders had asked many questions to Jesus, to trap Him in His words. While Jesus was answering them, He was not only answering their questions, but despite their wickedness, even in that last week of His sojourn on earth, Jesus was trying to lead them to the truth. After answering their query, He goes further and gives them counsel to come to the Lord. Also, in His talk to the apostles, we see this attitude in the Lord. We see His abundant grace in these.

They asked Him, "*What shall be the sign of your coming?*" Or *"What shall be the sign of the end of the world?"* Jesus gave

them the list of signs that should occur during the time of Tribulation, in its first half and the second half. But Jesus did not stop there. He tells them an important event that shall happen in the middle of the Tribulation period, which shall signify the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the second half of the Seventieth week. The times shall be difficult for the people of Israel. To be succoured during this time, they should flee from their land. Jesus gave them the sign of the time when they should flee from the land. This is a matter they had not known, nor had they asked Him. However, for the people living at that time, this was very important. Jesus gives them the sign in detail. In providing this warning, the Lord's love and grace to a people who had turned their backs on Him are very much seen.

The Lord explains this sign from Daniel's prophecy. This event should occur in the middle of the Tribulation period. The book of Daniel says, "*And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war, desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week, he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate"* (9:26,27). Further down it says, *"And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days"* (12:11). Jesus was referring to these passages in the sermon.

In the passage in Daniel, there is a mention of sixty-two weeks. Including the seven weeks mentioned before, it makes sixty-nine weeks. There is one more week remaining, the last week. At the end of the sixty-ninth week, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, should be cut off. This denotes the crucifixion. Then, the passage says about the seventieth week. Until its end, "*desolations are determined."* The passage mentions of the covenant that shall be confirmed at the beginning of the week, the seventieth week. This covenant shall be between the Antichrist and the people of Israel. This shall be a covenant of peace. Because of this agreement between

them, there shall be comparatively peaceful times for the people of Israel. But it shall not continue for long. In the middle of the seven years, he shall break the covenant and turn against the people. This shall be the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the last three-and-a-half years.

In both these passages, we have mention of the *"abomination of desolation."* This is explained as the abomination that makes desolate. Antichrist shall make the Temple abominable. This shall be by installing his idol in the Holiest of All. His action, shall make it desolate. The Israelites who hate idol worship shall turn away from the Temple, and it shall become desolate. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, gives more light on this matter. He says, *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4). This is about the antichrist. He sits as God in the Temple of God. This may mean that he shall set up his image in the Holiest of All and project himself in the place of Jehovah God. He would ask the people of Israel to worship him.

Israel has a history of idol worship. As a result, they were sent into captivity. After going into Babylonian captivity, they never worshipped idols. They got weaned from their idol worship by the captivity. After returning from captivity, they have never turned to idol worship. When Antichrist introduces his image in the Temple and asks them to worship him, they shall turn away from there. The sacrifices and worship shall stop. Thus, the Temple shall become desolate. This action and the image are called the *'abomination that makes desolate.'* In the book of Revelation, John sheds light on this matter. He says, *"And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed"* (Revelation 13:14,15). These verses indicate the work of the False

Prophet in the Tribulation period. He would compel people to worship the image of the Antichrist. He will give life to the image, and it shall speak. The deception shall be at its very height. But the Israelites would desert the Temple, and it would be made desolate. The rift between the people of Israel and the Antichrist shall turn into a full-fledged war. The Antichrist shall go out for a full-out war against Israel. This shall be the time of *'Jacob's trouble'* and time for them to flee from the land. The Lord has planned and prepared a place for the safety of His people.

J D Pentecost says,

> "Just as in Luke 21:20-24 Christ instructed the people to flee the land when Titus approached, so here in Matthew 24:16-18 He gave a similar warning to those who will hear of the approach of the armies of this dictator in the Tribulation."[3]

The place where the people shall be secured is indicated in Revelation. "*Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days"* (Revelation 12:6). This place is understood to be the place now called as Petra, a rock city, south of the Dead Sea, which comes in the territory of ancient Edom.

The Lord, in His message, gave warning to the people who shall be living then. He said, *"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath."* The Lord made it clear that the days shall be severe with extreme persecution. Unto those who are with children, it shall be difficult to flee the land. If it is winter, fleeing might become troublesome. Sabbath does not allow the Israelites to go beyond a limited distance. He told the people to pray to God, that He might be kind to them, that it might not happen when it is inconvenient to flee. The Lord's mercy to His people is evident here. In asking to pray for respite in the time of Tribulation, it is indicated that even in that time, God shall be in control. There is no time when He is not in control.

17

The Second Coming

The backdrop of the Olivet Discourse is the queries the disciples brought to the Lord Jesus. One of the questions was about the signs of His coming. Jesus is now addressing this question. In verses 23 to 28 of Matthew 24, Jesus speaks about the deception that shall happen in the name of the Lord, just before He comes. These are also seen in Mark 13:14-31 and Luke 21:20-33.

False Christs and False Prophets

Jesus warned about the coming of the false Christs and false prophets. He said, "*Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand."*

"Therefore, if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together" (vv. 23-28). The warning about the coming of false Christs and false prophets is also seen elsewhere. John said, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."* He said further, *"And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the*

world" (1 John 4:1,3). There have always been people who have claimed they are Christ. Such claims shall be more in the end times. But these are just the precursors of the appearance of the Antichrist and the false prophet.

The coming of the Antichrist and false prophet during the Tribulation time is prophesied in Revelation 13. In verses 1 - 10, we have the coming and description of the Antichrist given. This is followed (vv. 11-18) by the description of the coming of the false prophet. The appearances of these shall be preceded by many claiming that they are the Christ. Jesus warned and said, "*Do not believe it.*" These shall show miraculous signs and wonders to support their claims. They would try even to deceive the elect, the Israelites. Probably, some of them also shall fall for these deceptions.

In their attempts to deceive, some shall say, "*Look, He is in the desert."* There shall be others who would say, "*Look, He is in the inner rooms.*" Here, there is an interesting parallel with the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

S.W. Jennings draws the parallel beautifully. He says,

"The first and the last places of the true Messiah's public ministry."[1]

After Jesus was baptised, He was led by the Spirit to the desert to be tempted. With this, His public ministry began. The last ministry of Jesus, before He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to be arrested, was in the upper room in Jerusalem. Probably, when antichrists come, they may try to create a parallel in their life and ministry to what Jesus did. This would be to deceive the people.

But the Lord revealed the nature of His appearance. He said that it shall be like lightning. It flashes from one end of the sky to the other end. This means it shall be sudden and visible to all. There would be no need for anyone to drive them to remote places such as desert lands or secret places to see Jesus. When He comes, it shall be visible to all the world.

It is interesting to notice that Jesus calls Himself the 'Son of Man' in connection with the second coming. This connects Him

with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. Daniel presents Him as the One who receives authority from the One enthroned, the Ancient of Days. It is God the Father - the First Person in the Trinity. He is given a kingdom. This is the appearance of the Messiah. When Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, He is claiming that He is the Messiah.

Carcasses and Eagles

Jesus said, "*For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together*" (v.28). This saying of Jesus has attracted many interpretations. A similar saying is in Job 39:30; Hosea 8:1; Habakkuk 1:8, etc. Jesus also used it on another occasion (Luke 17:37). The same idea is seen in Proverbs 30:17.

Adam Clarke calls the Israelites living in the end times morally and judicially dead, like carcasses. Then he says,

> "The Roman armies, called so partly from their strength and fierceness, and partly from the figure of these animals which was always wrought on their ensigns, or even in brass, placed on the tops of their ensign-staves. It is remarkable that the Roman fury pursued these wretched men wheresoever they were found. They were a dead carcass doomed to be devoured; and the Roman eagles were the commissioned devourers."[2]

Pentecost gives a similar explanation but with a slight variation. He says,

> "He thus viewed the nation Israel as a lifeless corpse, and He will judge that nation."[3]

According to him, the eagle represents the Son of Man, who comes as the Judge, not the Romans. In this context, when these are acceptable explanations, other possible elucidations are also suggested.

Referring to the interpretation, where the carcass is taken as the corrupt Jewish nation and the eagle as the judgment coming on them, Ellicott says,

> "This, true as far as it goes, is too narrow and localised in its range for so wide and far-reaching a comparison."

Pointing to the interpretation of certain Fathers who take the carcass as Christ Himself in His coming and the eagles as the true saints who shall be taken to be with Him, he says that it is "at once revolting and irrational." Ellicott takes the saying as a reference to the destruction that shall come on "wherever a church or nation is decaying and putrescent" through various nations, here compared to vultures.

> "The words of Isaiah (46:11) and Ezekiel (39:4), in which the ravenous bird is a symbol of the nations who do the work of destruction to which God sends them, illustrate the meaning of the generalized law which is here asserted."[4]

He takes the proverb as a general law applied to the situation of Israel at the second coming of Christ.

Some take the carcass as Christ and the eagles as corrupt and evil men to be judged at His coming. They shall be gathered unto Him to be judged. Pulpit Commentary gives the following remark on this interpretation.

> "One fails to see the propriety of describing men coming to the great assize as vultures gathering to devour a dead body, or how, in this case, the body can be Christ or the place of His appearance."

Further, it suggests,

> "More probable is the interpretation which regards the carcass as antichrist or the world power, and the eagles as the saints and angels who attend Christ when He comes in judgement (Revelation 19:17,18).[5]

The commentary gives another interpretation given by the early church leaders, saying,

> "The carcass is Christ, or the body of Christ, the eagles are the saints, or true Christians, these, whatever happens, will. With keen spiritual sight, always be able to discern Christ and His body, and flock thereto. He calls Himself carcass, because He saves us by His death, and feeds us by His body."[5]

Some take the saying literally in the light of Revelation 19:17-21. Here, we see an angel standing on the sun and inviting all the birds of the air to consume the flesh of the people on whom the judgment of God would fall. *"Come and gather together for*

the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." The passage ends with the statement, "*And all the birds were filled with their flesh"* (v. 21). Thus, the proverbial statement would have a literal fulfilment also at the end of the Tribulation time. Another way to interpret the proverb is to take the eagle, or more appropriately, the vultures, as a picture of the deceivers, antichrists, and false prophets about whom the passage warns, and the carcasses as representing those who would fall for the deception and are deceived. It seems, in the context of the passage where the warnings about the end-time deceptions are given, the last explanation would be more reasonable, while at the same time yielding to the fact that there is more than one explanation to the proverb.

Signs in the Sky

Jesus warned about other signs that shall occur during that time. They are mainly signs in the atmosphere and the sky. He said, "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken*" (v. 29). In detailing the events happening in the Day of the Lord, Zephaniah also says about the darkness which shall characterise those days. "*The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness"* (Zephaniah 1:14,15). John saw this and recorded, "*Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night"* (Revelation 8:12). These signs are prophesied by Isaiah and others also (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4, etc.).

In telling about the blessedness of the descendants of David and the nation of Israel, the psalmist says, "*His seed shall endure*

forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky" (Psalm 89:36,37). This indicates that the sun and the moon shall be forever. From this, we may assume that the darkness should not be because of the disintegration of the heavenly bodies. But the darkness might be due to the atmospheric disturbances. The stars falling from the sky and the powers of heaven shaken may indicate some objects, such as meteors or similar things, falling from the sky. These may result in the dust rising and filling the atmosphere, resulting in darkness. The light from the sun or moon may become very dim, causing the darkness. These shall result in much consternation and confusion among the people. The end times shall not only be filled with literal darkness all over, but it shall also be a time of spiritual darkness.

The Son of Man Appearing

Over against the backdrop of the literal and spiritual darkness of the end times shall the Lord come in all His glory. Jesus said, *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"* (vv. 30,31). These describe the moment of the coming of the Lord in glory. Here, we reiterate that this appearance is not the rapture, which is for the church alone. That would have happened at least seven years before this Glorious Appearance. As it was made clear, the church is not mentioned in the Olivet Discourse. The Discourse is about the people of Israel, living in the end times. The Glorious Appearance is for the setting up of the kingdom on earth. All shall see Him in His glory. The rapture happens as a secret event. Only the truly born-again ones shall know that coming of the Lord for the church. Then He shall come only in the air, not to the earth.

There are four matters included in these verses. They are the sign of the Son of Man, all the tribes of the earth mourning over

Him, seeing the Son of Man in glory, and the regathering of the elect from the ends of the earth.

The sign of the Son of Man: The Lord said, *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven."* The word for *'sign'* is in the singular. What this sign would be is not clarified. It is not the coming of the Lord itself. It is about some sign that shall precede and be evident at the coming of the Lord. There are different opinions about the identity of this sign.

Some think that it shall be the shekinah glory which was there amid the people of Israel in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple. Ezekiel 10:3,18; 11:23, etc, records the departure of this glory from among the people because of their sin. That glory which departed is now returning to His people at His coming.

Others think that this is the coming of the New Jerusalem. John describes its descent before the setting up of the kingdom. "*Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God"* (Revelation 21:2,3). Probably, the sign can be the glory of this city coming down to earth.

Further, another suggestion is that this sign must be the lightning that shall be visible at His coming. Verse 27 says, "*For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."*

Darrell L Bock says,

> "Lightning often was seen as a phenomenon that reflected God's presence and power (Exodus 19:16; Psalm 97:2-4; Ezekiel 1: 4, 13)."[6]

The direction of the lightning, as told by Jesus, is to be noticed. He said, "*From the east and flashes to the west.*" Adam Clarke notes the comparison this has with the movement of the Romans when they invaded Judea. He says,

> "It is worthy of remark that our Lord, in the most particular manner, points out the very march of the Roman army; they entered into

> Judea on the east, and carried on their conquest westward, as if not only the extensive mess of the ruin, but the very route which the army would take, were intended in the comparison of the lightning."[7]

Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible also concurs in saying,

> "It has been pointed out that Vespasian and Titus were returning from a campaign in the east against Rome's perennial foes, the Parthians, when they decided, on the way back to Rome, to make an end of rebellious Jerusalem. Thus, the destroying power came from the east to the west, although it is said that Titus actually launched his attack from the western side of the city."[7]

While these parallels are interesting, the statement of Albert Barnes needs to be heeded, too. He says,

> "This is not designed to denote the quarter from which he would come, but the manner. He does not mean to affirm that the 'Son of Man' will come from the east, but that He will come in a rapid and unexpected manner, like the lightning."[7]

The coming of the Lord shall be visible to all and sudden.

Another explanation of the sign of His coming is that the sign may be the coming Lord Himself. First, the brightness of His resplendent glory shall be seen on the horizon. It shall become clearer and nearer as He comes. Just as, in His ascension, He was gradually departing from the disciples and going up to the clouds, so shall be His coming also. This manner of His coming shall attract the interest and attention of all the dwellers of the earth.

The mourning of the tribes: The Lord said, "*Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn."* The tribes here are the tribes of Israel. They shall mourn over the wrong they did to their Messiah when He came first for their deliverance. The Lord had told them when He left the Temple, "*I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"* (Matthew 23:39). When He shall come, they shall recognise Him and as a nation they shall turn to Him in repentance. Zechariah also foretold about this. "*And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes,*

they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. On that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves" (Zechariah 12:10-14). John also recorded about this mourning of Israel. He says, "*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen*" (Revelation 1:7).

All shall see the Son of Man: Jesus said, "*They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*" The two men that appeared unto the disciples on the Mount of Olives said, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). He left them visibly, gradually, while blessing them. So shall He come with blessings in His wings (Malachi 4:1,2). He was received into the clouds in the ascension. His glorious appearance shall be with clouds. He ascended in a physical body, though glorified. At His return, He shall come in the same body. Paul says, "*When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Colossians 3:4). The saints shall appear with Him before the eyes of the world, sharing His glory.

Gathering of His elect: Verse 31 says, "*And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* The regathering that began in 1948, when Israel was declared an independent nation in their land, is not the final regathering. As noted in 24:16, the people of Israel shall yet again be scattered to the four corners of the earth. This will be more severe than the scattering in AD 70. However, when the Lord

comes, and they turn to Him in repentance, the Lord shall gather them unto Him and to their land. He shall punish the nations and the people who attempted to annihilate His people. The angels sent with the trumpets to gather them should be understood symbolically. It represents all the means and agencies the Lord shall use to bring them back to their land (Deuteronomy 30:1-8; Matthew 13:49-50).

18

From Nature and History

In teaching about the end times, the Lord instructed about the duties of those who would live in the end times. They must watch and wait for the Lord. These instructions He gave them in a parable from nature, the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-36), and with an illustration from their history, from the time of Noah (24:37-44). With a parable and an illustration, the Lord was teaching them the signs of the coming of the Lord and the nature of the time of His coming.

Teaching from Nature

When the Lord taught His disciples, He often used illustrations from the surroundings. He spoke about lilies, birds in the air, a vine, light, darkness, etc. In almost everything around, the Lord saw principles for teaching spiritual truths. Here also, we see the Lord doing the same thing. He takes illustration from nature. He used the parable of the fig tree to show the sign of His coming.

Jesus said, "*Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only*" (Matthew 24:32-36). This parable is sometimes wrongly interpreted. There is a need for the right understanding of this parable.

There are four seasons in a year. They are spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Spring is the time when seeds take root and vegetation begins to grow. The weather would be warmer and wet. Animals also start bearing and raising their kids during this time. This is followed by summer. In summer, the temperature increases, and it could become the hottest time of the year. This is followed by autumn or fall. During this season, the temperature comes down. Vegetation stops growing, and animals also prepare for the winter coming near. Winters are often chilly. Some areas may experience snow or ice. Animals find ways to warm themselves. In some places, the atmosphere becomes cold due to rain. These cycles of seasons are repeated each year.

Jesus was taking the illustration from these cycles of seasons in the parable of the fig tree. In the spring, the vegetation sprouts, puts forth leaves, and starts growing. The figs also start putting forth their leaves. And when the tender leaves are sprouting on them, it is an indication that the next season, the summer, is near. Thus, putting forth the tender leaves is a sign that summer is coming. This episode in nature, the Lord took as a parable.

Some interpret this parable with application to Israel. They take the putting forth of the tender leaves on the fig tree for the regathering of the people of Israel. The regathering started happening in the middle of the last century. Israelites were scattered to the four corners of the earth since AD 70, when the city of Jerusalem was plundered by the Romans and the Temple was destroyed. But the Lord was faithful to His covenant with Abraham. He kept the race from extinction. Despite the severe trials they passed through, they increased and prospered. In 1948, after many contentions, Israel was declared an independent nation. The people scattered to the four corners of the earth began to return. Now Israel is a flourishing nation, the envy of its neighbours. This fig tree, putting forth its tender leaves, is taken as a picture of the return of the Israelites to their land. The fig trees indeed represent the nation of Israel in some passages. However, in the present passage, it must be interpreted differently.

In the scripture, the vine, the fig trees and the Olive trees are taken as representations of the nation of Israel. But this does not

mean that in all the places where these trees are mentioned, it must be taken as the picture of Israel. It must be understood and interpreted according to the context of the passage.

The illustrations of fig trees are familiar with the Scripture, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. Jotham used it to warn the Shechemites, (Judges 9:10,11), Jeremiah saw them in his visions at the wake of the Babylonian invasion, (Jeremiah 26:1-10), prophet Hosea used it in his prophecy on Israel, (Hosea 9:10), Joel used it in his prophecy to illustrate the condition of Judah, (Joel 1:4-7), and the Jesus also used the figure in His teachings, (Matthew 7:16; 21:19; Luke 13:6-9). The figure was a familiar one to the Jewish audience.

The parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke, helps us understand the parable. According to Luke, Jesus began the parable by saying these words, "*Look at the fig tree, and all the trees*" (Luke 21:29). The Lord was not telling about the fig trees alone. He was referring to a phenomenon that occurs every year. In the spring season, the trees put forth their tender leaves. This is a common phenomenon. It happens with all the trees, not just the figs. Jesus was mentioning something that happens to the trees before the summer. And when tender leaves are seen, it is evidence of the coming of the next season, summer. Thus, the fig tree is not used here as the picture of Israel. Neither is the focus on the formation of Israel as a nation, nor their regathering. These are seen in the conclusion that Jesus draws from the illustration.

Jesus said, "*So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!*" This statement shows clearly that the shooting of the tender leaves on the fig trees or other trees represents the various signs and events Jesus said would happen before the Glorious Appearance. They are the events of the Tribulation period. These are the wars and rumours of wars, famines and other natural calamities that shall occur, the coming of the abomination that shall make the desolations and the sign of the Son of Man in the horizon. The other things Jesus said were the coming of antichrists, false teachers, and false prophets. They will try to draw away even the elect after their pernicious teachings. These are various evidence or signs for the coming of

the Lord. There is no reference to the regathering of Israel as a nation in this passage. When the people living in the time of the Tribulation see these things happen, they should know that the coming of the Lord is near.

John MacArthur says, summarising the idea of the phrase,

> "All these things" that it can refer to what Jesus has been teaching about the birth pangs as seen in Matthew 24:4-14, the abomination of desolation, v. 15, the perils that lead to fleeing from the city, vv. 16-28, and the catastrophic upheavals of the universe, v. 29, and things like these.[1]

The Lord said, *"So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!"* (Matthew 24:33). *"It"* may refer to the event of the coming of the Lord or to the judgment that shall come on the world. Mark also puts it similarly (13:29). Luke says, *"So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near"* (21:31).

Passing of the Generation

Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."* This statement is also discussed extensively to come to its intended meaning, and it is variously interpreted.

Some limit the application of these prophecies to the historical event of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70. They understand the statement as meaning that the generation that sees all these events mentioned as signs shall also witness the destruction of the city. All the things prophesied here would happen in that same generation. However, this supposes that all the things mentioned in the list are fulfilled in that generation. There are signs yet to be fulfilled, such as deceptions about the coming of Jesus and His coming like lightning, other signs in the sky, etc., that are yet to be fulfilled.

Another way of understanding the phrase, "*this generation,"* is to take them as the generation that shall witness these signs, who shall also see the culmination of all these, the coming of the Lord in glory. Or, they shall live through the seventieth week in Daniel's prophecy. Pentecost concurs,

> "These will not be signs given to a generation preceding the rapture. Instead, these signs will be given to a generation that cannot begin until after the church has been translated."[2]

Norman Crawford states that thirty or forty years can be considered as a generation. He further explains that the wilderness experience of Israel is called a generation, and this is the approximate time from the cross to the destruction of Jerusalem. He further explains,

> "However, generation (*genea*) is also used to mean those who are successively born into a particular family (Matthew 1:17), a particular nation or people (Matthew 11: 16), or a group of people who have similar attitude or characteristics (Matthew 17:17; Mark 9: 19). This is how it is used in Philippians 2:15, "*a crooked and perverse nation,*" and perhaps is the meaning of our verse. There is likeness between the generation by whom the Lord Jesus was rejected and the future generation who will remain in unbelief."[3]

The Christ-rejectors belong to the same genre. They may be called the 'generation of vipers.' Such individuals will exist until all these signs of the end times are fulfilled and until the coming of the Lord in His glory.

Permanence of God's Word

The Lord assures the fulfilment of the events He prophesied with a powerful statement about the permanence of His word. He said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*" (v.35). This was something the Lord had mentioned at the beginning of His ministry as well. "*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*" (Matthew 5:18). The heavens and the earth shall one day pass away; the scripture tells us about this. The Psalmist says, *"Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed "*(Psalms 102:25,26). Isaiah states, "*The earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished"* (Isaiah 51:6).

Similarly, the New Testament also attests to this fact. It says, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up"* (2 Peter 3:10). *"Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain*" (Hebrews 12:27). Whether this is going to be a removal or a restoration is debated. Even if it is only a restoration, it shall be so thorough that it may be said to be a 'renewal.' We are waiting for the new heavens and the earth.

When all things that are seen around are temporary, the Word of God, His words, are permanent. N. Crawford is eloquent when he explains this great statement of the Lord. He says,

> "If verse 33 is not true, then any man who makes this statement is neither good nor holy; he is one of the world's greatest madmen. But our Lord is all that He claimed to be. Looking out on a universe of blazing suns and swirling galaxies, He said that they would all pass away, but in contrast to dying suns and exploding star systems, His words will stand forever."[4]

Blessed are those who trust in His words, which are a firm foundation for life.

Lessons From History

Matthew 24:36-44 calls for watchfulness. Though the signs of His coming are given clearly, the exact moment of His coming shall not be known. Thus, there would be a necessity for watchfulness. In these verses, a warning to be watchful is given. Jesus said, "*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.*

Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Focusing on the imperceptibility of the time of the Glorious Appearance, the Lord said that only the Father knows the time. However, the Marken version is more emphatic, which calls for explanation. He records, "*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"* (Mark 13:32). The clear teaching of the Bible is that the Father and the Son are coequal and co-substantial. The Son was omniscient even when He was in the body, on earth. Paul says, *"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"* (Colossians 2:9). Then, how could Jesus say that the time of His coming was not known to Him, but only to the Father? S W Jennings explains,

> "Verse 32 poses a difficulty for some. Surely, the eternal Son of God knows all things. One must keep in mind that the Lord, as the Perfect Servant, is teaching His fellow servants. The servant is not to ask why or when, but is to obey. Certain things are left to the Father."[5]

This submission of the Son to the Father does not imply inequality in position, but it indicates functional order between the Father and the Son. The matters related to the times of the Lord's coming do not pertain to the realm of the Son. It pertains to the Father's realm. A similar utterance is in Acts 1:5, 6. "*Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."* The matter of time pertained to the Father.

The Lord gave the example of the people in Noah's time to impress on their minds the need for watchfulness. By being watchful about the signs, one can understand the season of Jesus' coming. But the exact hour or time cannot be known. Therefore, there is a necessity to be awake and watchful, always. In verses

43 and 44, the Lord said that if the owner of the house had known the time of the coming of the thief, he would have kept awake and prevented the burglary. But no thief advertises in advance about any theft. He comes secretly. If somehow the owner knows the time of the robbery, there is a necessity to be awake only at that time. But such knowledge is impossible; it is necessary to be careful always. The lesson is that the hour of the coming of the Lord is not known; thus, there is a necessity for His people to be awake and be watchful always.

To teach them the necessity of watchfulness, Jesus gave them the illustration of the people of Noah's time. The historical narrative of this is found in Genesis 6 - 9. The wickedness of the people was so great that God determined to bring judgment upon the whole world. But God gave the world a time for turning from wicked ways to Him in faith and repentance. Noah preached, probably, for one hundred twenty years. God had told him about the method by which He would judge the world. It was a method that the world had never seen before, rain and flood. Noah and his family trusted in the word of God. Though they had never seen rain or a flood, they just believed what God said. But the world was after things that are seen, living after their sight and passions, they could not believe the unseen things. Noah might have preached until God pulled him into the ark and closed the door. This is assumed from the description given to Noah in 2 Peter 2:5. It says, *"Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness."* (KJV). In what way is he called the 'eighth'? There were only eight people who entered the ark, that is, he and his family. Noah might have entered last. Thus, he became the eighth person to enter. He might have gone on persuading the people, though in vain, as they turned a deaf ear to the plea.

At the designated time, the flood arrived. What were the people doing? Jesus said, *"They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and did not realise until the flood came and swept them all away."* They ignored the warning. They continued their normal lives. All of them were destroyed by the flood of judgment. Jesus warned that this is what the world will experience at the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus gave the warning in strong terms. He said, "*Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."* The statement "*one will be taken and the other left*" needs explanation. The general notion about this statement is that those who are taken are taken to be with the Lord, and those who are left are left behind for judgment. However, the meaning of this statement is just the opposite of this. Those who are taken are taken away for judgment, just like the flood came and took them away in judgment (v. 39). Those who are left are left on the earth to enter the kingdom that the Lord shall set up on earth.

The explanation of what shall happen when He comes shows that there shall be a sifting, believers from the unbelievers. The sifting and taking away for judgment are also seen in the parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50). The sifting shall be universal and not limited to certain places. This is evident from the activities mentioned here. Two men shall be in the field. This may be early in the day or later in the evening when the heat is less. Two women at the mill indicate that they are preparing breakfast early in the morning. Luke 17:34 adds one more situation. "*I tell you, on that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left."* This situation is at night. These indicate various places on the globe. When Jesus comes, in some places it shall be night, in other places midday, or early morning. These show that the whole world shall be sifted. It shall be universal. God shall then deal with the world.

There is one more truth in this description of the judgment at the end times. The opportunity to respond to the Word of God is equal for all. Two people in the bed, one taken, one left. Two in the field, one left, one taken. Two grinding grains, one left and one taken. These show that the opportunity given to respond to the Word of God was equal. They were given the freedom to act independently. However, their decisions, the exercise of their free will, would determine their future. These are solemn words indeed! The principles here apply to all, though mainly it is intended for the people living at the end of the Tribulation period.

19

Faithful and Wicked Servants

The Lord taught the duties of God's people of Israel living in the end times. Mark 13:33 summarises their duties. "*Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.*" The instructions here are intense. Firstly, *'take heed.'* This means 'to have the power of seeing.' Secondly, '*watch'*. This means 'to see' or 'be vigilant.' Thirdly, *'pray.*' This calls for dependence upon the Lord for help in adverse situations. The Tribulation period shall be the most troublesome time since the world began. Unless God helps the elect, they cannot go forward. Thus, they should commit themselves to God in prayer.

To encourage watchfulness and duties, as the time of the return is uncertain, the Lord told the parable of the servants.

Servants and Doorkeepers

In Mark 13:34-37, Jesus told the parable of the servants to teach the necessity of being watchful. He said, *"It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"*

In this parable, the Lord compares Himself to a man travelling to a distant country. This reminds us of Jesus' departure from the people of Israel. Matthew noted the Lord's departure from the house in 13:1. In chapter 12, the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of performing miracles with the help of Beelzebub. By saying this, they turned their backs on Him. Jesus then moved out, likely from His house in Capernaum, and went to the seaside. His mother and siblings were waiting outside the house, but He declared that His mother and siblings are those who do the will of His Father. He pointed to His disciples, saying they are His mother and siblings. Then He sat in the boat in the bay and taught the people truths related to the kingdom in its mystery form. This marked a turning point in Jesus' ministry, symbolising His shift away from the people of Israel to the Gentiles.

A similar departure is noted in 23:37-38, where Jesus mourned over Jerusalem, saying, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* He was leaving the city and heading to the Mount of Olives. Matthew records, "*Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple."* This is followed by the disciples' questions about the end times, to which Jesus responds in the Olivet discourse. However, His departure was not final; He would return. Jesus reiterated, "*See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* (24:39). This is a promise that Jesus gives to His people, indicating He will return when they turn to Him in repentance.

The promise of His return for His people Israel shall be fulfilled at His Glorious Appearance. But until He returns, there are duties for His people to fulfil. And there is a need to be watchful, as the time of His return is unpredictable. Jesus told this parable of the servants and the watchman to raise awareness of the duties. In the parable, apart from the house owner, there are servants and a watchman.

The purpose of going to the far country is not given in the parable. He might have gone to a social function, such as a wedding or a business trip. The time of his return was uncertain. Probably, he left his family in the house. He leaves the house with his servants to take care of and gives them authority to act on his behalf. They were like stewards working for the master in his absence. They were also assigned work to do. The doorkeeper was given his responsibility. He was supposed to watch over the house and wait for the master's return.

The doorkeeper was supposed to be watchful. Jesus said, "*Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning."* There are four times mentioned here: evening, midnight, the crowing of the rooster, and the morning.

Darrell Bock says,

> "The times mirror the four Roman watches during the night, times when people would be less likely to be prepared for an arrival."[1]

In the parable, the word '*watch*' is also seen four times. He was expected to be always watchful. How disastrous it would be if he were caught sleeping at the coming of the master! If he wanted to be awake at the coming of the master, as the time of his coming is uncertain, he should be awake always. This is expected of God's people living in the end times.

Similar instructions are seen in the words of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel. The Lord said, "*Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore, hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me"* (Ezekiel 3:17). The watchman has a duty toward the people in the house, other servants. At the same time, He must be watchful for the coming of the master, as he will have to open the door to him when he comes.

The Faithful and Evil Servants

Jesus now tells another parable to remind His people to be watchful in their duties. This parable has the story of the faithful

servant and the evil servant. Jesus said, "*Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 24:45-51). Just as it is true of the earlier parable, this also has much application for the people of God who shall be living in the time of the Lord's return.

One important element we notice in these parables is that the main character of the stories is a man travelling to a far country and later returning. In between these times, that is, between going and returning, there are duties given to his people. In the present parable, we see this same pattern.

The parable presents two kinds of servants: the first, those who are faithful and wise, and the second, those who are evil. The word used for these servants is *duolos* (Greek). It means a bond slave. There are two words often translated as servants in the Bible. One is *duolos* and the other is *diakanos.* When the former shows the servant's relationship to the master, the latter shows his relationship to the work. The portrait of a *duolos* is given in Exodus 21:1-6. A Hebrew servant, serving his master for seven years, could be free from service. However, if he determines to continue, he must declare His desire to the master. And he is taken to the doorpost, and with an awl, his ear is pierced. After this, the servant is devoted to the same master for all his life. He is a bond slave. He is all his life bound to the master. *Diakanos* is different. It is generally used for a servant who works in the house or the field, or the office. He works and gets his wages for the work, and leaves. He is related to the work only, whereas the *doulos* is bound to the master.

Faithful and Wise Servant

The description given to a servant in the parable is very positive. He was '*faithful and wise.*' The first word, '*faithful*,' indicates his nature in his work. He was trustworthy. He executed his works with elan and enthusiasm. The second word, '*wise',* shows what he was in himself. It also points to his relationship with God, who is all-wise and God-only-wise. Thus, in essence, we have a servant rightly related with God and with others on whom he is given charge to serve.

The master made him ruler over his house. Without being appointed by the Lord, none can do the service of the Lord. The priests and high priests were appointed by God. Similarly, the apostles were ordained by the Lord for ministry. Paul and Barnabas were called by the Lord to service and were sent by the Holy Spirit. Later, Paul would say that whatever he was, he was because of the grace of God. He ordained Him as a preacher and a teacher. Jesus told the disciples, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain*" (John 15:16). No man or committee or church can do this. For the Lord's work, the Lord Himself should appoint servants.

The duty that was vested in this servant was to "*give them food in due season.*" He was given charge of the household. He was supposed to provide them with food. He should give the right and rich food. These must be provided at the right time, in due season. These show the responsibility of God's servants who have the duty of feeding the people of God with spiritual food, the Word of God. The word of God is *'sound'* and it is also called a *'form'* (2 Timothy 1:13,14). The word used for *'sound'* is a medical term. A patient discharged from the hospital may take bed rest for a few days. He might not be involved in normal activities for a few days until he recovers and regains his health. Doctors would prescribe medicines and rich food for those days. The food prescribed would be hygienic and healthful. The word used for *'sound'* means these, hygienic or healthful. The Word of God is the spiritual food provided by God for the health of a

believer. The word used for '*form*' means a mould or a dye. A plastic object, or for that matter, any other object, is made with the help of a mould. The raw materials are poured into it. The object that comes out of the mould would have the same shape as the mould. Romans 6:17 uses the same metaphor for the Word of God. It says that a believer is delivered unto it. Thus, the Word of God strengthens and shapes the believers. God has raised people to provide this spiritual food to His people. They should be found faithful in the exercise of this duty. The right food, at the right quantity and quality, and at the right time, ought to be served. This is a great duty of those with whom it is entrusted.

Jesus said, "*Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.*" If the servant should be found doing this duty when the master comes, he needs to be doing it consistently. The reason for this is the uncertainty in the time of the coming of the master. To continue in duties when the time of His coming is uncertain requires much long-suffering. This is the reason Paul instructs Timothy, "*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*" (2 Timothy 4:2). Here, the need for longsuffering was due to the nature of the times. People would turn a deaf ear to sound doctrine. This calls for patience in ministry. As we understand from the parable, even the uncertainty of the time of the Lord's coming also calls for patience. Thus, as stated, if we want to be found doing the duties God has given to us, we need patience.

Jesus promised rewards to His servants for being faithful. Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.*" The servant's wisdom and trustworthiness would show that he could be trusted with greater responsibilities. In the parable, he is made the ruler over all his goods. We may say that he was a manager and has now been promoted to a General Manager. The Bible gives promises of rewards for faithful labour. The time of rewarding and the prizes are all given in detail in the scripture. They are an encouragement to serve the Lord more zealously.

'That Evil Servant'

In the parable, the Lord gave the details of a servant who is evil or wicked, in contrast to the *'faithful and wise'* servant. About this evil servant, Jesus said, "*But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming."* His heart, thought area, was corrupted. He lost the expectation of the coming of the master. He lost sight of it. One could serve the Lord faithfully only if the heart is right with the Lord. The matter of the heart is the most important thing.

The evil servant told in his heart that the master is delaying his coming. When he lost the expectation of the coming of the master, he became irresponsible. He called his master *'my master,'* but his behaviour changed. The way we think has an impact on our behaviour. He started misbehaving with the people whom he would have served. He "*begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards.*" When he lost his respect for the master, he became distant from the master's servants, too. He started beating his fellow servants. When he became distant from the master and the fellow servants, he joined the wrong company of drunkards. Man is a social being. If he does not keep the right companions, he will join with the wrong ones. What a pathetic fall in this servant! The evil servant showed his true colour, his evil nature.

Then, the master comes at an hour when the servant did not expect. He came when he was not looking for him. Just imagine, in what state the master might have found him. Probably, he was found with the drunkards. The fellow servants might have stood before the master, narrating the tale of matters that were happening in his absence.

The punishment given was severe. The master came to know that he was evil. Outwardly, he was pretending to be trustworthy. But he proved that he was a wicked and unworthy person, not good for any honour. He groups him with the hypocrites. These show that he was never genuine. He was cut in two and put in the place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The phrase "*cut him in two*" is difficult to understand, especially

when it says immediately following that he was numbered with the hypocrites. Ellicott explains,

> "The form of punishment (one which, in its literal sense, belongs to the inventive cruelty of Eastern kings) would seem here to have been chosen for its figurative fitness. The man had been a hypocrite, double-minded, trying to serve two masters, and his lord, with the sharp sword of judgment, smites through the false, apparent unity of his life, and reveals its duplicity."[2]

This means the master in punishing the servant, put in sunder what he pretended outwardly from what he was inwardly.

The lessons here are primarily for the people of Israel living immediately before the coming of the Lord in His glory. The church shall not be there on earth at that time. It shall be with the Lord. At least seven years before that, the church would be caught up in the presence of the Lord to be with Him forever. Then, Israel shall be witnesses for the Lord on the earth. They shall evangelise the world in the time of the Tribulation. They shall have the duty of encouraging one another also. Then, when the Master comes, He shall reward them accordingly.

If these parables are primarily for the people of Israel living in the end times, the church also has reminders here. For the Israelites, the signs were given for the coming of the Lord, by which they would know the season in which the Lord would come. Seeing the fulfilment of the signs Jesus has given in the Olivet Discourse, they will be able to sense that the coming of the Lord is nearby. Yet they shall not be able to know the time and hour, or exact time, of His coming. But for the church, no signs are given. The coming of the Lord can happen anytime. The rapture can occur even at this very moment in which I am writing these lines. This is the expectation of the church about the coming of the Lord. The hope of the church is the imminent coming of the Lord. We must prepare to meet the Lord in the air.

This preparedness involves keeping ourselves holy. Further, it means finishing the work the Lord has given us. We must be ready always. The Lord may come at any time. We must guard our minds from corruption. When we think that His coming

tarries, then we lose the impetus to live worthy of the Lord and the Christian hope. If we do not faint, but continue with zeal in His service, we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

The hymn captures the spirit:
Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noon tide, and the dewy eve,
Waiting for the harvest and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

The time for labouring for the Lord is now. The time of harvest and rewards lies ahead. When the Lord comes, let us be found doing what He wants us to do. Such shall be honoured by the Lord.

20

Wise and Foolish Virgins

In Matthew 25, there are three parables: the parable of the virgins, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the sheep and goats. The third one, the parable of sheep and goats, need not be considered as a parable. It shall happen almost literally. It is about the setting up of the throne of glory, which the Lord shall set up when He comes in glory. It is often called a parable because of the parabolic elements, such as 'sheep and goats.' Just as chapter 24 applies to Israel, the present chapter is also applicable to them. It is not about the believers in the New Testament, though there are principles here that may be applied to them.

Cor Bruins gives the following outline for the chapter.

"Chapter 25 can be divided as follows:

A. Verses 1 - 13: Our Lord's coming to test profession (v.6)
B. Verses 14 - 30: Our Lord's coming to test service (v.19)
C. Verses 31 - 46: Our Lord's coming to test nations (v.31)."[1]

Cor Bruins adds,

"Deals with communal responsibility, the second, (25:1-13) with individual responsibility, and the third, (25:14-30) with imperial or worldwide responsibility of the church during the absence of the Lord."[1]

These outlines indicate the importance of these parables in connection with the duties of God's elect in the end times before the Glorious Appearance of the Lord.

The chapter begins with the words, "*Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to.*" Commenting on the word *'Then,'* G H Lang says,

> "It is a particle of time (tote), 'Then.' When? …. Of course, at the time with which the speaker is dealing, 'the consummation of the age,' not before … at the end of the End, at the time when this age and the next age are about to meet."[2]

The time indicated by the word "*Then*" is the end of the Tribulation time and the time before the beginning of the Millennium. The parable describes the events at the Glorious Appearance. The word *"Then"* is also used in 24:9,10,21,30,40. Another word to notice at the opening of the chapter is the phrase *'kingdom of heaven.'* This seems to have a different meaning from the similar usage in chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel. There, it is about the 'mystery form of the kingdom of heaven' which is synonymous with the Christendom, or the present Christian world, comprising all those who take the name of Jesus Christ, the real and the unreal included. But here, it seems, it is about the Jews in the Tribulation time.

The Parable of the Virgins

The parable was told to teach about the importance of waiting for the Lord's coming. Each person is responsible for preparing for the appearance of the Lord. The Lord said, "*Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now, five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterwards, the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matthew 25:1-13).

The instruction to keep watching, as the exact time of the coming of the Lord is unknown, is reiterated.

Jewish Marriage Customs

To understand the parable, it is necessary to know the marriage customs of the Jewish people. Pentecost provides the following explanation for the parable from the Jewish backdrop.

> "The parable was based on the marriage customs of our Lord's day. Previous to the actual wedding, an invitation would be extended to those who were invited to the marriage feast. At the time of the banquet, a second invitation would be sent out announcing that the marriage feast was prepared. While the bridegroom sent for his bride so as to claim her as his own, the guests would assemble. The presentation of the bride to the bridegroom would be made in a private inner chamber. At the conclusion of the presentation ceremony, the assembled guests would eagerly await the appearance of the bridegroom with his bride. In the Lord's parable, ten virgins had been invited as guests and were awaiting the appearance of the bridegroom with his bride."[3]

According to this explanation, the virgins are awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom, coming with the bride.

Darrell Bock explains the parable differently. He says,

> "The background to the parable is the first-century custom of escorting the bride to the groom's house when he comes for her. This often happened in the evening and was part of a grand celebration. The light was provided by torches or sticks soaked in oil."

This gives the impression that they are more like bridesmaids or groomsmen. He further says,

> "Their job was considered to be highly important in Jesus' culture of honour and shame. The virgins would not know exactly when

> the groom would show up, since it followed the completion of the final delivery of the bridal presents. So, announcements of the approach were given, although the groom could appear hours later."[4]

In both the above explanations, the element of waiting, the thrust of the parable, is present. When Ellicott favours the former explanation, Edersheim takes the latter view. As both these explanations have eminent advocates, it is left to the readers to choose. Here, we are taking the former explanation. The conclusion of the parable, where the bridegroom shuts the door and his answer to the foolish virgins, gives the impression that the events of the parable occurred in the groom's place rather than the bride's place.

The parents of a boy and a girl may come to agree on the marriage of their children, even when the children are small, or sometimes even before their births. When the children reach the marriageable age, they decide on the time for betrothal and marriage. Normally, there would be a gap of about twelve months between these two. Once the date of betrothal is fixed, the invitations for attending the betrothal and marriage are sent forth. These elements of the marriage imagery are scattered over many passages and parables of the New Testament.

During the interval between the betrothal and the marriage, about twelve months, the bridegroom must prepare a place for the newlywed to live after the marriage. Jesus took this imagery when He stated that He was going to prepare a place for the disciples. This dwelling place is built adjacent to their family home. Palestinian houses were like row houses. When a person in the house gets married, an extension to the family house is made. This imagery is implied when Jesus said that in the Father's house there are many mansions (John 14:1-4). Though the bride and the groom are not allowed to meet or communicate with each other during this time, they could pass on any message through the *'friend of the bridegroom.'* Of course, after the marriage, his part is over. The bridegroom and the bride live together after the marriage. Then the friends have no part to play. This phrase and these ideas are reflected in the words of John the Baptist. He

said, "*He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled*" (John 3:29). He was comparing himself to a friend of the bridegroom.

In ancient times, invitations for the betrothal and the marriage were given together. Those were times when people did not have proper recording systems, such as diaries or digital devices, to remember. So, it was necessary to remind the invitees about the dates as the time comes nearer. The reminders were sent repeatedly. In the parable of the marriage of the king's son, this element is seen. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants"* (Matthew 22:2-4). The servants were sent repeatedly to remind them of the marriage.

Just before the marriage, the invitations would be sent again. In the meantime, the bridegroom goes to the bride's home to receive the bride, whom the father of the bride gives him. This giving of the hand by the father of the bride into the hand of the bridegroom or his father is an important part of the marriage. This is a private affair. This occurs in the presence of people who are close to the family, in an inner chamber. This will be accompanied by a small celebration in the bride's house. After these, he returns with the bride to his house. The main celebrations are there, in his place. When the bridegroom comes with his bride to his house for the celebrations and feast, the guests would be waiting for them. They could start the functions only after the arrival of the couples and companions. All these happen normally at night. The couple might arrive late at night. All that depends upon the length of the celebrations at the bride's place and the time of the journey from there. The exact time of arrival is unpredictable. A team would be arranged to announce the arrival. There would also be a team to receive the couples. They were normally ten in number. The ten virgins in the parable might be the team to receive them. If they are delayed, they will

go to sleep. But when the people appointed to proclaim the arrival announce it, by shouting or by sounding an instrument, they get up and do their part in receiving the couples. As the exact time of the arrival is uncertain, they must be ready for the reception. Here, it is also interesting to note that the people appointed to bless and pronounce benediction at the marriage of Boaz and Ruth were ten in number (Ruth 4:2). The celebrations often continued for a week. The length of days depended upon the wealth of the bridegroom.

The Ten Virgins

The word '*virgin*' was often used to denote a young, unmarried woman. As bridesmaids and for bridal attendants, such young women were involved. All of them had carried lamps with them. They had responsibilities at the coming of the bridegroom, with the bride in the night. The couple should be led with lights and the sounds of music for the celebration. Thus, the burning lights were necessary when the couples came. The lamps the virgins carried consisted of a round receptacle for oil for the lamp to burn. The wick was placed in a hollow cup of a deep saucer. This was tied aloft a long-pointed pole. For a bridal procession, according to Jewish customs, ten such lamps were needed. Thus, in the parable, we have ten virgins with ten lamps. They were all ready to receive the bridegroom, coming with his bride.

At first, there was no difference between these ten virgins. They all might have dressed alike. Probably, their lamps also looked similar. Uniformity is essential for the team. They all go to meet the bridegroom. When the arrival of the couple got delayed, all ten virgins went to sleep. Similarly, all ten virgins got up when the couple's coming was announced. Until this stage, everything about them was similar. Jesus said, "*And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps"* (v.6). Quoting another (Keener), Bock writes about the grandeur and significance of such processions, and says,

> "Such processions were important enough that rabbis would suspend their lectures to acknowledge them, and ritual obligations would be superseded."[5]

When the announcement of the arrival of the bridegroom with the bride was made, they all began to light up their lamps. Then five of them understood that their lamps were running out of oil. Then the difference was evident. The foolish virgins proved their foolishness. The wise virgins proved their wisdom. The foolish did not carry sufficient oil. The wise virgins had oil for the whole procession. The foolish virgins requested the other virgins to share oil with them. Nevertheless, the wise ones proved their wisdom. And they said, "*No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves"* (v.9). The wise virgins did not want to share their oil with the others, lest none would have oil at the end. That would sink the whole procession into darkness. They did not want to dampen the spirit of the celebrations. Then the foolish ones rushed to procure oil for them.

The foolish ones were not to be seen there for some time. They went in search of shops to buy oil. It would have taken some time before they could find a place for oil. When they returned, the bridegroom arrived and entered the banqueting hall. And the door was closed. "*And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut"* (v.10). Scofield suggests that the *"wedding"* or 'marriage' here means 'marriage feast.'[6] It was the reception or feasting time after the marriage, in the place of the bridegroom.

They came and knocked on the door to be let in. But the reply of the bridegroom was final. The Lord said, "*Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you' "*(vv. 11,12). That was final. The foolish virgins were left out of all the festivities and the celebrations.

The Son of Man is Coming

"*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming"* (v.13). All the people who were waiting for the bridegroom knew that he would come. But the time of arrival was not known. As stated before, the time of

the arrival depended largely upon the time he leaves from the bride's place after receiving the bride from the hands of her father. Thus, a sufficient preparedness to receive the procession was necessary. Last-minute preparations would not work. They should have been ready always. This has been the main lesson in focus from the beginning of the Sermon. The parables of the householders also focused on this necessity.

The theme of a final separation and rejection is seen in the earlier teachings of the Lord. A similar situation is seen in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said about a group of people who shall knock at the door and find no entrance at the end times. Jesus said, "*Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*" (Matthew 7:22,23). The door was not opened to them. The Lord said that He never knew them. When Jesus spoke about the parable of the tares, there was also a separation indicated at the end (13:30). A similar finale is seen in the parable of the dragnet also. The net which was cast into the sea is brought to the shore, and the edible and the inedible are separated, and the inedible are thrown back into the sea (13:49,50). Those who are not separated unto the Lord in time shall be separated by the Lord at the end time, for eternal condemnation.

The parable is primarily about the people of Israel who shall be living just before the coming of the Lord in His Glorious Appearance. They must be ready for the coming of the Messiah. The season of His coming would be evident from the signs of the times. But the exact time of the coming cannot be predicted. Thus, the people should always be in expectation of the coming. The foolish virgins did not have sufficient oil to replenish the lamp. They did not care for this because they were fools. But the wise virgins stored sufficient oil because they were wise. Thus, the important fact that segregated one group from the other is their foolishness or wisdom. One group of virgins proved that they were fools, and the other vice versa.

In the Scripture, possessing wisdom implies relationship with God who is all wise (Jude 25; 1 Timothy 1:17; Romans 16:27). It is the scripture that makes one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Jesus Christ is wisdom incarnate (1 Corinthians 1:30). Those who are in relationship with this God through the Lord Jesus are the ones who are in the category of the wise. They should keep themselves ready for the coming, to meet Him with preparedness. Of course, in this preparedness, the submission to the works of the Holy Spirit is important. It is not necessary to find the application in the oil in the lamps. Darrell Bock reminds,

> "It is unlikely that the oil itself symbolises anything beyond the imagery it contributes to the parable."[7]

The oil here is just an element that makes the story. The main lesson in the parable is to be ready always. And that each should be ready in himself. To be prepared is the duty of each person. One cannot live or minister with somebody's fullness!

As it was told, the primary application is for the people of Israel in the end times. However, parable has principles and lessons for the New Testament believers. As the Lord is coming in the air for the church without any signs, they must be more ready and prepared. Christianity consists of sanctity, manifestation, and expectation. These demand to give priority to holiness and show the attributes of the Lord Jesus, and wait and watch for the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus.

21

Servants and Talents

Jesus continued with His discourse, reminding the people of their duties in the end times. In the parable of the virgins, the importance of personal preparedness was emphasised. In the parable of talents, which is our present consideration, the Lord goes on to focus on the duties to the king and the kingdom. This parable is narrated in Matthew 25:14-30.

"*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise, he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time, the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also, who had received two talents, came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a

few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my coming, I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The parable tells the story of a man travelling to a distant country. He entrusts his talents to his servants for trading. Upon his return, he calls the servants and assesses the trade they conducted with the talents, and rewards them based on their faithfulness. This denotes the responsibilities of the people of God, the Israelites, living in the end times. It emphasises their obligations to their King.

Trench says about the parable,

> "While the virgins were represented as waiting for their Lord, we have here the servants working for Him. There, the inward spiritual life of the faithful was described; here, their external activity. ……. Very fitly, therefore, that precedes and this follows, since the maintenance of the life of God in the heart is the sole condition of a profitable outward activity for the kingdom of God."[1]

John MacArthur gives the following contrast between the two parables. He says,

> "The Parable of the Virgin focuses on readiness manifested in waiting, whereas the parable of the talents focuses on readiness manifested in working."[2]

The order is also worth noting. First, our duty to ourselves, then our duty to the king. First, prepare yourself, and then serve.

Some believe this parable is the same as the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27). However, a closer look reveals that the differences go beyond the similarities. Once again, Trench helps us understand the distinction between these parables. He states,

> "That (Luke 19) was spoken when Jesus was now drawing near to Jerusalem, but had not yet made His Triumphal entry, this (Matthew 25) while He was seated on the Mount of Olives, the third day after He entered into the city. That was addressed to the multitude as well as to the disciples; this to the innermost circle of the trusted followers …. The scope of that, which is more complex parable, is two-fold, and may be thus defined."[3]

This shows that there are differences between these two parables in various aspects. They were delivered on different occasions, addressed to separate groups of people, the nature of the parables differs, and the lessons are also different.

The parable begins with the phrase, "*For the kingdom of heaven is like."* This connects this parable with the parable before this, the parable of the virgins. There, Jesus told them about the need to be prepared. Now He says about the reason for preparedness. There is a day of reckoning for our lives and works.

Going to a Far Country

The master, the main character in the parable of talents, is going to a far country. In all these parables Jesus uttered, the main character in the story is absent as he goes far away. This indicates the Lord's absence that was going to follow His crucifixion. He was going to leave them. He was returning to His Father, having accomplished His work which He had undertaken in the past eternity. The times at the end of the period of His absence shall be severe tribulation. Jesus was preparing Israel for the troublesome times. The times of His absence from them should be times of fulfilment of responsibilities. In these parables, the householder, the master, or the bridegroom is absent from the scene. In such times, it is essential to be faithful in doing the work.

In the absence of the man, he did not want his people to be idle, back in his home or estate. He wanted his wealth to increase. He wanted everything to continue just as they were when he was present. Ellicott explains,

> "The outward framework of the parable lies in the Eastern way of dealing with property in the absence of the owner. Two courses were open as an approximation to what we call investment. The more primitive and patriarchal way was for the absentee to make his slaves his agents. They were to till his land and sell the produce, or to use the money which he left with them as capital in trading. In such cases, there was, of course, often an understanding that they should receive part of the profits, but being their master's slaves, there was no formal contract. The other course was to take advantage of the banking money-changing, money-lending system, of which the Phoenicians were the inventors, and which at the time was in full operation throughout the Roman Empire."[4]

The man in our parable also, in his absence, wanted his wealth to be profitably used. He entrusts that duty to his slaves.

When Jesus told this story, He was pointing to His plans. He was leaving His disciples and the people of Israel. In a few days, He would leave them. He wanted His people to use His spiritual wealth wisely, which He would entrust to them.

Entrusting Talents to Servants

"*Servants"* are bond slaves (*doulos)*. The word indicates the relation a servant has to the master. He is bound to the master. He was not a daily wage earner or a servant hired for a few months. *"Servants"* are slaves in the house of the master. Thus, they were committed to service, to please the master. They were given the duty of trading for the master with his wealth.

The master, before he left them, called and gave them money to trade with in his absence. It is said that they were given '*talents.*' These are not coins. It represents the worth of goods or wealth that was given to them. It was a weight, so to speak. Its value depends on the metal with which it is made. It could be gold or silver or copper. The value depended on the metal used. The most common metal used was silver. The word used for "*money*"

in verse 18 is '*argyrion*' and can also be translated as 'silver'. This indicates that these talents were in silver. If so, then the value of the wealth entrusted to these slaves was fabulous. One calculation says that 'one talent' is equal to a labourer's twenty years' earnings. That is big money!

Bock gives the following explanation for the worth of the wealth involved.

> "A talent is variously estimated in value as being worth between ten thousand and sixty thousand denarii. So, this is a significant amount of money. At the least, for the third servant, a talent at ten thousand denarii is about thirty years' wage at a minimum-wage level. That one talent could be, on the higher value estimate, a lifetime of basic wages. The other, larger amounts for the other servants certainly are lifetime wages."[5]

This explanation tells us how big the amounts involved were! The man was a wealthy man. It seems he had confidence in his servants. Without any mortgage deeds or agreements, he gave his wealth to them.

In the parable of the pounds, the wealth was equally distributed among the servants. Each servant was given one pound. But in the present parable, in the distribution of talents, it was not equal. The distribution of pounds is interpreted as the opportunities God gives His people to serve Him and His people. Such opportunities are equal for everyone. But talents were not given equally. One servant was given five talents, and the second two, and another one talent. Talents are taken to mean the abilities God gives to His people. These are different from one another. These were distributed according to their abilities. The more able were given more, and the less able were given less.

Verse 15 concludes with the note that the man went immediately on his journey. This is surprising as He gave huge amounts to these slaves. Naturally, anybody could have expected the man to wait for a few days to check on the faithfulness of the servants. However, the parable says that he took his journey immediately. He wanted them to fulfil their duties independently. It seems he had full confidence in them.

Servants in Trading

About the servants who received talents, it is told, "*The one who had received five talents went off right away and put his money to work and gained five more"* (v. 16 NET). After he received it, he went out 'right away' and traded with them. The immediacy in the action is seen here. There was no delay in doing the duties. The action of the servant who received two talents was also similar. About him, it says that he went and traded '*likewise.'* NET says "*In the same way*" (v. 17). This means he also acted like the first servant. Without wasting any further time, they both went out to trade with the money. They both made a one-hundred per cent gain for the master. The zeal of these servants, evident in the immediacy of action in trading, reminds us of the service of the Servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus. Mark's Gospel presents Jesus as the Perfect Servant. It is complete with the actions of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, we see words like, immediately, straightaway, then, etc., occurring many times. The expressions show the Lord moving from one action to another without any gap. He worked tirelessly. In the parable, in His description of these servants, we see this same character reflected. Just as the Master was, so were these servants also.

The servant who received one talent was different from the others. About him, the Lord told, "*But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money*" (v.18). The statement starts with *"But*," indicating a contrast in this man from others. He was not as zealous as the other servants. He did not trade with the wealth, as he was expected to do. He went, dug in the ground, and hid the Lord's money. Hiding valuable items underground was a common practice in the ancient world. There were no bank vaults or lockers. Thus, the easiest way to keep things safe was to dig a pit and put them in the earth. Even in the parable of the treasure (Matthew 13:44), the man who saw a treasure in a field took and hid it in the field. This was a simple and sensible way to keep valuable items safe. The important matter here is that the talent was not given to him for safekeeping. He was supposed to trade with it.

A Time of Reckoning

Verses 19 to 30 speak about the master's reckoning with the servants and rewarding them according to their works. Verse 19 begins with the words, "*After a long time.*" We do not know how long it took for the master to come. However, it was sufficient time for trading and making a good profit for the master. He who received five talents came first and gave his account. Probably, he was called first. After him came the servant who was given two talents. Both, by their labour, had doubled their master's money. The rewards given to them were also similar.

Firstly, the master gives them a commendation in words. He said, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" The two words, *'good'* and *'faithful,'* say much about these two servants. They were good in themselves, and so they were faithful to their lord in their works.

Secondly, they were promised more responsibilities. The lord said, "*You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.*"

Thirdly, the servants were given entrance into the joy of the master.

Then comes the servant to whom one talent was given. He reports his activity with the talent he received. Three things are clear in what he says: his knowledge of his master, how that affected his attitude toward the master, and his actions. He describes his master as a hard man who reaps where he did not sow. This was his understanding of his master, which made him afraid. That faulty knowledge and wrong attitude caused him to hide the master's talent in the ground. Here, we see all parts of his personality at play. Knowledge reflects his intellect; his fear shows his emotions; and hiding the money demonstrates his will. All three—intellect, emotions, and will—were involved. His incorrect attitude and actions stemmed from his flawed personality.

The master calls him a wicked and lazy servant. Those were his problems. When the first two were 'good,' he was 'wicked.'

This, in turn, made him lazy at work. He did not object to the assessment the master made. Even that knowledge should have led him to give the money to bankers and allowed the master to take it back with interest. But he kept the wealth idle. The money was not small but huge. Thus, the loss sustained was also huge. The punishment given to him was also threefold. Firstly, in the place of commendation, he was condemned as wicked and slothful. Secondly, instead of giving him more responsibilities, what he had was also taken away. Thirdly, instead of the joy of the master, he was thrown into the outer darkness.

Good and Faithful Servants

The talent seized from the slothful servant was given to the servant who had ten talents. The Lord gave the reason for this in verse 29. "*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away."* The more faithful shall be given more responsibilities.

God had chosen Israel as His servants. They were brought out from Egypt that they may serve God. "*Let My people go, that they may serve Me"* (Exodus 8:1). "*But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away*" (Isaiah 41:8-10). But they failed in their duties. Now they are blinded and rejected. But in the Tribulation time, the end times, they shall have a ministry to accomplish. The 144000 seen in Revelation 7 shall be chosen to serve Him in the end times. These are the Jewish witnesses. They should prove their faithfulness. They should be seen as good and faithful. Such shall be commended, rewarded, and they shall enter the joy of the Lord in the Kingdom of God. The parable is primarily for the Israelites, but it has principles for God's people in this church age. The Lord is now absent. But He shall come soon. There are responsibilities for believers in the present age to accomplish.

Each believer must prove themselves as '*good and faithful*' and finish the works entrusted to them. The spiritual abilities they are endowed with, they should use for the good of others and the glory of God. And when the Lord shall come, He shall reward them.

22

The Sheep and the Goats

With the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus was concluding His great Olivet Discourse. Though it is often called a parable, it is not taken as such by many. Jesus was telling about an event decreed by God, which would happen when He comes to the earth. The event is the judgment of the Gentiles before the throne of His glory. In presenting the truths about the event, Jesus employed parabolic elements, such as sheep, goats, and shepherds. Due to the presence of these elements, the narrative is mostly known as a parable. This is narrated in Matthew 25:31-46.

The Throne of Glory

In the glorious appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, His feet shall touch the Mount of Olives. After the destruction of all that rises against the Lord, He shall set up His Millennial Kingdom. Only those who are righteous shall enter therein. Israelites shall be cleansed from their sins. All those who repent and turn to the Lord shall be ushered into the kingdom. The Gentiles who have exercised their faith in Jehovah-God through the witnessing of the Jews, who shall express their faith by helping the people of Israel in their time of trial, in the Great Tribulation, shall also be ushered into the kingdom. Before taking them into the kingdom, they shall be judged before the throne of glory.

Matthew 25:32 says, *"All the nations shall be gathered before Him."* Is this judgment before the throne of glory individual or national? The phrase "*all the nations*" gives the impression that

this shall be a national judgment. But Pentecost suggests otherwise. He says,

> "This will not be a judgment of nations as national entities but of individuals from the nations. If this were a judgment of national entities, it is obvious that some unsaved would be included in an accepted nation; on the other hand, some saved would be excluded because they were in a rejected nation. Therefore, it must be concluded that this will be a judgment of individuals, not of nations."[1]

This explanation indicates that the nations shall not be judged as nations, but everyone will stand before the throne of glory and be judged. The basis of the judgment of the Gentiles at the throne of glory is narrated in this parable of the sheep and the goats.

One important matter here is that the disciples had not asked about all these matters that shall happen at the coming of the Lord. They only wanted to know the time and signs of His coming. In the earlier part of the Sermon, He had made it clear. He had answered their questions. Jesus did not stop with that. He goes on explaining the other details. He tells them the duties of the Israelites in the end times and the response of the Gentiles to them and the judgment that shall be meted out to the Gentiles at His glorious appearance. In this, we see the grace of God. He not only taught others to 'go the second mile,' but also practised it.

Segregating Sheep and Goats

Jesus told the disciples about the judgment of the Gentiles when He comes in His glory. Jesus said, "*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left*" (vv. 31-33). Jesus refers to the coming of the Son of Man. This title is repeatedly used in the Discourse (24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44). The title of the Son of Man is not identified as Himself anywhere in the Discourse. But the question the disciples asked, for which

the discourse is an answer, clearly indicates that the title is used for Himself. The question was, "*What will be the sign of your coming?"* (24:3). In answer, Jesus tells about the sign of the coming of the Son of Man, indicating clearly that He is the Son of Man. The inference is inescapable. Jesus was telling about Himself. He was referring to His coming in glory.

The title, Son of Man, connects Jesus with the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13. "*I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him."* In this passage, the title is a Messianic title. When Jesus used this title, He was claiming to be the Messiah.

The following are the details from the passage about the coming of the Lord in His glory.

The Son of Man shall come in His glory.

He shall come with His holy angels.

He shall sit on His throne of glory.

He shall gather all nations.

He shall separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

These give us a summary of the events at the judgment of the Gentiles. There are seven judgments seen in the scripture. Firstly, the judgment upon sin. This happened on the cross with the sacrifice of Jesus. Secondly, the judgment of self. This happens with oneself. Thirdly, the judgment of the works of saints. This would be at the rapture of the saints, before the judgment seat of Christ. Fourthly, Israel shall be judged when the Lord comes. Fifthly, the judgment of the Gentiles. Sixthly, Satan and his cohorts judged. Lastly, all the wicked shall be judged before the Great White Throne. Out of these judgments, our consideration now is the judgment of the Gentiles.

Joel 3:1,2 helps to understand where this judgment shall occur. Joel says, *"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My*

people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land." The passage clearly shows that the judgment shall be in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

The identity of the valley of Jehoshaphat is also a matter of contention, as it is difficult to decide. Some say that it is the valley of Berachah (2 Chronicles 20:26). Here, Jehoshaphat defeated the Moabites and the Ammonites. Another suggestion is that it is the Valley of Kidron. It is near Jerusalem, dividing the city from the Mount of Olives. This valley is also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. But it came to be known by this name only later, many decades after these were recorded. There is another suggestion, which sounds more probable. According to this suggestion, this valley shall be the valley that shall develop by dividing asunder the Mount of Olives, when the feet of Jesus shall touch the Mountain of Olives. Zechariah says, "*And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south."* This shall develop at the coming of Jesus at the time of His coming in judgment. The word *'Jehoshaphat'* means 'Jehovah judges.' Thus, it is appropriate that the valley should be called the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

The Parabolic Elements

The parabolic elements in the narrative are the shepherd, sheep, and goats. Jesus said, "*He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."* He was telling what shall happen on the day of that judgment. Like a shepherd dividing the goats from the sheep, the Lord shall divide the righteous from the unrighteous.

The illustration of separating the sheep from the goat was very familiar to the people in the Middle East. During the day, it happened very often. The main occupation for people there was shepherding. The shepherds take their flock to the pastures and rivers during the day. In the nighttime, they gather them into the

sheepfold. In all these activities, the dividing of the sheep from the goats happens. When it is taken to the pastures, this division becomes necessary. The goats are more powerful and active. They may not allow the sheep to eat grass. Sheep are slow and feeble. Thus, to take them to the pasture, this division becomes necessary. When the flock is taken to the waters, this becomes necessary. If the goats are allowed to go first to the water, they will drink to the full and dirty the remaining water, making it undrinkable. The sheep will not be able to drink. In the evening, when the flock is taken to the fold, this becomes necessary as the goats need special care. They do not have fleece like the sheep have. If the nights are cold, it needs shelter to keep it warm from the cold. As the sheep has a thick fleece, such care is not necessary for them. They can be left in the open at night. These indicate that the division of goats from the sheep happens throughout the day among the flock. The division was a common sight. Thus, the metaphor that the Lord uses here is easy to follow for those who heard it.

The sheep is said to be on the right hand, and the goats on the left hand. This may be because sheep have more value because of their fleece, milk, and meat. The right side is commonly taken as the good side. The left side is often taken as the side of disfavour or bad fortune. Goats and animals of lesser commercial value are given this side. As we shall see later, those who are given the right side are righteous, and those on the left are unrighteous. Sheep or flock is the Old Testament image for God's people.

Inherit the Kingdom

In verses 34 - 46, Jesus speaks about the judgment on the nations. They are portrayed as people on the right and the left. One important matter to notice is that the Son of Man becomes the *"King"* v. 34. This change very much follows the pattern seen in Daniel 7. The son of Man approaches the 'Ancient of Days' to receive the eternal kingdom. "*I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory*

and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed" (vv. 13, 14). '*One like the Son of Man*' receives an eternal kingdom!

In verses 34 to 40, judgment of the righteous is seen. "*Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.*'

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (vv. 34-40). These words of the Lord indicate that these were chosen for the blessedness reserved from before the foundation of the world, that is, the past eternity. Also, whatever they did in faith in helping Israel in their distress was considered as done to the Lord. They shall be rewarded accordingly.

This is followed by the words of judgment of the Lord to those who were on the left, the unrighteous. He asked them to depart from Him. This is ominous, the worst judgment anyone can receive. God gave them up to eternal separation and punishment. The everlasting fire was not prepared for them. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. However, these landed in them as it was their choice. They were given this judgment as they did not help the Israelites in the Great Tribulation.

Notice the words of the Lord, *"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I*

was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The Lord does not want anyone to perish. Paul says, "*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1 Timothy 2:3,4). If anyone lands in hell, it is not God's choice for him, but his own choice.

Cor Bruins says,

> "In verse 34 the sheep are addressed as "blessed of My Father." True, we do not have here the heights of the Church saints who are children of their heavenly Father. But there is a vast difference with those addressed in verse 41 as "ye cursed" - not cursed of My Father, for God wants all men to be saved."[2]

'These My Brethren'

The Lord's judgment upon the nations was according to their dealing with "*these My brethren.*" These are the Jewish people who are His brethren after the flesh. Jesus was born a Jew. Thus, He calls them 'brethren.' These are the Jewish people who shall live and witness for the Lord during the Great Tribulation. As they shall not receive the mark of the Antichrist, they shall suffer much during that time. They shall not be able to buy or sell anything. Persecution shall be unprecedented in measure. It shall be a time of Jacob's trouble. But they shall be helped in this time by some Gentiles. These are the ones who are called the righteous and ushered into the kingdom. This does not mean that salvation shall be by works, then. At any time, salvation shall be only by grace and faith. So shall be in the Tribulation time also. Salvation shall be by faith alone. But the works they shall do in helping the Israelites in the time of their trouble shall be evidence of their faith in the gospel of the kingdom that shall be preached then.

Jesus said, *"These My brethren."* This indicates that they were present at the time of the judgment on the nations. Cor Bruins states,

> "Chapter 24:14 tells us that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations. In chapter 25, we find the messengers who have preached this coming kingdom. They are called Christ's brethren."[3]

This blessing the Gentiles received may be traced as the fulfillment of what the Lord told Abraham in blessing him. The Lord God said that in Abraham the nations shall be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). In the Tribulation, they shall especially be witnesses to the Gentiles (Joel 3:2; Isaiah 66:19,20; Zechariah 8:20-23; Revelation 7:1-8). The faith of Rahab or Ruth is an illustration of this future blessing (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

The blessings His people shall enjoy at the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Glorious Appearance, and the concern He would have for them, and Israel becoming the basis for the Lord's dealing with the nations, shall be matters of great encouragement to the Israelites. If the Lord is so careful for His people and for those who favour them in the Tribulation time, how much more is He now with the Church!

We may say that the Lord concludes His great Discourse with a high note. He concludes by narrating the eschatological truths associated with the Throne of Glory, to show His care for His own, the Israelites.

Luke concludes the Discourse with a summary of His ministries throughout the week. He says, *"And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him"* (Luke 21:37, 38). Jesus is seen among the crowds and alone with the disciples, tirelessly labouring.

V

The Upper Room

"When the hour had come, He sat down,
and the twelve apostles with Him" Luke 22:14.

23

Closer to the Cross

Jesus begins moving closer to the crucifixion. Of course, He had come to this world for this very purpose. His face was turned to the cross like a flint. Nothing could swerve Him from the mission. But the time has come nearer to accomplish the task. It was only two days away from the cross. The events that should be fulfilled before the crucifixion are the keeping of the Passover, washing of the feet of the disciples, instituting the Lord's supper, the Upper Room ministry, followed by the intercessory prayer, arrest at Gethsemane, and the trials before the religious and civil authorities. The immediate event here is the keeping of the Passover Feast, its preparations, and matters associated with it. The Passover and the related events are recorded in Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16; Mark 14:1,2,10-16; Luke 22:1-13.

The Prophecy About Betrayal

Matthew opens chapter 26 with these words, *"Now it came to pass when Jesus had finished all these sayings"* (v.1). This phrase occurs here for the fifth and the last time in this Gospel. It is seen in 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1. All these references come after some important discourses. The first reference comes after the Sermon on the Mount and the second after the discourse on discipleship. The third reference comes after Jesus' discourse on the kingdom parables, and 19:1 comes after His teaching on greatness and forgiveness. The last reference (26:1) comes after His great discourse on the Mount of Olives.

Jesus announces His death once more. He said, *"You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified"* (26:2). This is the fourth and the last time the Lord spoke to the disciples about the cross. The other references are 16:21; 17:23, and 20:18. Now He announces it again. Each announcement has something more than what was told before. Now, Jesus tells them about the betrayal.

Spurgeon comments,

> "Our Lord, having finished all these sayings about the destruction of Jerusalem, his own Second Advent, and the great Day of Judgment, brought back the thoughts of his disciples to his own death. He had often foretold what the end of his life would be; he now states definitely when it would be: "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover." In a sense that they probably did not fully comprehend, the Passover, the one great Passover, was about to be observed."[1]

Jesus knew all the details of the events that awaited Him. This was unlike others who suffered before or after Him. None of the prophets or apostles knew beforehand what they should suffer. Even Apostle Paul says, "*I go up to Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there."* This should be carefully noted. Jesus knew all that should happen to Him. *"He said, "The Son of Man is delivered up to be crucified."* (YLT, Darby, etc.). The Lord used the past tense here as if the betrayal was past already. The past tense usage can be explained as the certainty Jesus had about the betrayal and crucifixion. He was committed to all that would happen.

Jesus had arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12:1,12). Probably, He entered Jerusalem the day after that. Now Jesus said that two days after was the Passover. This indicates that three days had passed after the Triumphal entry. These three days have been very hectic. He cleansed the Temple. This triggered the animosity of Jewish leaders and caused queries from the Temple authorities. The Jewish leaders also came against Him with various questions. Jesus had to answer all these. He spent time with the disciples and prepared them for the future. He would do this again. The last two days before Passover, that

is, before the cross, He would spend time alone with the disciples preparing them for their future life and ministry. The time before Him was very precious. But compared to the first three days in Jerusalem, the last two days were relatively relaxed. He was mostly with His disciples.

Luke calls the feast of the Passover, as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "*Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover"* (22:1). This indicates the inseparable connection between these two Festivals. With the beginning of the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread also began. The spiritual truths connected with these are significant. This is stated in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul says, "*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"* (v. 7). This calls for holiness in the lives of those who are redeemed. These two feasts are seen as connected in Josephus. Geldenhuys notes,

> "In practice, however, these two festivals were regarded as one, and the whole feast was, in common parlance, merely called the Passover. So also Josephus writes in his *Antiquities xiv, 21, I.* ('At the season of the festival of unleavened bread which we call Passover')."[2]

The Plot Thickens

Luke tells the plan of the Jewish leaders. He says, *"And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people"* (Luke 22:2). They huddled in the High Priest's palace. Matthew says, *"Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people"* (Matthew 26:3-5). Caiaphas was the high priest in the year when Jesus was crucified. He was the one who said that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation perish (John 11:50).

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas, who was his predecessor in the office. Quoting another, Pentecost writes that Annas was the high priest from AD 6 to 15. After him, his four

sons and his son-in-law held this office. No other high priest ever had such dignity.[3] This does not mean that his spiritual standing and state were very high. Romans appointed men to this office according to their desires and will. Those who were favourable to them and served their purposes were given the office. Corruption characterised this office and the Roman government.

Since the Roman invasion of Palestine, the high priesthood was not granted according to heredity. From BC 37 to AD 67, the Romans appointed 28 high priests. On average, 6 or 7 years were given for each one. But Caiphas ruled from AD 18 to 36. This long-term position given to him was not because of his nobility or character, but only for his subtlety, which pleased the Romans. Barclay says,

> "This was an extraordinarily long time for a high priest to last, and Caiphas must have brought the technique of cooperating with the Romans to a fine art. And therein precisely there lay his problem."[4]

The meeting of these high officials of the Jews in the palace of the high priest did not consider whether Jesus should be put to death or not. They had already decided on that. They were only waiting for the appropriate time to put Him on the cross. They agreed not to do it until the feast was over. But the fact is that the crucifixion happened on the day of the Passover feast, contrary to what they planned. This is clear evidence that although they put Him on the cross, matters were not progressing according to their plans, but according to the eternal purposes of God.

Certain other matters also did not work as they expected. They wanted to break His legs. This was normally done to those who were crucified to hasten their death. But Jesus was already dead. They could not break His legs (John 19:33,34). This happened according to the prophecies (Psalm 34:20). Then they wanted to remove the superscription written on the cross, which stated that He was the King of the Jews (John 19:21, 22). Pilate disallowed this. They planned to bury Him with the thieves crucified with Him. But, in His burial, He was with the rich. This plan of burial is not narrated in the Gospels, but Isaiah prophesied it (Isaiah 53:9). They even wanted to block His resurrection (Matthew

27:66). But He rose again on the third day. These show that the matters were not according to their ideas. But all things happened according to the plan of God, which He had determined in past eternity. Peter says, "*Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that He should be held by it"* (Acts 2:23-24). Men were not in control of the events, but Heaven!

During the Feasts, the number of people who come to Jerusalem shall be numerous. Barclay says,

> "It is Josephus's estimate that there were in the city for that Passover some two and three-quarters million people"[5]

A small spark can set the whole city ablaze. So, the Romans were very careful. If such things occurred, Caiaphas could lose his position. Thus, they did not want to arrest Jesus during the Feast days. However, Judas Iscariot's approach changed this plan. He came and offered to betray Jesus for money!

Luke says, "*Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad and agreed to give him money. So, he promised and sought an opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude"* (Luke 22:3-6).

Cor Bruins comments on the use of the surname with his name. He says,

> "Some think that 'Ish Kerioth', meaning 'man of Kerioth,' would indicate that he was the only Judean among the disciples; all the rest of them were from Galilee. Others think that the name has the same root as "Issachar," which means "there is reward." And again, in the name is found the word "Shacar," from which is derived the word "Eschar" (Ezekiel 27:15) with a similar meaning. Iscariot, therefore, even means "trafficker" and thus refers to his crime!"[6]

The statement, "*Then Satan entered Judas,"* does not mean that he was possessed. He was acting freely and independently.

This is evident from what Luke says in verse 4. "*So, he went his way."* He was doing things on his own. But he submitted to Satan to enter him and play havoc with his life. Norman Crawford sees more in this statement. He says,

> "Luke and John record that Satan entered into Judas (John 13:27). The vague suggestion that Judas was overcome by an evil influence does not satisfy these statements. Satan did not leave such an important task to any of his emissaries. In a coming day, Satan will so energise the beast that he will speak Satan's words and do his deeds (Revelation 13:1-7). It is significant that only two men in all history are called "the son of perdition," Judas in John 17:12, and "that man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Luke's comment that Judas was "of the number of the twelve" is a tremendous contrast to "Then entered Satan into Judas."[7]

Matthew informs that the reward for betrayal was thirty shekels of silver. *"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him"* (Matthew 26:14-16). If a slave is gored by an ox, the owner of the ox must pay for the slave thirty shekels of silver. The amount was the same, thirty pieces of silver (Exodus 21:32). This was the amount the nation of Israel estimated for their Messiah (Zechariah 11:12, 13)!

Leon Morris, quoting Plummer, suggests a connection between anointing and betrayal.

> "Plummer points out that thirty shekels of silver would be worth about 120 denarii, and that Judas would hardly have been able to steal more than that amount out of the 300 denarii that the unguent was worth (Mark 14:5)."[8]

Had Mary sold the ointment and brought it to the Lord, it would have come to Judas for keeping. As we see elsewhere, he used to steal from the coffer. But nothing went to the coffer as she poured the ointment at Jesus' feet. Judas was making good of what he lost, by betraying his Master!

Matthew says that Judas was given money immediately (Matthew 26:15). But Mark and Luke give the impression that

the Jewish leaders promised to give him money (Mark 14:11; Luke 22:5). Most probably, Mark and Luke might be giving the matter according to the order of the events. Matthew may be merging events that happened at different times. Considering all three records, it seems Judas received the money before he betrayed Jesus. From then on, he sought an opportune time to complete his work.

Mary Anointing Jesus

Matthew and Mark narrate the anointing of Jesus at Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). Luke omits the event from his record. Many think that the anointing recorded in John 12:1-8 is the same event. But John says that it happened six days before the Passover (John 12:1). Matthew and Mark record it with the events that occurred two days before the Passover (Matthew 26:2; Mark 14:1). The anointing might have happened six days before the Passover. Matthew and Mark recorded it with the events that transpired two days before the Passover, along with the betrayal, to show the contrast between what the woman did to Him when one of the Twelve tried to betray Him. Or, as seen before, it is placed here as it gives the reason for betrayal.

In the narratives, there are differences between them. But these differences are not irreconcilable. The narratives are not contradictory but complementary. Matthew and Mark do not give the name of the woman who anointed Jesus. It is John who provides the name. Matthew says that it happened when Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper (26:6). The relationship between these sisters and Simon is unknown. It is left to conjecture. Mark informs that some murmured (14:4). Matthew says that it was the disciples who murmured (26:8). But John identifies the leader of the murmurers and says that it was Judas (12:4).

About the eating feast in the house of Simon the Leper, Albert Barnes says,

> "It was unlawful to eat with persons that had leprosy; and it is more than probable, therefore, that this Simon had been healed—perhaps by our Lord himself. Jn. 12:1 says that this was the house

where Lazarus was, who had been raised from the dead. Probably Lazarus was a relative of Simon's and was living with him."[9]

Barnes further explains,

"The reason why Judas was indignant was that he had the bag (John 12:6), i.e., the purse, or repository of articles given to the disciples and the Saviour. He was a thief and was in the habit, it seems, of taking out and putting to his use what was put in for them in common. The leading trait of Judas' character was avarice, and no opportunity was suffered to pass without attempting by base and wicked means to make money. In his example, an avaricious man may learn the true nature and the effect of that grovelling and wicked passion. It led him to commit the enormous crime of betraying his Lord to death; and it will always lead its possessor to guilt"[9]

In the details of anointing, there are some apparent contradictions. The common practice was to anoint the head or hair. Nevertheless, John records that she poured it on the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair (John 12:3). But the Synoptics say that she poured it on His head. But there is no contradiction. She probably poured it both on his head and his feet. Matthew and Mark recorded the former, and John recorded the latter. John, who wrote his gospel in part to record events omitted by others, relates that the ointment was also poured on the feet of Jesus. Pouring ointment on the head was a common practice. To pour it on the feet was an act of distinguished humility and attachment to the Lord, and therefore deserved to be particularly recorded. Thus, we get the complete picture of what happened only when all records are taken together.

In ancient times, people sat on couches and had food. Legs are folded backwards. The woman might have come from behind and anointed the head and feet of Jesus. John says that it was a very costly ointment. The disciples, led by Judas Iscariot, estimated the price of it as three hundred denarii. This is equal to the annual wages of a common labourer. This indicates that it was indeed costly. Probably she had it with her for a long time. She kept it to be given to the worthiest person. When the opportunity came, she did not want to miss it. She used it to

honour the worthiest One in her life, her Lord and Master. Her brother Lazarus had died just a few weeks back. But she did not use it for his burial. And when she anointed the Lord Jesus, she did not keep a part of it for use on anyone else. She broke the alabaster box and poured it wholly on Jesus.

Indignant Disciples

Matthew says, "*But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor'*" (26:8-9). This they said among themselves. Mark says that they criticised sharply (Mark 14:5). It was Judas who did this. John gives the reason for his reaction. "*This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it*" (John 12:6). But Jesus justified the anointing of Mary. "*But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her*" (Matthew 26:10-13). How commendable was the anointing of Mary! It was noble and timely. Certain women went to anoint Him after He was dead and buried. But they could not do it. But Mary could anoint Jesus and was commended by the Lord because she made use of the opportunity. She is an example for all believers to follow.

24

Keeping the Passover

Passover commemorates the deliverance of the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. For more than four centuries, Israel was in captivity. When it became rigorous, they cried to the Lord, and the Lord heard their cries. He sent Moses and Aaron to bring them out of their captivity. Ten plagues were sent upon Egypt, and God showed the might of His power over creation, visible and invisible. The tenth plague was the slaying of the firstborn. All firstborn of the men and beasts were slain. But the houses where the lamb was killed and its blood applied on the doorposts and the lintels were safe from the angel of death. All the Israelites believed the words of Moses, which he spoke from God, and applied the blood at their doorposts and lintels. The angel of death passed over them. That night, they were delivered from captivity when the Egyptians were mourning over the death of their firstborns. Jehovah God asked Israel to remember this every year by keeping the Passover feast. This was the first feast among the seven annual feasts of Jehovah. As per the Law, all the males were commanded to come to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate feasts, in the time of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Jesus and the disciples came to Jerusalem, as any other Jew would come to celebrate the Passover. The Lord had a greater purpose for the arrival. He went to the city to offer Himself as the Passover Lamb, bearing the sin of the world. In the offering of Abel, a lamb was sacrificed for an individual. In the Passover, one lamb was offered for a family. On the Day of Atonement, a

lamb was offered for the nation. But Jesus bore the sin of the world on Himself and gave Himself as a sacrifice for all. That hour of the sacrifice was coming near. Jesus and the disciples were there in the city for that very purpose. He would offer Himself on the cross. But before that happens, Jesus would eat the Passover feast with the disciples. The earnestness with which the Lord looked forward to this moment is evident from the words of the Lord. Luke says," *When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With fervent desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God"* (Luke 22:14-16). These words indicate the importance Jesus gave to this moment.

Preparation for the Passover

Luke narrates the preparation for the Passover. *"Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." So, they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready." So, they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover"* (Luke 22:7-13). Matthew tells us that the disciples came and asked the Lord where they should prepare for the Passover. "*Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"* (Matthew 26:17). Mark also records the question disciples asked about the preparation. In response to their query, Jesus tells them where to prepare for the Passover.

It was the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which was the day of the Passover. According to Leviticus 23:5, the Passover was observed on the 14th of the month of Nisan.

Formerly, this month was called Abib. All leaven was removed from houses. The lamb was slain between the two evenings. (Exodus 12:6; Numbers 9:3,5,11). The lamb was slain between 3 PM and sunset. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread began on the 15th day. As no leaven was allowed at the Passover feast, the Jews linked together the two feasts. Pentecost states,

> "We note that the entire Passover season was referred to as 'the feast of Unleavened Bread.' Thus, 'Unleavened Bread' referred to the Passover as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed for seven days (Leviticus 23:4-8). It seems that since the days of the Dispersion, the Jews had added an extra day at the beginning of the eight days of this festival season and called it the Day of Preparation."[1]

It is worth noticing that the Lord sent Peter and John to prepare for the Passover. It is generally understood that Peter was the most senior among the apostles and John was the junior-most. Thus, Jesus sent the oldest and the youngest among the twelve for Passover preparation. These stand for experience and energy, respectively. Both are essential for preparations. Peter might have given directions for the preparation. John might have done the running around and the doing part of most things, as he was younger. In Acts 3, these two apostles, Peter and John, are seen going to the Temple together and healing the lame man. This provides a pattern for practising in every area, whether secular or spiritual. This helps to do things relatively perfectly, gives experience to the younger, and forms future leaders.

The place where Jesus sent them for preparation is also important. The Lord sent them to the city and talked about a person whom they would meet. He will be carrying a "*pitcher of water.*" This description of the man is important. Geldenhuys records, water in a pitcher was commonly borne by women. When men carried water, it was normally in 'water skins.'[2] This sign indicates that the disciples would have no problem identifying the man. Among the men there, he was unique in carrying a pitcher. The words of the Lord make it clear that the man knew Jesus personally and, if so, he knew the disciples too. It seems that he knew that Jesus would be keeping the Passover in his

house. He had the place for the purpose. An interesting matter to notice is that certain versions render verse 14 as, *"Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is My guestroom where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"* (NET, NASB, DARBY, NIV). This shows that it was a house where he frequently visited. He had a guest room in that house which He could call *"My guest room."* This shows the devotion the house owner had for Jesus. Referring to tradition, Geldenhuys says that the house was the house of Mark's mother.[2]

Geldenhuys gives the order of Passover preparation. He says,

> "The Jewish custom at the time of Jesus (and today still) was that families on the night before the Passover, ie, in the evening following the 13th Nisan (the month which usually commences during the second half of March), searched through their houses thoroughly and collected every bit of leaven or leavened cake to burn it on the following day. Towards noon on the following day (the 14th Nisan), there must be no more leaven in the houses, and the unleavened loaves must be made ready for the Passover. Therefore, Luke rightly calls this day the 'day of unleavened bread.' Between about 2.30 p m until about 6 p m on that day (14th Nisan) the paschal lambs had to be slaughtered and made ready for the Passover, which commenced a little after sunset (according to Jewish chronology it was thus, after sunset, the beginning of the 15th Nisan, the first day of the seven days' 'festival of unleavened bread,' sometimes also merely called 'Passover').[3]

Barclay gives a list of things to be prepared for the Passover.

> "There were four items necessary for the Feast. 1. A bowl of salt water had to be set upon the table, to remind them of the tears they had shed while they were slaves in Egypt and of the salt waters of the Red Sea through which God's hand had wondrously brought them. 2. A collection of bitter herbs had to be prepared, a compound of horseradish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound, and the like. This was again to remind them of the bitterness of slavery, and of the bunch of hyssop with which the blood of the lamb had been smeared on the lintel and the doorposts. 3. There was a paste called the Charosheth. It was a mixture of apples,

> dates, pomegranates, and nuts. It was to remind them of the clay with which they had been compelled to make bricks in Egypt, and through it, there were sticks of cinnamon to remind them of the straw with which the bricks had been made. 4. Lastly, there were four cups of wine. These were to remind them of the four promises of Exodus 6:6,7. "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians; I will deliver you from the bondage; and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment; I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."[4]

From the conversation between Jesus and the disciples, it seems the host of the house where Jesus was going to eat the Passover was known to Jesus and the disciples. Probably, Jesus visited the house often. The room for keeping the Passover was prearranged. Jesus might have told the householder that He would eat the Passover there. Thus, the host had prepared the room for Jesus and the disciples. Then, naturally, a question may arise. Why did Jesus not give the name of the host of that upper room, or the address directly? The reason for this may be the presence of Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew that he was looking for an opportunity to betray Him. If he knew that they were planning to have Passover there, he might plan to bring the Jews there. Jesus did not want to have such interruptions while keeping the Feast. Thus, he did not give the details to hide the matter from Judas. In the conversations, the sovereignty and omniscience of Jesus are evident.

Gathered in the Upper Room

When the time for eating the Passover came, Jesus went with the disciples to the prearranged place. Matthew says, *"When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve"* (Matthew 26:20). Mark also gives similar information (14:12). Luke records, *"When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him"* (Luke 22:14). Darrel Bock says,

> "In the evening, which would be around 6 PM, at sundown, they gathered together at the table in the upper room. This table likely would have been in the shape of a U, not a long, straight table."[5]

Commonly, Palestinian houses were constructed with three parts: a lower floor, a higher floor, and an upper room. Jesus and the disciples gathered in the upper room.

When the Israelites kept the Passover when they left Egypt, they ate the Passover standing, in haste. The practice probably altered over time. Barnes explains,

> "At first, the supper was eaten standing, with the loins girded and their staff in their hand, denoting the haste with which they were about to flee from Egypt. Afterwards, however, they introduced the practice, it seems, of partaking of this as they did of their ordinary meals. The original word is, he reclined; i.e., he placed himself on the couch in a reclining posture, in the usual manner in which they partook of their meals."[6]

According to this, the sitting is understood to have been on couches. When it says He sat with the Twelve, it includes Judas Iscariot.

Washing of Disciples' Feet

Before eating the Passover, it was necessary to wash the feet of all those who had come. This was one of the steps in receiving a guest into the house. The Middle Eastern roads were dusty. People walked without sandals or shoes. While walking a long distance in the sun, feet become dirty. Sweat and dust mix, and it becomes muddied. Thus, washing of feet was necessary. Jesus and the disciples were gathered in the upper room. They had come after a long walk. Normally, the host must wash the feet of the guests who come to his house or arrange for this. But such arrangements were not made. The host might have thought that one of the disciples would do that. Now the time had come for somebody to do that. Without feet washing, they could not eat the prepared Passover supper.

John's Gospel gives more details about the washing of the disciples' feet. John says, "*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*" (John 13:1). The Passover Supper was ready.

Jesus knew that His hour had come. In John's Gospel, the 'hour' occurs from its beginning. At Cana of Galilee, Jesus said, "*'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come"* (John 2:4). Another time He told His brothers, *"My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready"* (John 7:6). Then He prayed to His Father and said, *"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour"* (John 12:27). Now John says, *"When Jesus knew that His hour had come."* John describes that 'hour' as the time when Jesus should depart from the world and go to His Father. This indicates the time when Jesus should ascend to the Father's presence. That would be the time of His glorification. Later, in His prayer to the Father, He would mention this again (17:1). John records that as Jesus knew He was departing from them, He loved them even unto the end. This may be understood as His love to the uttermost or the very end. This means His love toward them was not limited to the washing of their feet, or even His death for them, which followed, though we see there the highest expression of His love, but it was eternal. The amplified version renders it as "He loved them (and continuously loves them with His perfect love) to the end (eternally)." Above all, it shows His readiness to go to any extent, in time or space, to show His love toward them. Immediately after this, Jesus washes their feet. He was expressing His love toward them. Jesus calls the disciples "little children" (John 13:33). This is an endearing address, a word that a mother would call her little son. This was the word with which Mary called her son Jesus (Luke 2:48). Now, Jesus was dealing with His disciples as a mother would her children!

"And supper being ended" (v.2) does not mean the meal was finished. It only meant that the supper was ongoing. Another translation states, "The evening meal was in progress" (NET). Satan had put it in the heart of Judas to betray Jesus, indicating he was resolute in his betrayal. Matthew shows that he had received the money beforehand. *"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out*

to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him" (Matthew 26:14-16). He may have received this before they gathered in the Upper Room, and now, he was waiting for the right moment.

"You Shall Never Wash My Feet"

It was the servants who washed the feet of others. But here, the Master washes the disciples' feet. This is an amazing act, something that does not occur among humans. A South Indian, a renowned patriarch in the secular music industry, and not a follower of the Lord, recently said that he had never heard of a master washing the disciples' feet. That, he said, is heard only about Jesus. This action of the Lord is acclaimed by the world, as an act having no equal in human history.

John says, *"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded"* (John 13:3-5). In washing their feet, we see seven actions of Jesus. He rose from the supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, girded Himself, poured water, began to wash their feet, and wiped their feet. The number seven is often taken for perfection. Here we have the perfect humility of Jesus. This humility is blended with the knowledge of Jesus. He knew that all things were given unto Him. In His prayer before entering the Garden of Gethsemane, He would mention some of the things that were given to Him by the Father. He was given the power to give eternal life (17:2), His men (17:6), words (17:8), glory (17:22), and love (17:26).

As Jesus was washing the disciples' feet, He came to Peter. John says, *"Then He came to Simon Peter* (v.6)." This shows that it was not Peter's feet He washed first. He washed somebody else's feet before this. We do not know whose feet it was. Probably, it was Judas's feet. He sat near Jesus. That is evident in the fact that Jesus gave the morsel of bread to him first. If that is so, he had no qualms about Jesus washing his feet!

But Peter objects when Jesus washes his feet. John says, *"And Peter said to Him, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?'" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean, and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean"* (John 13:6-11). At Peter's objection, Jesus said, *"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."* Jesus was lifting him to a higher level and teaching him spiritual lessons. He did not understand it then, but Jesus said he would know it later (v.7). He would know these spiritual lessons after the Spirit came. The washing of feet reminds us of the necessity of daily cleansing by His Word and His blood. Daily cleansing is necessary to keep our part with Him. This indicates fellowship. Our part in the Lord, which speaks of our relationship with God, is permanent. Once saved, we are saved forever. But fellowship is hindered by even a little sin. As we are prone to sin, the daily washing is a necessity.

In explaining the washing, Jesus used the illustration of Roman baths. In ancient times, public baths were used. People washed their clothes and bathed in such places. When they return home, they will have to walk on the dusty paths. Thus, while walking, dust and mud gather on the feet. Before entering their houses, they should wash their feet. This ancient practice is the illustration Jesus used. When Peter asked Jesus to wash his whole body, Jesus said that those who are bathed need not bathe again. Washing of their feet is sufficient. This implies that those who are washed, that is, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and are born again, need not be regenerated again. They only need the daily cleansing. Later, Peter came to know more of these truths and would instruct the believers on the need to be holy, as God, who called us, is holy (1 Peter 1:15).

"Wash One Another's Feet"

Jesus now instructed His followers that they should wash one another's feet. He said, *"So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'"* (John 13:12-17).

After washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus put on His garments again and sat down. If girding with the towel and washing the feet of His disciples showed His humility, putting on the garments and sitting down again shows His exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty. About the 'garment' Jesus wore, Pentecost says,

> "There are several hints in Scripture concerning the outer clothing which Christ wore. From the record given to us at the crucifixion, we know that He wore a seamless robe. This would have been an unusually costly robe. Normally, robes were made of strips of cloth that had been woven on narrow looms; these strips were sewn together to make a garment of sufficient size to be wrapped around an adult. But the robe that Christ wore had been specially prepared at great cost. We do not know its origin, but scripture does say that women of considerable means supported Christ during His ministry, evidently out of gratitude for the blessing He had bestowed on them (Luke 8:2,3)."[7]

After taking His seat, Jesus gave them the necessary instructions from the object lesson. They called Him "*Teacher and Lord,"* and Jesus said that so was He. The order here must be noticed. At first, we come to know His teachings. When we accept His teachings in our lives, He becomes our Lord. As we continue the path of discipleship, He becomes our "Lord and Master." The change in the order of the titles shows the progress in the path of discipleship to Jesus.

Then, Jesus asked them to emulate Him by washing one another's feet. This should not be taken literally. In the ancient Jewish world, washing feet was a customary practice that showed care and love for others. Today, we must consider how to demonstrate our love, care, and respect for others and express these feelings. The lesson Jesus taught in the Upper Room remains highly relevant today, as self-love and self-centeredness increase.

25

Instructions and Information

Jesus washed the disciples' feet and shared lessons with them. He provided them with more insights and established the Lord's Supper while they were in the upper room. While having the Passover meal, Jesus spoke about the betrayal, gave the new commandment, and detailed the denials, among other things.

The Passover Supper

Passover was a time of celebration in all the land. The preparations everywhere were elaborate. Roads and bridges in the path to Jerusalem would be repaired. The wayside tombs would be whitewashed. This was to avoid any ceremonial defilement of the pilgrims by touching the tombs. When it is whitewashed, it can be seen even in the night. During the weeks preceding the Passover, the significance of the festival shall be taught in the synagogues. Search shall be made in the whole house two days before the Passover, to make sure that there is no leaven in the quarters. The owner of the house would search the house, nook and corner, with a candle in hand. This is done until the last particle of leaven is thrown out.

Barclay states that every male Jew of age who lived within 15 miles of the holy city was required by law to attend the Passover. He adds that Jews all over the world longed to observe the Passover at least once in Jerusalem. Barclay cites data from the

report of Cestius, the governor of Palestine, written to Nero to showcase the splendour of the celebrations. To illustrate the greatness of the Passover to Nero, he mentioned the number of lambs slaughtered during the season. The count was 2,56,500. One lamb was shared by about ten people. This suggests that roughly 2,700,000 people celebrated the Passover that season. The crowd was so large that it gathered from across the globe to observe the Passover.

To avoid any flare-up of violence among the people during the festival season, more detachments of troops would be stationed in Jerusalem during the season. In the Passion Week, the Jews were also careful. The Jewish leaders knew that if they arrested Jesus during the Festival, as the people had high regard for Jesus, there could be problems that might be out of their control. However, the coming of Judas Iscariot changed their plans. He offered to help them arrest Jesus for money. The arrest happened during the festival week itself. This was according to the eternal purposes of God. The Lamb that takes away the sin of the world cannot die at any other time but on the day of the Passover.

The disciples, with the Lord, were in the Upper Room to keep the Passover. Peter and John had made the feast ready in the place where Jesus had sent them. In the arrangement of matters, we see the nature of Jesus. He was not a person who would arrange things only at the last minute. The place for the preparation for the Passover, arranging of the sign of the man with the water pot, and all things were set. Everything was prearranged.

Barclay writes in detail about the things that had to be prepared for the Passover.[2] The most important thing is the preparation of the Paschal lamb. The lamb was brought to the Temple. The person bringing the offering himself must slay the lamb. The blood was sacred to God. The life of the flesh is in the blood. The blood was collected in bowls and offered at the altar. Priests were present to collect the blood. The carcass of the lamb, after removing the entrails, was brought home for eating. It must

not be boiled. It was roasted wholly. It was roasted over coals of fire with its head, legs, and tail.

The table on which they ate the Passover was normally low and square. The people in the home and the guests partaking would sit on couches. They lean toward the left, resting on their left hands, and their right arms are free to take food from the table. Their feet would be folded backwards.

Apart from the roasted lamb, which is the primary item in the feast, other items were also prepared.

Unleavened bread should be made. This reminded them of the haste with which they left Egypt. They ate unleavened bread while they fled Egypt. A bowl of salt water was kept on the table. This salt water, apart from reminding them of the tears they shed in Egypt, also reminded them of the Red Sea, which they crossed miraculously. Then there was the collection of bitter herbs. These reminded them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Then there was a paste prepared from fruits and nuts, which was called Charosheth. This was for the remembrance of the clay with which they had made the bricks. There were four cups of wine, which they drank at different stages of the meal. These four cups of wine were to remind them of the four promises in Exodus 6:6,7. *"Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."*

The Passover meal was eaten in an orderly manner. The meal started with a benediction. This was followed by drinking a cup of wine. This is the cup of sanctification. It reminded them of the deliverance God gave them from slavery. Then the master of the meal makes a prayer and passes the basin with water for washing hands. After washing their hands, they ate bitter herbs dipped in sauce. Then the roasted lamb is brought. With another prayer and benediction, they ate bitter herbs again. Now the second

cup of wine is drunk. This is called the cup of deliverance. While they drink of it, they are supposed to remember that it was Jehovah who delivered them out of Egypt. At this moment, questions about the origin of the feast were asked, and answers were given. Then they sang the first part of the Hallel, Psalm 113 and 114, which was then followed by a benediction. The master of the feast takes a small part of unleavened bread with a piece of the roasted lamb, with bitter herbs, dips it in sauce, and gives them to each participant. Then all ate of the lamb. After washing their hands, a third cup of wine is passed to all. This cup is called the cup of redemption. This cup reminded them of the slaying of the lamb by which they were delivered from slavery. The second part of Hallel is sung. They are Psalms 115 to 118. The meal concludes with the drinking of the fourth cup of wine, which is called the cup of praise. This cup reminded them of the restoration when God would finally accept His people and gather them to Himself. These four cups are also called as cups of blessing, wrath, salvation and kingdom, respectively.

In the upper room, Jesus informs them about various things that would occur following the meal, in the ensuing hours, and prepares them for the future. Jesus said, *"Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He"* (John 13:19). This is not just about the betrayal but about all the things Jesus would tell them that should occur from then on. It is evident from other translations. *"From now on, I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He."* (NASB). Another version is more evident. "*From now on, I will tell you things before they happen, so that when they do happen, you may believe that I am what I say."* (Goodspeed). It is not about any one information He would share with them, but about all things that He would share with them from then on before the cross. The purpose of informing in advance was not just to keep them informed, but to help them know who He was. Jesus said, *"That… you may believe that I am He."* In the KJV, "He" is in italics. Thus, it reads that *"ye may believe that I am."* Goodspeed says, "that … you may believe that I am what I say." These show clearly that when His words were fulfilled, they must know that He is the great "I am" of the

Old Testament, come in the flesh, who appeared unto Moses on Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:14).

In John 13:20-38, Jesus foretells the events that would occur in the ensuing hours.

The Betrayal by Judas Iscariot

In John 13:20-30, Jesus talks about the betrayal. He makes it clear that it would be one of twelve, Judas Iscariot, who would betray Him. In the Synoptic Gospels, this is mentioned in a general way (Matthew 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23), while John gives the details. The records are not contradictory but complementary. John narrates how Jesus disclosed the matter to him, and others record how the matter was shared commonly with all. To John, it was revealed when a piece of bread was given to Judas. John was leaning on Jesus' bosom. Unto others, it seems, He revealed while He was dipping the bread in the sauce or when He was dipping subsequently. The matter was also told to Judas directly (Matthew 26:25).

Jesus had quoted from Psalm 41:9 and said, *"I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me"* (John 13:18). This did not give them a clue as to who the betrayer would be. Then He said, *"Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me"* (13:19,20). He revealed who He is and the honour all those who faithfully follow Him would receive. Then, Jesus made it clearer. He said, "*When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me'"* (v.21). He mentioned here that it was one of the Twelve who would betray Him. This was not a casual talk. It was a serious communication. The seriousness of the matter was evident in the words of the Lord Jesus. John says, *"He was troubled in the spirit and testified."* He added the formula, "Most assuredly," which He used only when He spoke matters of a serious nature. This worked well

among them and made a commotion. John says, "*Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke"* (v.22).

The reason for the grief of Jesus must be understood. It is not for the troubles that were awaiting Him. Those troubles were all expected. He came to this world for that very thing, to suffer and die on the cross. The reason for His grief was Judas, who chose a different path for himself. Jesus was thinking about the condemnation that would come on Judas, after being with Him for three and a half years. He was near the blessings but missed them. The opportunity that came before him was unique. It was to represent Christ and Him who sent Him to earth. But Judas missed it. This was the reason for Jesus' grief.

Even in the face of this heinous act of betrayal by Judas, Jesus' attitude to Judas is marvellous. John says, *"Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon"* (vv. 25, 26). Normally, the person to whom the piece of bread was given first was the most honourable. Probably, this was the first person to whom the piece of bread was given. Knowing all that he would do to Him, Jesus gave him honour.

Pentecost explains the practice of making a roll with the piece of bread and dipping it in the sauce for sharing with those seated for the meal. He says,

> "The dipping of a piece of bread was a significant part of the Passover ritual. In the course of the paschal meal, the master of the feast would pick up some unleavened bread, which was a flat cake. He would put bits of lamb on the piece of bread, sprinkle some bitter herbs on it, and then roll it. Then he would dip the bread containing the meat and herbs into a bitter sauce. This bread would then be handed to a guest. The ritual would be repeated until a piece of bread had been provided for each guest."[3]

The first person to whom it was given was the most distinguished guest in the group. Here, it seems, it was Judas Iscariot!

Pentecost further explains,

> "It was customary to offer the first piece to the most honoured guest at the feast. Judas had been placed on the Lord's left; therefore, he shared with John the places of honour. In fact, the place of highest honour had been given to Judas. This was the evidence of the love and the grace of the Lord, who knew what was in Judas' heart before the seats were assigned around the table."[4]

In 13:1, it is told that *"He loved them even to the end."* This included Judas also. Jesus could have shamed him by exposing him before the other disciples. But we do not see such moves from Jesus' side. On the contrary, Jesus was careful in giving the identity of the betrayer. *"Now, after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, Buy those things we need for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor"* (vv. 27-29). No one recognised that he was the betrayer. Probably, Jesus was keeping the opportunity to repent and turn to Him open even in these last moments. Despite the apparent setback of the betrayal, we see Jesus committed to the work of redemption He had undertaken. Jesus said, *"The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born"* (Mark 14:21). He also asked Judas to do quickly what he was intending to do (John 13:27). His face was turned to the cross like a flint.

John records the time of the departure of Judas Iscariot from the upper room. He says, *"Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night"* (13:30). He walked away from light into darkness! There are three significant nights in the Gospel of John. Firstly, the night of Nicodemus. He came to Jesus at first under the cover of darkness (John 3:2). We are under the influence of darkness when we are hesitant to identify as the witness of the Lord. The second night is the night of Judas Iscariot (13:30). We are in darkness when we do not

walk with the Lord. Thirdly, the night of the seven disciples (21:3). The whole night they laboured with no profit. They were without the Lord. Their labour was futile. We are in the darkness when we do not work with the Lord.

It seems that, though Judas was offered the piece of bread by the Lord, giving him honour, he did not eat of it. John says, *"Having received the piece of bread, he went out immediately."* There is no record that he ate it. Pentecost says,

> "Perhaps no greater demonstration of the love and the grace of Christ can be found anywhere in Scripture than in this scene, for the One who would be betrayed was offering the betrayer forgiveness of sin if he would accept it. Judas took the bread, but there is no record that he ate it as a sign of his acceptance of the Messiah's offer of salvation. Rather, it seems that the moment he took the bread "Satan entered into him" (John 13:27). Judas left the bread untouched and went out of the Lord's presence."[5]

This portrays the most unfortunate step taken by anybody in life, in human history. The darkness outside, into which he stepped out from the upper room, was not as thick as the darkness within him!

Prophecy About Jesus' Departure

At the departure of Judas, Jesus speaks of His glorification in verses 31-35. Jesus said, "*So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately'"* (vv. 31,32). The word glory occurs here, in these two verses, five times. All these centres on the death of the cross. When He stated that the Son of Man is glorified, it is a reference to His death, which He considered as already accomplished, as He was committed to it. By His obedience on the cross, He would glorify the Father. The words, *"God will glorify Him in Himself,"* may be the sustenance the Son shall receive from the Father when He goes through the excruciating experience of the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension. It seems the Lord was looking forward to all that shall follow and was rejoicing in them. In these words, we see His joy and confidence.

When He shared about the cross that was coming close, He also told the disciples how they should live in His absence. *"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (vv. 33-35). Jesus called them *'Little children.'* This is an address of endearment. One commentator says,

> "This term of love expressed Jesus' concern for them. It is used only here by Jesus in this Gospel. John used it seven times in his first epistle (1 John 2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21) and Paul used it once (Galatians 4:19)."[6]

Mary called the boy Jesus with this term when she and Joseph found Him in the Temple (Luke 2:48). Jesus now called His disciples with the same word as His mother called Him! Jesus tells them about His impending departure. He also tells them that the path He would tread, now they cannot go with Him. He would have to walk it alone. This is the path of the cross. None could share in His suffering on the cross, for atonement.

In His absence, He wanted them to follow His footsteps, in loving one another. He gives them a new commandment. This is to love another as He loved them. To love one another is a commandment, seen also in the Old Testament. But to love another as He loved us is a new commandment. Here, a pattern is provided for love.

William MacDonald says,

> "This commandment was not new in point of time because the Ten Commandments taught love to God and to one's neighbour. But this commandment was new in other ways. It was new because the Holy Spirit would empower believers to obey it. It was new in that it was superior to the old. The old said, "*Love your neighbour,"* but the new said, *"Love your enemies."* It has been well said that the law of love to others is now explained with new clarity, illustrated by a new example, and obeyed in a new way. Also, it was new, as explained in the verse, because it called for a higher degree of love: "as I have loved you, that you also love one another."[7]

Jesus said that love is the mark of His disciples. Pentecost comments,

> "Each movement in Israel historically had had its peculiar identifying sign. The sign that one was related to Abraham and the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision. The sign that one was related to Moses and the Mosaic law was the observance of the Sabbath. The sign that one was related to John the Baptist and his message concerning the coming Messiah was water baptism. The sign that one was a Pharisee was that he wore a phylactery either on his forehead or upper arm. These external signs all indicated a relationship to a particular movement in Israel. Christ gave His disciples a new kind of identifying sign. It was not an external sign that could easily be imposed, but an inner sign that required transformation. That sign was mutual love."[8]

While the path of the cross was inaccessible to the disciples, love was the path He wanted them to tread.

Predictions About Peter

When Jesus spoke about the path He was going, where the disciples would not be able to tread at that time, Peter came up with his enquiry. He asked, *"Lord, where are you going?"* Jesus answered him, *"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterwards"* (v.36). The Lord was indicating how Peter would die. Just as the Lord would be crucified, he also would be crucified. According to reliable traditions, he was crucified head down at his martyrdom. After resurrection, Jesus would give more details about how Peter would die (John 21:18, 19; 2 Peter 1:14).

Jesus shares details about Peter's denials in verses 37 and 38. When Jesus told Peter that he could not follow Him, his pride was triggered. Peter replied, *"Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake"* (v. 37). What was hidden to Peter then was that the death that Jesus was going to die was not for Himself but for the whole world. This, Peter could never do. Jesus answered him and said, *"Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times"* (v. 38). Jesus told him that he would deny Him three times.

The prediction of Jesus about Peter's denial is recorded in Matthew 26: 31- 35; Mark 14:27-31, and Luke 22:31-38. A comparison of the Synoptic records with those of John shows some variations in the records. Probably, these were done at different times. John records what happened in the upper room. But the records of the Synoptic Gospels happened later, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, probably, nearer to the Garden. In Matthew and Mark, Peter made his great claim that he is ready even to die for Jesus when Jesus told that all disciples shall be offended that night as the shepherd shall be smitten (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27). In Luke, Peter came up with the claim when Jesus told him about Satan's desire to sift him (Luke 22: 31,32). Probably, the intimation was given on three occasions. The predictions of denials also have variations.

Matthew 26:34 - *"Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."*

Mark 14:30 - *"Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."*

Luke 22:34 - *"I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."*

John 13:38 - *"Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times."*

The resolving of this apparent contradiction lies in the right understanding of the 'cock crowing' mentioned in all these records. The cock crowing mentioned in Matthew, Luke and John seems to indicate dawn or daybreak. But the cock crowing in Mark must be taken literally.

In this narrative, three disciples are named. They are Judas Iscariot, Peter, and John. These may be taken as representations of natural, carnal, and spiritual man, respectively.

Even amid these solemn warnings that Jesus was giving, he assured them of His preeminent association and fellowship with them. This is evident in Mark's record. Jesus said, *"All of you*

will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee" (vv. 27, 28). He assured them that after He is risen, He shall meet them in Galilee, going before them.

26

Institution of the Lord's Supper

The Lord had told that He was looking forward intently to keep and celebrate the Passover with the disciples (Luke 22:15,16). That was His last Passover, before He would have it again with His people, with the fruit of the vine, in the Kingdom. There was another reason why the moment was very dear to Him. That became the opportune time for Him to institute the Lord's Supper, an institution by which His people would remember the Lord throughout the church age. John does not record anything about this institution. But the Synoptic Gospels give the details of the institution of this important ordinance. There are two ordinances the Lord has ordered the church to keep. One is the Lord's Supper and the other is baptism. Christendom has increased the number of ordinances, but the Bible names only these two as the ordinances for the church. The other additions by men are ordination, confirmation, matrimony, extreme unction, and penance. Nevertheless, these are human inventions for material gains or goals. An ordinance may be defined as 'an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church.' Its significance is the spiritual meaning it carries. Some call these 'sacraments.' The word is derived from the Latin language. Originally, it was used for a declaration of allegiance to the emperor by Roman soldiers. The observance of these two ordinances indicates loyalty of believers to their Emperor, the Lord Jesus.

The two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, relate to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the baptism, the believers declare their identity with the death and resurrection of the Lord, whereas in the Lord's Supper, they proclaim His death. While the former is only once in a lifetime, the latter is repeated every Lord's Day. These ordinances, commanded by the Lord, are important for all those who love the Lord.

We are considering only the Lord's Supper, which was instituted in the upper room.

Various Titles Used

In the New Testament, this ordinance is called by three names. Firstly, the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42; 20:7). The connotation of this title is with the Jewish custom of mourning with the bereaved ones by breaking bread with them and drinking the cup of consolation. This Jewish custom is mentioned in Jeremiah 16:7. Friends or relatives come to the house of the bereaved and eat bread and drink wine with them to show their sorrow, fellowship, or oneness with them. They remember the departed and mourn together. This title given to this ritual indicates the significance of keeping this ordinance. In keeping this ordinance, they remember the death of the Lord and proclaim it. Secondly, the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:20. It was called a 'Supper' as it was instituted in the backdrop of the Passover supper. It was ordained in the night when the Lord was betrayed. Thirdly, the Lord's Table. 1 Corinthians 10:21. Though this is included here among the titles for this ordinance, many think that this is different from the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Table has a wider meaning. This title has a connection with the 'altar' in the Old Testament. The brazen altar is termed as 'table' in Malachi. *"You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible'"* (Malachi 1:7). Further, it says, "*But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible'"* (Malachi 1:12). In both these references, altar is referred to as table. When the altar is referred to as a table, it includes all the blessings that the sacrifices bring. For a New

Testament believer, it represents all the blessings the Lord has for believers. Thus, the term represents more than what the Lord's Supper implies. Albeit, some take the term 'the Lord's Table' as tantamount to 'the Lord's Supper.'

There are two other words used for this ordinance in Christendom, to refer to the 'Breaking of Bread.' They are the 'Eucharist' and 'the Mass'. The Eucharist is explained as follows. "This word is derived from a Greek word which means 'thanksgiving' and is based on the giving of thanks that is an essential part of the Lord's Supper." The latter term, 'The Mass,' comes from the Latin term '*missio*' to refer to the dismissal, before the Lord's Supper was celebrated, of those who are not yet full members of the church."[1] Though these words communicate some idea in the keeping of this ordinance, they are not biblical terms provided in the scripture.

Some use the word 'Communion' also for this ordinance (1 Corinthians 10:16). More than providing a title, this term gives us the significance of the ordinance.

'In Remembrance of Me'

The institution of this ordinance of the Lord's Supper is seen in Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26, and Luke 22:19,20. The observance of this ordinance by the early church is recorded in Acts 2:42 and 20:7. The doctrinal aspect of it is given by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. The doctrines and principles for the keeping of this ordinance may also be observed from 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, where the 'Lord's Table' is the subject.

When Jesus and the disciples were in the upper room for the Passover meal, Jesus would have pronounced the blessing over the first cup of wine, which is the cup of blessing. All of them might have eaten the bitter herbs with the sauce. As the host of the meal, Jesus must have given the Passover message. This might have been followed by the singing of the first part of the Hallel (Psalms 113, 114). All might have sung these psalms. Then the second cup was passed, which is the cup of wrath. After it is passed from hand to hand, it is poured down as a reminder of

the plagues that came upon Egypt. Nobody drank from it. Then all of them ate the unleavened bread with the roasted lamb. After prayer, which Jesus might have said, the third cup of wine was passed, which is the cup of salvation. Then the rest of the Hallel was sung (Psalms 115-118). The course ended with the fourth cup, the cup of the kingdom. The Lord might have instituted the Lord's Supper between the third and the fourth cups.

The institution of the Lord's Supper occurred after Judas Iscariot left the upper room (John 13:30). John did not record the institution of the Lord's Supper. About the time of the institution Matthew says, "*And as they were eating*" (Matthew 26:26). Mark says, *"And as they were eating"* (Mark 14:22). Luke says, *"And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise, He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'"* (Luke 22:19-20). In Luke's record, this comes in between the passing of the cup of wine, which may be the third or the fourth cup of the Passover supper (v. 18), and the prophecy about the betrayer. Paul's record of the time of the institution is more specific. He says, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread"* (1 Corinthians 11:23). When one among the Twelve, and the world around Him, who received much blessings from Him, were busy seeing how they may put Him to death, He instituted this ordinance and asked His own to observe it till he comes. This indicates the importance He gave to this memorial.

In His words about the betrayer, the Lord said, *"But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table"* (Luke 22:21). This does not mean that Judas was present there when the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper. As seen before, he had left the group before it was instituted. Some of the translations have the word "is" in italics. (Darby, KJV, NKJV). YLT has "is" in brackets. The Scripture Direct, the online interlinear, renders the verse as follows. *"Nevertheless, pay attention, the hand of the one betraying Me (is) with Me at the table."* Here "is" is in brackets, indicating

that it is not in the original. It is added by the translators to make the statement complete. The Lord was telling about Judas, who was with them at the meals until a few minutes before. He is expressing His grief about such a one who turned out to be the betrayer.

My Body, My Blood

The institution of the ordinance itself was simple. Matthew says, "*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-28). The Lord takes one of the unleavened breads which were used for the Passover meal, blesses the Father, which means He praises the Father, breaks the bread, and gives it to them. The simplicity with which the Lord ordained this solemn ordinance is astonishing. After they ate the bread, He gave them the cup of wine.

The instructions that accompanied these actions are important. While He gave them the bread, He said, *"This is My body."* And while giving them the cup, He said, *"This is My blood of the New Covenant."* These words of the Lord have been misinterpreted greatly in Christendom. There is a teaching called 'transubstantiation." According to this, the bread and the wine are transformed into His body and blood. Catholics are adherents of this view. Then there is a view called consubstantiation. They teach that the elements have the actual, substantial presence, in, with, and under the elements. Lutherans hold this view. The reformed churches teach that there is a special spiritual presence with the elements. All these views hold that there are special blessings and grace imparted in partaking of this Supper. But the most biblical view is that it is only a memorial. The words of the Lord are clear on this matter. According to Luke, after giving the bread, the Lord said, *"Do this in remembrance of Me"* (Luke 22:19). According to Paul, Jesus said this after giving the bread and repeated it after the cup also. "*Take, eat; this is My body*

which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner, He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). These make clear that the bread and the wine are only a remembrance or a memorial. At the breaking of bread, the emblems remain the same, and in partaking from the elements, believers proclaim the death of the Lord.

Emergence of the New Covenant

When the Lord gave to the disciples the cup of wine of the Lord's Supper, He said, *"This cup is the new covenant in My blood."* He announces the coming of the New Covenant in these words. These words of the Lord draw our attention to an Old Testament passage where similar language is heard. The people of Israel came out of slavery in Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai. God gave His words to the people through Moses. When Moses announced all the words of the Lord before the people, they said that they would obey all that the Lord commanded. Then Moses built an altar and offered sacrifices thereon. About these actions, the scripture says, *"Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words"* (Exodus 24:5-8). Through the sprinkling of the blood, the people were brought into a covenant with God. The application of the blood of the Old Testament was also used for the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8) and the cleansing of lepers (Leviticus 14).

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the people said that they would be obedient to the words of the Lord (Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7). They said this three times. But they began breaking the law of the

Lord there itself. But God, who had started a good work in them, would not give them up forever. Though He punished them for their disobedience, He also promised them a New Covenant. *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah"* (Jeremiah 31:31). The writer to the Hebrews says, *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah"* (Hebrews 8:7-8). God found fault with the people. They became disobedient. Because of the weakness of the people, the Law became faulty and weak. It did not bring any good to the people. And God promised them the New Covenant in its place. The clauses in it shall be unconditional. God Himself shall fulfil the demands of the Covenant. Israel shall enjoy its blessings in the future kingdom. However, the believers of the church age are a part of the New Covenant by grace and are enjoying it now, spiritually, being the spiritual Israel, a kingdom of God. The institution of the Lord's Supper in the upper room and the Lord's utterance that the cup of wine He gave them was the blood of the New Covenant, were preambles of the emergence of a new age.

"Till He Comes"

The importance of this ordinance is seen in many ways. As noticed, it was handed down to the disciples a few hours before He went to the cross. And that too when He knew fully well all that would happen to Him. Then, He asked them to observe this *"as often as"* they do it (1 Corinthians 11:25,26). Since the early records of the church, it has been understood that they observed this ordinance in all gatherings. But in the apostolic time itself, it got confined to the first day of the week, probably for the significance of that day. After this ordinance was given to the Twelve, after He was risen, the Lord appeared unto Paul, and gave the command concerning the ordinance just as it was told to the Twelve. About this, Paul says, "*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you"* (1 Corinthians 11:23).

What Paul received, without any additions or editions, Paul delivered to the church. The church has no right to twist or turn the instructions received. But it is unfortunate to notice many alterations and embellishments added to this simple observance, which the Lord instituted. The Lord wanted His people to keep this ordinance *"till He comes."* As suggested, there is no practice given to the church that connects all three times. It looks back and sees the sacrifice on the cross. It views the present and sees the communion the believers have with the Lord and one another. It also, as seen here, looks to the future and sees the coming of the Lord. Simple yet sublime!

Who is the Greatest?

Following Luke's record, around the time when the Lord's Supper was instituted, there was an argument brewing among the disciples about who among them was the greatest. *"Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*

"But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:24-30). Not all the disciples were involved in the argument. Verse 25 was spoken to those who were not in the contest. He told them that the greatest among them should be the servant of all. Then, He gives them His example. He was serving them at the table and washing their feet as a servant. Yet, He commended them all for being with Him in His time of trial, into which He was going to enter fully (v.28). Further, looking beyond the trials, He promised them a kingdom, wherein they shall rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. He knew that they would

grow over their petty squabbles, which were characteristic of them then, and mature when He shall share with them His greatness and glory. The disciples had such arguments over this at other times also (Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46-48). It is interesting to notice that at the very moment when the Lord's Supper was instituted, there was an argument on greatness. The ordinance is a rite of communion and unity. But at the very moment it was instituted, a rift rose among them. It was for the same reason that Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). They kept the ordinance without fail, but had no care for the poor ones among them. They celebrated the fellowship without having any real fellowship.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, after the Lord's Supper was instituted, Jesus went with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. Matthew says, "*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives*" (Matthew 26:30). Mark also gives the same order of events (Mark 14:26). The departure to the Mount of Olives Luke records after few more exchanges between Jesus and the disciples (Luke 22:39). But a comparison with the Gospel of John shows that there are many more things that happened in the upper room. This is the sermon in the upper room, which is instructions Jesus gives to His disciples, preparing them for the future. These are seen in John 14 - 16 and conclude with a high priestly prayer of the Lord (John 17). These chapters are certainly very enriching portions of the Bible. All the important doctrines of the New Testament are embedded here. A clear understanding of these passages is important for all believers. These provide instructions for our duties, comfort for the weary, and confidence in Christian living in troublesome times.

27

Comfort for the Troubled Hearts

The discourse of the Lord in the upper room is recorded only in the Gospel of John. According to the Synoptic Gospels, after the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus and the disciples went directly to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39). But there is a discourse that the Lord spoke to the disciples in the upper room, which is important. This discourse has every doctrine in the New Testament in its seed form. Jesus preached this Sermon to prepare the disciples for their future life and ministry. These are seen in John 14 - 16. This is followed by the Lord's prayer, for His own, who were living then, and for those who believed throughout the following centuries (John 17). What a surprise to know that it includes the believers who are living on earth now, you and I.

God's revelation is through two channels. They may be divided into visual and verbal. These mean through works and words. In the upper room, both were seen. Jesus communicated truths in both ways. The Lord taught them in action, in washing their feet. Now, from chapter 14 onwards, He would teach them in words. He taught them visually and verbally.

The order in which the points in the sermon in the Upper Room ministry were presented is interesting. In John 13, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. The humility of Jesus is seen here. This was a reminder and preamble of His greatest humility,

which was exhibited on the cross. Thus, chapter 13 brings before us the cross. Chapter 14 is about the peace He gives. This is the result of the cross. Chapter 15 is the chapter of fruit-bearing. Those who have found peace through the cross must bear fruit for the glory of God. Chapter 16 speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is the Helper for His own to live a fruitful life. This is followed by the high priestly prayer of the Lord, which was the foretaste of the present ministry of the Lord in the presence of the Father.

Though we call the whole section of chapters 13 to 17 the Upper Room ministry, the whole sermon was not uttered in the upper room. Chapters 13 and 14 happened in the upper room. Towards the end of chapter 14, Jesus told them, *"Arise, let us go from here"* (v. 31). Thus, we may assume that between chapters 14 and 15, the Lord left the upper room with the disciples and went out. Chapter 15, most probably was uttered in the vicinity of the Temple, probably near the Temple gate. This assumption is based on the metaphor Jesus used, the metaphor of the true vine. Jesus normally picked up metaphors from the surroundings. There was an engraving of a vine on the Temple gate. This was fixed there as a symbol of Israel. Vine represented Israel in their past failure, just as the fig tree prefigured their future restoration, and the Olive tree their present rejection. Jesus might have pointed to the vine on the gate and taken up the metaphor. 17:1 says, *"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said"* (John 17:1). This lifting of His eyes to heaven shows that they were in the open at this time. Then Jesus and the disciples would cross the Brook Kidron and enter the Garden of Gethsemane on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Though only half the Sermon was uttered in the upper room, the whole section, chapters 13-17, is known as the Upper Room ministry. In the divisions of the Gospel of John, this section comes under the private ministry of the Lord. He shares these with His disciples alone.

Their Troubled Hearts

The main thrust of the teachings in chapter 14 is seen in the repeated instruction to the disciples that their hearts should not be troubled. The Lord said, *"Let not your heart be troubled."*

This, the Lord said twice (vv. 1, 27). Their hearts were miserably troubled. The word "troubled" is used in other passages, which helps us to understand its meaning. The word is used for water being agitated (John 5:7). Here, an angel went down into the pool and stirred up the water. This is used in Galatians 1:7 for the effect of false teachings. It is used to describe the troubles persecutions bring (1 Peter 3:14). These show the state of the disciples. They were fully troubled.

There was every reason for the disciples to be agitated in the spirit. Firstly, the Master Himself was troubled (13:21). The reason was the matter of Judas. One who was with Him for three and a half years turned out to be His betrayer. One among the Twelve is going to eternal perdition. This thought was a matter of trouble for Him. Secondly, the Master washed the disciples' feet. The disciples were supposed to do that act. However, it so happened that Jesus washed the disciples' feet. This might have dampened the hearts of everyone. Thirdly, Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him. Just as the Master was troubled about this, the disciples also might have been troubled. Fourthly, Judas Iscariot walked away from the group into the night. The purpose was unclear to all of them. Thus, his departure might have generated many questions in the minds of the disciples. Fifthly, the departure of the Master. Jesus had told them clearly that He would depart from them shortly (13:33). Thus, they did not know what their future would be. Sixthly, the Lord told them that Peter would deny Him (13:38). The thought of one of them denying their Master was something they could not digest. Seventhly, their kingdom's hope was shattered. They were expecting to sit immediately on the thrones and rule with Jesus. Though Jesus had told them the future, directly and in parables, it was still unclear to them. These make it clear that there was every reason for the disciples to be troubled in heart. Thus, the Lord comforted them. And Jesus told them, "*Let not your heart be troubled.*" The world is like a troubled sea. God's children living here have many things that trouble them. Thus, the words Jesus shares with them to comfort them are always essential for all His children.

The following are the truths that the Lord is sharing with them for comfort.

Firstly, He instructed them to have faith in Him.

In verses 1 - 14, Jesus asked them to have faith in Him. Jesus said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me"* (John 14:1). The words *"You believe in God"* may be taken as indicative. All the Jews believed in their Jehovah God. The disciples were also primarily Jews. Thus, they believed in God. The following part may be taken as an imperative. The Lord told them, *"Believe also in Me."* This does not mean they were not believers till then. But He was asking them to hold fast to their faith in times of trouble. Some take both as imperatives. But, it seems, that it is better to take them as indicative and imperative, respectively.

Bringing both God and Jesus together indicates the equality and thus deity of the Lord Jesus, though this was not the primary intention here, as He was speaking to His own. This is followed by the Lord disclosing truths about Himself to them, in which they could take comfort.

He was going to prepare a place for them.

Jesus said, *"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:2-3). They thought that the fellowship they had with Him was coming to an end. But Jesus made it clear that it was only a beginning. They were going to have fellowship with each other in a greater measure than ever before. Most probably, Jesus was speaking here metaphorically. As per the Jewish custom of marriages, it was the duty of the bridegroom to prepare a house for the bride before marriage occurred. This should be built between the betrothal and the marriage. This house was made, mostly, adjacent to his family's house. The houses were mostly like row houses. He makes an extension to the existing houses. Jesus said, similar to those bridegrooms, I am also preparing rooms for My bride, the church. Such preparations were for greater fellowship and living together. '*Mansions*' may be rendered as rooms. Jesus was referring to the greater fellowship and life together, eternally, with His bride, the church.

Jesus told these in the upper room. It was a place prepared by the owner for the Master and disciples to keep the Passover (Luke 22:12). The disciples, Peter, and John had made the feast ready for them to eat (Luke 22:8,9-12). Now the Lord says, *"I go to prepare a place for you."* If the fellowship in the upper room was only for a few hours, the life and fellowship in the place that He is preparing was forever, eternal.

The place that Jesus is preparing is the New Jerusalem. John gives us a description of the city. *"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Revelation 21:2). *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God"* (Revelation 21:9-11). This is the dwelling place of the church.

Jesus said, "*I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."* This is the only place in the Gospels where we have a promise or even mention of the coming of the Lord for the church, which is called the rapture. There are many places in the Gospels where the second coming of the Lord is recorded. But all those records are about the Glorious Appearance, the coming of the Lord to the earth to set up His kingdom. The truths about the rapture of the church are given in the epistles of the New Testament. However, in the Gospels, John 14 is the only place where we have the promise about the rapture, the Lord's coming in the air for the church.

He was going to the Father.

The conversation between Jesus and the disciples in verses 4 - 12 was about the destination of His journey, the Father. He had told them about this before (Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22; 18:31). Jesus had told them all that would befall Him. He had also indicated that He is going to the Father. Now, He tells them that He is going to that Father, as He had told before. Jesus said,

"And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14:4). What He meant is that the departure should not be a matter of trouble to them. He is going to the Father who was also their Father. This is a matter He would elaborate on later. The revelation of the destination triggered a couple of questions from the disciples, and the Lord answered them.

It was Thomas who asked the first question. He asked, "*Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5). Jesus had told them that they knew where He was going and the way. But 'doubting Thomas,' countered it by stating that they did not know where He was going, and thus the way to the destination. He might have thought that Jesus was going to withdraw to some place where He would spend time in seclusion before setting up the kingdom. This became the occasion for Jesus to make one great claim about Himself. He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him"* (John 14: 6, 7). The truths hidden in this claim about the person of Jesus are impossible for humans to fathom. To go anywhere, it is necessary to possess life, a map, and a path. To reach the true and living God, Jesus Christ is the promise of life. He gives us the direction, and He takes us to the destination. He is not just one of the many ways available, but He is the way. It was Philip who responded now. He stated, *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us"* (John 14:8). In answer, the Lord said, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves"* (John 14:9-11). This is a claim that in His person and work, the Father is manifested. Jesus represented the authority of the Father and did His works. So, He said, *"He that has seen Me has seen the Father."* They are inseparably one.

He promised them that they would perform greater works.

Jesus assured them, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father"* (John 14:12). In verse 1, Jesus asked them to believe in Him. Now, He says that those who believe shall perform the works He did and greater works as He would be living for them in the presence of the Father.

His assurance to answer prayers

"*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*" (John 14:13). Asking in His name indicates asking in His authority, and for His sake. We may not ask anything that the Son Himself would not ask. In everything, the Son wanted to glorify the Father. Such must be the intention of His children when they pray (1 Corinthians 10:31). The assurance of answer to their prayers, Jesus made repeatedly in this Sermon (14:14;15:7, 16; 16:23,24). When a statement is repeated six times in a sermon, then it is a matter that the preacher wants his listeners to take note of. He did not want anyone to miss it. So was this matter to the Lord. He did not want, and does not want, any of His followers, then or now, to miss this truth. He assures answers to their cries and prayers in need. This does not mean all the items that we ask for in prayers are going to be given just as we ask for them. He knows what we need and when to provide them. He looks at our lives and intentions in prayers. Even denials of the petitions are an answer from Him. But the help of the Spirit is a sure answer which He has assured (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13).

Secondly, He instructed them to love Him genuinely.

Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). The love for the Lord and our obedience are seen together in verses 21, 23, and 24 also. "*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me"* (v. 21). "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"* (v. 23). *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words"* (v. 24). A loving and obedient life shall be pleasing to the Lord. This does not mean that their lives would

be trouble-free. Even when there are problems, they shall never lose their confidence. Thus, apart from faith in Him, love for Him is another antidote to troubled hearts.

Jesus was also challenging them to overcome their grief and instead live a life of obedience and commitment. Albert Barnes comments,

> "This is the only proper evidence of love to Jesus, for mere profession is no proof of love; but that love for him which leads us to do all his will, to love each other, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow him through evil report and, through good report, is true attachment. The evidence which we have that a child loves its parents is when that child is willing, without hesitation, gainsaying, or murmuring, to do all that the parent requires him to do. So, the disciples of Christ are required to show that they are attached to him supremely by yielding to all his requirements, and by patiently doing his will in the face of ridicule and opposition."[1]

The focus of disciples should not be on their comforts but on pleasing the Master.

He promises them the 'Spirit of truth' (vv. 16,17).

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you".

The Holy Spirit is called "another Helper." The 'Scripture Direct,' an online interlinear, explains the title 'Helper' as follows.

> "The principal difficulty in rendering parakletos is the fact that this term covers potentially such a wide area of meaning. The traditional rendering of 'Comforter' is especially misleading because it suggests only one very limited aspect of what the Holy Spirit does. A term such as 'Helper' is highly generic and can be particularly useful in some languages. In certain instances, the concept of 'Helper' is expressed idiomatically, for example, 'the one who m, as in one language in Central Africa, 'the one who falls down beside us,' that is to say, an individual who upon finding a person collapsed along the road, kneels down beside the victim, cares for his needs, and carries him to safety."[2]

The word *"another"* also calls for explanation. The word means 'another of the same kind.' Jesus was there with them all these years as a Helper. Now, He is leaving them. But they are going to have another Helper. He shall be another of the same kind, as the Lord Jesus Christ. For 'another of a different kind' there is another word in Greek (*Heteros*). But, here, it is '*allos*,' different of the same kind. The Spirit, the third Person in the Trinity, is just like the Son, the second Person in the Trinity, in essence and position.

This *'Another Comforter'* is called the 'Spirit of Truth.' The Word of God is the truth (John 17:17). It is the Spirit that inspires the Scripture, illumines readers to understand its truths, and preserves the truth for generations. It is He who helps God's people to fight all the falsehood that rises against the eternal truth and helps to surmount all vanities of the present evil world. It is the Spirit that aids the believers to understand the scriptures and apply them in every situation of life. Thus, He is the *'Spirit of truth.*'

When Jesus said about the Spirit that "*He dwells with you and will be in you,"* He was looking forward to the church age and viewing the relationship God's people shall have in the New Testament period. The Spirit's indwelling is a New Testament blessing; a blessing Abraham or David did not possess. He directs and energises believers to know the Word of God and obey it by dwelling with the believers and within them.

He assures them of His abiding presence.

Jesus said, *"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"* (14:18).

Adam Clarke explains the word 'orphans'

> "The disciples of a particular teacher among the Hebrews called him father; his scholars were called his children, and, on his death, were considered as orphans. Christ calls his disciples children, beloved children, John 13:33; and, now that he is about to be removed from them by death, he assures them that they shall not be left fatherless, or without a teacher; for in a little time he should come again, (rise from the dead,) and, after his ascension, they

should be made partakers of that Spirit which would be their comforter, advocate, teacher, and guide forever."[3]

Jesus was promising them His continued presence. The crucifixion shall be only a temporary separation. He shall rise again and come to them again. His people are never alone. Jesus makes this doubly sure by saying, "*A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me"* (v.19).

Jesus tells them about His ministry with the Father, for their sake.

He said, "*Because I live, you will live also*" (v. 19). This is not just about His resurrection. It is about His life in the presence of the Father for His people, which shall be the reason for the lives of His people on earth. Paul says, "*For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"* (Romans 5:10). This 'life' is His present life and ministry in the presence of the Father.

Promise of greater and higher fellowship.

"On *that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you"* (vv. 20-26). In these verses, all three persons in the Trinity are mentioned. Intimate fellowship is promised to those who are obedient. We must have His commandments and keep them. To them, the Spirit shall manifest truths in a greater measure.

Thirdly, He instructed them to have hope in Him.

The Lord shared truths about Himself with His followers, which would encourage them to put their trust in Him. Four truths about Himself may be highlighted about the Lord.

My Peace: Amidst troubles, Jesus was at peace, and that peace was available to all His people in their distress. He said, "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* (14:27). Notice the phrase *"My peace."* This is emphatic. It may be rendered as "The peace, the mine." This is the non-circumstantial peace. Anyone can trust Him in any difficulties.

My Father: Then the Lord said, "*My Father.*" *"If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I"* (14:28). After telling about "My peace," now He says about "My Father." The disciples were saddened by the fact that He was departing from them. But He told them that they should rejoice in the fact that He was going to His Father. The reason He gives is, "*My Father is greater than I."* Positionally and in essence, all three Persons in the Trinity are equal. They are consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal. But, as far as functions are concerned, there are differences. Father is the 'fountainhead' of all blessings among the three Persons. Prayer and worship are addressed to Him. All good gifts and perfect gifts are from the Father of lights. Thus, Jesus was going to the presence of the Father, who is the source of all blessings. As He was going to live for them there, in the presence of His Father, the potential for receiving all blessings was greater. So, the Lord told them to rejoice as He was going to His Father. The epistle to Hebrews says, *"For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us"* (Hebrews 9:24). He is in the highest office, in heaven itself. He is in the highest position, at the right hand of the majesty. He can succour all those who draw near to the throne of grace for help in need.

The sorrowful disciples, as He was departing from them, now understood that it was for their good. After they watched Him

departing from them in ascension from the Mount of Olives, they came back to Jerusalem with great joy (Luke 24:53). It was this knowledge that made them rejoice.

I Am: He also wanted them to know that He is omniscient. Jesus said, "*And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe*" (14:29). Also see 13:19 and 16:4. These things He told them that when all things happen just as He had told them, they should believe that He is the revelation of the great "I am" (Exodus 3:14).

Satan had nothing in Him. Jesus said, "*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me*" (John 14:30). This is a claim of His holiness. He has no sinful nature. He was in every point like any human in the world except for sin (Hebrews 4:15).

His Pattern: Then, Jesus is seen as a pattern for obedience. He said, "*But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do*" (v.31). The One who said that they should obey Him if they loved Him, now says that He loved the Father and was obeying Him. He did this for the world to know and follow!

As seen, the whole chapter is about calming the troubled hearts of His disciples. The antidotes to trouble, which the Lord suggested, were faith, love, and hope. They were asked to believe in Him. They were commanded to show their love to Him in obedience. They were also instructed to hope in Him for all their needs.

After giving these instructions in the upper room, Jesus and the disciples left the house where they were gathered. This is evident from what Jesus told them. He said, "*Arise, let us go from here*" (v. 31). Now, they would start their travel to the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord shall continue instructing them on the way. Following them in this path closely, listening to Him, shall not disappoint us, as He shares the riches of all knowledge and wisdom hidden in Him.

28

Bearing Fruits for God

John 15 is about fruit bearing. We must bear fruit for the glory of God. The teachings on fruit-bearing are evident throughout the Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Joseph is compared to a fruitful bough (Genesis 49:22). Israel and Judah are compared to a vine or a vineyard (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:1-7). The blessed man is compared to a tree planted by a river (Psalm 1:3). The New Testament also compares the people of God to a farm (1 Corinthians 3:9). In many of His parables, Jesus used this imagery. But nowhere are we compared to any tree, like trees growing on the roadside by themselves or growing in the forest. But believers are compared to trees planted by the Lord. The New Testament also says about the fruits the Lord expects from His people. We must bear for Him the fruit of lips (Hebrews 13:15), fruit of labour (Romans 1:13; Philippians 2:17), fruit of life (Philippians 1:9; Galatians 5:22, 23) and fruit of light (Ephesians 5:10). The word '*scattered*' used for the believers also indicates that we are His planting (Acts 8:4; 11:19; 1 Peter 1:1; James 1:1). The word was often used for scattering of seeds. It is with the expectation of fruit that we are *scattered* in various places. The chapter calls us to examine ourselves whether we are bearing fruit for the glory of the Father or not.

In chapters 13 and 14, we saw the humility of Jesus and the peace He grants to alleviate the troubles within. Those who have found peace from the Lord must live a fruitful life. This is the burden of Chapter 15. Here, the Lord says what believers must

do for the Lord. T.E. Wilson dwells on the order of things in these chapters. He says,

> "In chapters 13 and 14, we are introduced to the sanctuary, right inside the Holiest of All. But in chapters 15 and 16, we are introduced to service. In chapters 13 and 14, we get our relationship to God, and in chapters 15 and 16, we get our responsibility in the world. ……. First of all, He speaks of our relationship to God, and then He speaks of our relationship in service for the Lord and our behaviour and conduct down here."[1]

The believers are in the world to bear fruit and fulfil their responsibilities in the world.

The word 'fruit' occurs eight times in the chapter. They show that the main theme in the chapter is fruit-bearing.

'I am the True Vine'

Jesus uses the parable of a true vine to teach the duty of fruit-bearing. He compares Himself to a vine and the disciples to its branches. Father is the farmer in the parable. It must be, "I am the vine, the true." Jesus was contrasting Him with the vine that proved to be a false vine. Through Jeremiah, God says, "*Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?*" (Jeremiah 2:21). Israel proved themselves as a wild plant. The song of the vineyard in Isaiah also gives the backdrop for the illustration (Isaiah 5:1-7). All that was necessary for the vineyard was done with the expectation of a good yield. But it bore wild grapes. Israel proved to be a wild plant. Now, Jesus says, "*I am the true vine.*"

The Lord had told the parable of the wicked husbandmen just two or three days before this (Matthew 21:33-46). A man planted a vineyard and did all that was necessary for it, and gave it into the charge of the farmers. They were supposed to render a share of the produce to the owner at the time of the fruit bearing. But when they sent the servants to receive the share of the fruits, they stoned, beat up, or even murdered the servants. When his son was sent, they caught him and killed him. The parable says what the owner would do to those wicked men. He

would take the vineyard and give it to people who would give a share of the produce to the owner. Jesus concluded by quoting from the scripture. He said, *"Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD's doing,
And it is marvellous in our eyes?

Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:42-44). The Stone which the builders rejected, which became the cornerstone, was the Lord Himself. This parable speaks about the failure of Israel and the rejection that followed. But in God's plan, He shall be at the centre. This is the claim made in the saying, *"I am the true vine."* In giving fruit, Israel failed. But now, Israel being rejected, Jesus takes the centre stage.

Jesus used illustrations from the surroundings. On the way, when He saw a bird flying or a lily plant blooming, that became an illustration for His sermons. It is not known where Jesus took the illustration of the vine from. Some suggest that the wine they drank at the Passover meal was the reason for taking this illustration. Others suggest that a vine planted in the house where the Passover meal was observed or one in its compound became the illustration. Yet others suggest that on their way, from the upper room to the Mount of Olives, there would have been many vineyards, and from them He took the illustration. There is another more interesting suggestion. On the Temple gate, there was a golden vine engraved. It was fixed there as a representation of the nation of Israel. Jesus and the disciples might have taken note of this engraved golden vine and taken up the illustration. Israel proved to be a degenerate, wild vine. Now, Christ and His people have taken their place. Thus, Jesus said, *"I am the true vine."* If the final suggestion is taken as the right one, then Jesus might have used this illustration when they were somewhat near the Temple precincts.

The Vine and the Branches

Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches*" (John 15:5). Apparently, the statement is simple. But a closer look and clear understanding would show the sublimity of the statement. Jesus claimed that He is 'the vine.' And its branches are the disciples. Branches are parts of the vine. Thus, in 'The Vine,' branches are included. Imagine a teacher asking the students to draw a vine and mark its parts. On a piece of paper, the vine would be drawn. At the top of the paper, the title would be written, 'The Vine.' Then the branches, leaves, flowers, fruits, roots, and other parts would be marked. The vine includes all these. So, when Jesus said, '*I am the vine,*' it included even the branches. This explains the relationship between Christ and His people. Just as the branches of the vine are part of and one with the vine, so are His people one with Him.

This relationship between Christ and His people is evident in the epistles. Apart from the personal, historical Christ, He is seen in His corporate entity. Or the title 'Christ' is seen as used for Christ and His people, collectively. Paul says, "*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ*" (1 Corinthians 12:12). In the next verse (v.13), Paul says about the baptism in the Spirit. It is that which brought this unity. When Paul says, "*So also is Christ,*" the "Christ" is not just Jesus Christ, but the title includes His people. This title comprises the Head and body, Jesus Christ, and His people. We may say that this is 'the corporate Christ.'

In the very first utterance of Jesus to Saul, this relationship is implied. This we hear on the way to Damascus. Paul was journeying to Damascus to arrest the followers there and persecute them. But he got arrested by the Lord. Jesus asked, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (Acts 9:4). In fact, Saul might not have seen Jesus personally when He was on earth. Thus, he never persecuted Jesus. But Jesus states that he was persecuting Him. Saul was only persecuting His people. But Jesus said that it was persecution of Him. This shows the head-body relationship between Jesus Christ and His people on earth. In

this very first statement to Saul, Jesus is expressing this relationship with His people. If the head-body relationship is implied in the very first statement of the Lord to Saul, the apostle picked up the metaphor of the human body to explain the relationship between God's people and the Lord, and the relationship among believers. This metaphor of the body he used in Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. It is a Pauline metaphor. No other New Testament writers use it. In this expression of *"I am the vine and you are the branches,"* we see this unity between Christ and His people. Pulpit Commentary says,

> "Here Christ says, "I," but we see from verse 5 that the branches, which by reason of relation to Him have and draw their life from Him (or, to use His own words, "I and the branches," and "the branches in Me"), constitute the veritable "vine" of the covenant."[2]

The Vine-Dresser

Jesus said, *"My Father is the vinedresser"* (John 15:1). In John 14:28, Jesus had referred to 'My Father.' He said He was greater than Him. As explained before, the greatness was not in position or essence, but in function. In the present passage, the greatness is seen clearly. He is the vinedresser when Jesus is the vine. As the vine dresser, the Father takes care of a vineyard. He nurtures, trims, and defends the vine. He feels a deep interest in its growth and welfare. The figure also means that God gave or appointed His Son to be the source of blessings to man. All grace descends through him, and the Father takes care of all the branches of this vine, that is, His people. They are by faith united to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ and His people must bear fruit unto the glory of the Father. In the place where Israel failed, the 'True Vine' must bear fruit.

John Gill says,

> "Now Christ says this of His Father, both with respect to Himself the vine, and with respect to the branches that were in Him. He was the husbandman to Him, He planted the vine of His human nature, and filled it with all the graces of the Spirit, He supported it, upheld it, and made it strong for Himself, for the purposes of

> His grace, and for His own glory, and took infinite delight in it, being to Him a pleasant plant, a plant of renown. The concern this husbandman has with the branches is expressed in the following verse."[3]

When Paul writes about the relationship of God's people with Christ, he instructs, "*Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God*" (Romans 7:4). Here, the relationship is different, a husband-wife relationship.

Types of Branches

A careful look at the passage would make it clear that there are three types of branches in the vine. Jesus said, "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit*" (John 15:2). Here, two kinds of branches are seen, firstly, branches that bear not, and secondly, branches that bear fruit. Coming down to verse 6, the Lord said, "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*" (John 15:6). Here, we have the third kind of branches. They are branches that 'abide not.' These are branches that are not well related to the vine. As the sap that comes to it is limited, they become yellowish and later are dried, worth only for being collected and burned. These are branches that abide not.

Jesus was not teaching about salvation or the security of salvation. The chapter is about service, about fruit bearing. About all these branches, Jesus said, *"Every branch in Me."* All these branches were in the wine. It is about His followers that Jesus was teaching. They were all saved, but they were not bearing fruit equally. By teaching, the Lord was encouraging them to bear more fruit. The Lord's dealing with the branches is according to the kind of the branch.

Firstly, the branches that bear no fruit. About such branches, the Lord said, the Father *"takes away."* This phrase must be clearly understood. The word used here, '*takes away*', does not mean

that He would remove the branch from the vine. It can be rendered as 'lifts up.' It is thus rendered in Luke 17:13; Acts 4:24; John 11:41; Revelation 10:5, etc. About 36 times it is rendered with this meaning in the New Testament. A vine is a climber. It has long, thin branches. Sometimes, if not properly attended to, they may grow downward. If it is allowed to grow downward, it may touch the ground and take root there. Then it would grow as a parallel plant. It shall not produce any fruit, and it destroys the mother plant. Thus, it becomes necessary for the vinedresser to go through the vineyard and lift the branches and make them grow upward, so that they may become fruitful. This kind of branch represents worldly believers. They bear no fruit. They are earthbound. They are after the temporary matters of this world. When the Father deals with them to separate them from the things they are entangled in and straightens them, it may be painful. Thus, it is necessary to turn to the Lord, repenting for failures. This must be a continuing experience, as we are still in the flesh and prone to fall.

Secondly, the branches that bear fruit. The Lord said that such fruitful branches "*He prunes.*" More than pruning, the word used here means to cleanse. It is common for birds to bring things and keep them on the branches. Seeds of other plants are taken by birds and deposited on these branches. Dust also commonly accumulates on it. These call for regular washing. Otherwise, they could hinder the fruit-bearing. Thus, to get more fruit, cleansing is necessary. In a spiritual sense, this calls for regular cleansing. As believers live in this sin-stricken world, it is natural for them to get contaminated by the world. Thus, regular cleansing by the word of God becomes necessary.

Thirdly, the branches that do not abide in the vine. These are the drying branches. The vine dresser cannot allow these to continue in the vine. These become dry and affect the whole plant. Because of this, the vine dresser removes it from the vine as it dries. This gives the picture of a believer who would not care for cleansing. But he continues in sin despite instructions given. The Lord shall deal with them specially, and He may even take them away from the world. This does not mean that their

salvation is lost. But they are removed from their position of responsibility. Such removal can happen to individuals and even to assemblies. This is a solemn warning for those who would not care for living a life of holiness and separation. Verse 6 Jesus said, "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."* The casting into the fire and burning does not indicate casting into hellfire as some wrongly understand. The Lord was not teaching about salvation but about service. This indicates removal from responsibilities. It means that even the world does not want to see a half-and-half Christian. They are like salt that has lost its savour. People throw it out and stamp on it.

Conditions for Fruit Bearing

The passage also tells us the conditions to have a fruitful life. The Lord said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you"* (John 15:16). If the believers are appointed to bear fruit, how much important it is to see that they bear fruit.

The following are the conditions for fruit bearing. Firstly, we must be branches in Him. This indicates that we must be born again (v.2). Secondly, we must have holiness. This is indicated by the 'pruning' or the cleansing. It is the Word of God that cleanses us. Jesus said, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3). All that hinders a useful life must be removed. No wise farmer would leave any place for the weeds to grow in His farm. We must allow the Word of God to work in our lives. Thirdly, we must abide in Him. Jesus said, "*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me"* (John 15:4). This is elaborated in the verses following (vv. 5-15). This shows an unhindered fellowship. This is essential for fruit bearing. If the sap of the stem does not come to the branches, the branches cannot grow or bear fruit. Thus it is with Christian life. When the believer abides in Him,

He abides in him, as the controlling and energising factor. This becomes possible by the abiding word (v. 7). The prayers of such shall be answered (v. 7). A fruitful farm shall be for the glory of the farmer. When we bear fruit, the Father, the Vine Dresser, is glorified.

A fruitful life shall be the evidence that we are the Lord's disciples. Such shall love the Lord (v. 9). The love for the Lord shall be shown through obedience to His word. His word shall abide in their lives, controlling them. When we love the Lord, we shall love others also. Jesus Himself is the pattern here (v.10). There is no limit to express this love as the Lord has revealed to us the full and final revelation (v.15). This love for the Lord and others may be considered as the fruit of life or as evidence of a fruitful life.

Jesus reminded them that the appointment they have received is to live a fruitful life. This appointment is for all believers. It is necessary to see how faithful we are in this duty. The Vinedresser would not waste His farm forever, with fruitless trees and branches (Luke 13:6-9).

29

Coming of the Comforter

The Lord draws the disciples' attention to another important matter. It is about the Holy Spirit, who shall be their Helper. The Lord taught them about fruit-bearing before this (John 15). It was only proper for the Lord to take them to this topic, about the Holy Spirit, after those lessons. Fulfilling the responsibility of fruit bearing is not without difficulty. The believers cannot do it themselves. They need the help of God. The Spirit that proceeds from the Father provides help. The word for Comforter in Greek is *'Parakletos.'*

Scofield explains,

> "The Greek *parakletos* means one called alongside to help. Thus, a helper, a consoler. It is translated 'Advocate' in 1 John 2:1: 'An Advocate with the Father.' Christ is the Christian's paraclete with the Father when the Christian sins. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's indwelling Paraclete to help his ignorance and infirmity, and to make intercession (Romans 8:26,27)."[1]

The Lord is telling the disciples what the Spirit shall do when He comes. He referred to the coming of the Holy Spirit three times in the passage (15:18-16:15). *"But when the Helper comes"* (15:26). *"And when He has come"* (16:8). And again, *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come"* (16:13). These three references about the coming of the Holy Spirit divide the whole section into three parts. Each section shows a different kind of ministry that He shall do when He comes. The Spirit shall testify

about the Lord when He comes (15:18-16:4). He shall reprove the world (16:5-11). And the Spirit shall guide the disciples in the way of the truth (16:12-15). These three-fold ministries of the Spirit, to three groups, are given here.

The Ministry of Witnessing

In 15:18-16:4, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ is discussed. The Lord said, *"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning"* (John 15:26-27). There are a couple of things to notice here. The Spirit is seen here as the One that proceeds from the Father. About the procession of the Spirit, from the Father and the Son, Thomas Scott says,

> "The Holy Spirit is here said to proceed from the Father; and many suppose this to refer, not only to his being sent forth from the Father and the Son (as the Son was from the Father), a willing messenger to apply the salvation of Christ to the hearts of his chosen people; but to what is called his eternal procession from the Father; by which is meant something similar to the eternal generation of the Son, yet distinct from it."[2]

To explain the relationships between the three persons of the Trinity, theologians use different words. For the relationship between the Father and the Son, the word 'generation' is used. To show the relationship between the Father and the Son with the Spirit, the word 'procession' is used. These are just human endeavours with human terms to explain that which is inexplicable. The word used here, "proceeds," is in the present tense. This indicates that He has always been proceeding. The Spirit has always been coming. It is an eternal procession. If it is an eternal procession, then the Spirit is eternal, and if eternal, then God. This eternal procession denotes the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Another truth to notice is in the word *'testifies.'* Jesus said, *"He will testify of Me."* The word means to witness. The word 'martyr' is derived from the word used for a witness in Greek. A

martyr has given over or committed himself to the truth which he witnesses. The word used here, thus, indicates the commitment the Spirit shall have for the Gospel of Christ and its spread. Jesus said, further, *"And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning"* (John 15:27). This is probably applicable to the apostles, primarily. Because they have been with Him from the beginning. This is primarily not about the whole church, but only about the apostles whom Jesus chose, the Twelve. It was they who were with Him *'from the beginning.'* This beginning is the beginning of their association with the Lord. In his first epistle John says, *" That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us"* (1 John 1:1-2). Though the statement primarily is applicable to the apostles, the truth applies to all believers throughout the church age. The Spirit shall witness, and they too should witness with the Spirit.

One important matter to notice here is that the witnessing is the occupation of the Holy Spirit. The church participates with the Spirit in the evangelisation. This is evident from Revelation 22:17. It says, *"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."* The Spirit is seen first here. The bride associates with Him. On the building up of the church, Jesus said, *"I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18). He did not say, 'We will build.' But He said, "*I will build."* It is His work. Paul says, *"We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain*" (2 Corinthians 6:1). Believers are workers together with God, as they have received grace to labour with Him. Thus, the Spirit is not only an associate in the work of the Lord, but He goes before, and we associate with Him.

The leadership of the Spirit in the work of the Lord and His help in the ministry to the believers are present here in the context of the conflict that the church shall suffer from the world in the

present time. The Lord said, *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you"* (John 15:18). By these words, Jesus was fortifying the disciples against all the atrocities they would suffer from the world for the gospel's sake. When they suffer, they should remember that their Lord and Master had gone this same path of suffering before them. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:11-12). It is not only the Lord who would suffer, but the prophets of the Old Testament also suffered and were martyred. When the same experience shall happen to these apostles, they should remember that they are also on the noble path by which their Lord and the prophets trod before them. The Lord said that they should be happy for it.

Jesus then tells the disciples why the world will persecute them. The reason for their hatred and persecution is that they were separated from the world (v.19). If they belonged to the world, the world would have loved them. But the Lord chose them and separated them from the world. Now they belong to Jesus. The experience of the Lord would also be theirs. Jesus repeated what He told them before. "*A servant is never greater than his Master."* Also see Matthew 10:24 and John 13:16. The world hated Him without a cause. Thus, they hated His Father also. This hatred was according to the Scripture (Ps. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3-5). The Lord indicated the punishment that shall come upon those who hated Him and His people. He said, *"If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father"* (John 15:24).

Barnes notes,

> "He did all this by his own power; Moses and the prophets by the invoked power of God. Jesus spoke and it was done, showing that he had power of himself to do more than all the ancient prophets had done. It may be added that his miracles were done in a short time. They were constant, rapid, and continued in all places.

> Wherever he was, he showed that he had this power, and in the short space of three and a half years, it is probable that he wrought more miracles than are recorded of Moses and Elijah, and all the prophets put together."[3]

Their hatred and rejection were not because there was insufficient proof for His claims, but it was because they would not come to Him.

The Lord also told them what kind of persecution would come on them. "*They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service"* (John 16:2). These persecutions may be from the Jews or the Gentiles. In verses 1 - 4, He explained why He did not share these matters earlier and why He shared them now. He was preparing them for the future, for the rough ride that lay ahead. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

But the persecutions and hatred that shall arise in church history shall not hinder the work of the Lord. It is in this context that the Lord said about the witness of the Spirit and the church.

Convicting Work of the Spirit

Jesus further tells them what the Spirit shall do to the world. He said, *"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged"* (John 16:5-11). These words are filled with feelings and emotions. The disciples were all sorrowful as He told them again that He was departing from them. Jesus said, "*But now I go away to Him who sent Me"* (v.5). Here, Jesus might have halted for them to ask questions. But they were not in a frame of mind to ask questions. Thus, the Lord Himself asks the question. He said, "*None of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?"* Then He told them that it is

necessary and for their good that He go away. His departure was essential for the Spirit to come.

The words of the Lord indicate that the coming of the Spirit was essential and better for them than the physical presence of the Lord with them. The ministries of the Spirit residing within them shall be manifold than when the Lord was with them. Unless the Spirit comes, the greater works which were foreseen for them to do shall not be accomplished. The two stages, the Lord being with them and doing the works, and the time when the Spirit comes and leads them, are like emerging into adulthood from being a minor. Thus, Jesus said, that His departure was their good.

The ministry of the Spirit to the world shall be His convicting work. *'To convict'* means 'to give necessary proof and bring to conviction.' There are three areas where the Spirit would give conviction.

Firstly, Spirit convicts about '*sin*' because the world does not believe in Jesus. Notice here that the word '*sin*' is in the singular. This may be taken in two different ways. This may first refer to the sin of unbelief. This is the sin that cannot be forgiven in this world or the world to come. This is that sin unto death (James 5). The Spirit shall convict the unbelieving world of this heinous sin. This was the sin of the people of Israel in Jesus' time. They rejected Him in unbelief. The Spirit should convict the people of this sin. The word may be taken in the secondary sense also. In certain places where the word '*sin*' is used in the singular, it means the 'sin nature.' Here, it is worth noting that all religions and philosophies teach that man in himself is good. But it is only the scripture or the Spirit through the written Word that teaches that man in himself or intrinsically is evil. This condition of man is the result of the original fall. This evil nature is what we inherited from Adam. It is only the Spirit that convicts of this evil nature.

Secondly, He shall convince the world of righteousness. The reason for this is given in the statement, that is, Jesus is going to the Father. When Jesus was on the earth, He exemplified what righteousness is by His life and teachings. As He goes away to

the Father, the Spirit does that work in the world. The Spirit shall show what a righteous life is through the preaching on righteousness by the believers and by the practice of the same in their lives. Apart from this, He shall also turn others to the cross where righteousness is available to whoever believes in Him.

Thirdly, Spirit shall speak "*Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*" This ruler is the devil himself. The accomplishment of the judgment occurred on the cross. As he is judged, those who follow him also shall be judged with him. Unto those who would not believe in Him the Lord shall one day command, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Mt.25.41). The Spirit warns the world. He shows the judgment that shall come on all those who reject the righteousness that comes from the work of the cross.

This work of the Spirit is exemplified in the ministry of Paul to Felix. *"Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you'"* (Acts 24:25). Here we understand that Felix was convicted. Yet he resisted the work of the Holy Spirit in his life and brought peril on his own life, a danger to all those who would reject the Spirit's plea!

Without these works of the Spirit, no sinner can come to Christ. Even when the truth is presented evidently to people, they cannot yield to the gospel unless the Spirit works in their hearts. This shows how dependent we are on the Holy Spirit when sharing the gospel.

Guidance of the Spirit

In John 16:12-15, the Lord spoke about the ministry of the Spirit in guiding God's people. The Lord said, *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to*

you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:12-15). The Lord told about the ministry the Spirit shall do when He comes, in connection with the Lord. The Lord glorified the Father on the earth. When the Spirit comes, He shall glorify the Son on this earth.

The Lord said that the Spirit shall take from the Son and give to the people. Whatever the Son has is from the Father. The Spirit shall take from the Son and give them to the people of God. Without this ministry of the Spirit, none can understand anything of the Lord. This is the reason why He said, though there are many things to say, they were not able to bear it. This limitation shall be removed only on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit descends on them and reveals to them greater truths. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Truth is the Word of God (John 17:17). It is the Spirit through whom the Word is revealed.

It is not only in the giving of the inspired word that the Spirit was involved, but when a person reads it or studies it, it is the Spirit who gives the illumination. Without the help of the Spirit, no individual would be able to go into the depths of the scripture. As the Author, the Spirit should make them clear. It is the Spirit who helps the person to practice what was understood. These show that without the help of the Spirit, no one can come to the Lord or grow in the Lord. This is the idea we receive from the instruction, "*Walk in the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:16). This means to walk in dependence on the Spirit. The portrait here is a child learning to walk. The child holds the mother and walks. So are we in this world. We cannot walk by ourselves. But the Spirit of truth is given as our help. He enlightens our path and helps us go forward. Just as a child holds the hand of the parent and walks, we must, each day, depend on the Spirit and walk. This is walking in the Spirit.

How important these truths about the Holy Spirit were to those disciples. They were in sorrow, thinking about the departure of the Lord. They might have felt they were abandoned in the world. But He told them that He would not leave them orphans. He shall come to them again after the resurrection. Apart from this,

He shall send the Holy Spirit from the Father. Jesus assured them that it would be good for them. They shall associate with Him in building up the church. He shall convict the world through them. And He shall guide them in all the truth. These words of the Lord might have given them much strength and confidence. They might not have understood all the implications of what the Lord said, but they might have understood what was essential. But when the Spirit indwelt them, He would lead them to greater heights of revelation.

30

The Two 'Little Whiles'

The phrase *"a little while"* occurs seven times in John 16:16-22. In John's Gospel, the phrase also occurs in 7:33; 12:35; 13:33; 14:19. Outside this Gospel, it occurs in Hebrews 10:37. A similar phrase in 1 Peter 5:10 is different. T E Wilson says,

> "It is mentioned here seven times, and twice in the rest of the NT, in Hebrews, chapter 10, where it is called 'a very little while' and in 1 Peter, chapter 5."[1]

The phrase in 1 Peter 5:10 is different in Greek. The key number in Strong is 3641, whereas key numbers for other occurrences are 3397 or 3398. The Lord would teach them some major events that would occur 'in a little while' (John 16:16-33).

Puzzled by the 'Little Whiles'

When the Lord spoke to them about the coming of 'little whiles,' it brought confusion in the minds of the people. They could not understand what Jesus meant. Jesus says, *"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said, therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying"* (John 16:16-18). The disciples could not follow what He said. There were other instances when disciples could not follow the words of the Lord

(Matthew 16:22; 17:23; Mark 9:9, 10, 31, 32; Luke 9:44, 45; 18:34; 24:25). Until the Spirit came and guided them with the truth, they had a problem in understanding truths. Now, they were puzzled at what Jesus said about the 'little whiles.'

Though the disciples were confused by the term '*little while,*' Jesus was not using this for the first time. He had used a similar term in His conversation with the Jews. "*Then Jesus said to them, "I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come"* (John 7:33-34). Jesus told this to the officers who came to arrest Him, sent by the Jewish leaders. He had told the disciples likewise. "*Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you"* (John 13:33). This He uttered just a while ago when they were in the upper room. But it seems all these were hidden from the minds of these disciples. Apart from the verses quoted above, the Lord had shared with them about the significant events to follow and things about Himself. These doctrines of his death, resurrection, ascension, and coming to judgment, our Lord had inculcated to his disciples (John 8:21; 12:33; 14:2,4,12,28; 16:5,7). Still, their minds were blocked from understanding. This denotes the necessity of the Spirit's help for a believer to understand spiritual matters.

Jesus Helps in Understanding

Jesus knew their difficulty in understanding what He told them. They wanted to ask Him about the '*little whiles.*' John says, *"Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, 'Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again, a little while, and you will see Me?'"* (John 16:19). They had not asked Him about the matter. They spoke among themselves about this. Jesus knew their desire to ask Him. Here, the omniscience of the Lord is seen. He knew what was going on among them and within them. This indicates His deity, that He is God. Now, He interposes and helps them out of their ignorance and confusion.

The Lord said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore, you now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing"* (John 16:20-23a).

Jesus begins His words with "*Most assuredly*" or '*Verily, verily*' (KJV). In John's Gospel, this term is seen many times. This gives a double affirmation of what He was going to tell following this phrase. Jesus, then, tells them all the experiences they would go through in life. The phrase "*Most Assuredly*" appears in the Gospel only two more times. First, before He went to the cross, and for the last time after His resurrection (16:23; 21:18).

The Lord now would distinguish between the characteristics of the time after the first '*little while*' and of the time after the second 'little while' (vv. 20, 21). The first one would be a time of sorrow for them and joy for the world. And the second time would be a time of joy for the disciples and sorrow for the world. The Lord compared the times associated with the two '*little whiles*' with the illustration of a woman in travail (v.21). A woman, when she is about to deliver a child, is in great travail. But then, the child who is the reason for the travail would become the cause of joy after the birth. For the disciples, the Lord shall be the cause of sorrow in His departure from them. But the same Lord shall become the cause of joy after the time of sorrow. The Lord assured, *"I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."* Their sorrow had already begun (v.22). But after the sight (*"I will see you again"*), the joy shall be real and permanent and full.

About the identification of the two "*little whiles,"* there are two suggestions.

Firstly, when the Lord said, "*A little while, you shall not see Me,"* the Lord was referring to the death on the cross, which

would happen the very next day. It shall put them in sorrow. They were already in sorrow. Till the time of His death, the first '*little while,'* they shall continue in sorrow. Then, after three days, the second *'little while,*' at the resurrection, their sorrow shall turn to joy. The Lord, who was the reason for their sorrow in the first *'little while,'* shall become the reason for their rejoicing then.

Secondly, the first '*little while'* is taken as the time till the ascension. The death, burial, resurrection, and return to the Father shall happen in this time of forty days. The second *'little while'* is taken as the time till the second coming of the Lord. The second suggestion views the second *'little while*' as the church age itself. At the second coming, His people shall enter His joy.

Though the first suggestion sounds like the natural choice among the two, for the following reasons, the second is more acceptable.

It does justice to the Lord's statement, *"I go to the Father."* Also see verse 28. "*I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father"* (John 16:28).

In its broader context, the verses do not apply only to the Twelve but to all believers. If it is limited only to death and resurrection, it has only limited application.

The phrase *"little while"* applies to other believers also in the epistles (Hebrews 10:37; 1 Peter 5:10). Thus, the interpretation should also be taken for the wider application.

The terms *'sorrow*' and *'travail'* are always applied to the experience of the believers. It is not just to the Twelve who would be witnesses of the death of the cross and resurrection.

In verse 23 (a), the Lord said, "*And in that day you will ask Me nothing"* (John 16:23). This part of the verse seems to fit only the time when the Lord shall return. Thus, it is necessary to have a broader time period for the application of what the Lord said to the disciples.

The truth mentioned above shows that verse 16 has a wider application. The Lord said, *"I will see you again."* Then, the

Lord said, they shall rejoice. The Lord, who was and is the cause of all sorrow, hatred from the world, and separation from the world, shall become the cause of great joy for His followers. Thus, the second suggestion seems to fit in its context.

Privileges of Believers

Now the Lord would talk about the privileges of His followers during the time of His absence, after the first *'little while.'*

They have the privilege of coming to God as children. Jesus said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now, you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language, but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day, you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father"* (John 16:23 (b)-28). Here, the Lord was saying about the privilege His followers would have, in the church age, in the second '*little while.*' They would have the privilege of praying to the Father for all their needs. Until then, they were going to the Lord for all their needs. Now, the Lord says that the time shall come when they can come directly to the Father and ask their needs in His name, without a mediator. When it means that they can pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, it means in His authority, for His sake, and for the glory of God. When they ask in His name, the things they ask should be the things that Jesus Himself would have asked.

This privilege of drawing near to God is taught in the epistles. The epistle to the Hebrews says, "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16). *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the*

veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22). *"Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25). How pathetic it is to see many in Christendom, trying to come to God through many mediators whom they call 'saints.' It seems, Paul was having such in his mind when he said, *"Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head"* (Colossians 2:18-19).

The Lord said that there is no need for a mediator, as the Father loves those who follow Christ, as they have believed that Jesus came from the Father. The Father loves them and hears them and answers them. This is a privilege the disciples did not have when Jesus was physically present with them. Jesus said, *"Until now you have asked nothing in My name"* (John 16:24). Then, about the coming church age, Jesus said, *"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full"* (John 16:24). These words must encourage us to lead an effective prayer life.

They have the privilege of fuller revelation and understanding. The Lord said, *"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father"* (John 16:25). Jesus was looking forward to the time of greater revelation, after the Spirit is come. By the mention of the '*figurative language,'* Jesus might have been referring to the term '*little while,'* which confused the disciples.

Notice the response of the disciples to the words that Jesus spoke to them now (vv. 25-28). They said, "*His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God'"* (John 16:29-30).

Barnes explains,

> "What he had said that perplexed them was that which is contained in John 16:16. Compare John 16:17-19: "A little while and ye shall not see me." This he had now explained by saying (John 16:28), "Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." In this, there was no ambiguity, and they expressed themselves satisfied with this explanation."[2]

They could have peace amid tribulation. Towards the close of His discourse, there was a situation where the disciples had to be corrected and warned. They claimed, *"By this we believe that You came forth from God."* Here, the Lord corrects them. He said, *"Do you now believe? Indeed, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me"* (John 16:31-32). Jesus was deflating their overconfidence. There were similar occasions before this also.

A good number of His disciples stopped accompanying Him, saying that His sayings were hard. Then the Lord told the Twelve that they might also go from Him. It was Peter who responded. He said, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Peter talked about their faith and understanding with much confidence. Now, Jesus addresses their overconfidence and says, *"Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve"* (John 6:68-71). When Peter said that '*they believed*,' he included Judas also. Jesus corrects and rebukes him for his overconfidence. Another time, the Lord said that He was leaving the disciples and informed them that they would not be able to follow Him on the path. Again, it was Peter who responded, expressing his self-confidence. Peter said, *"Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake. Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times"* (John 13:37-38). Now, this is another occasion. When Jesus spoke to them in clear terms, they

said, *"By this we believe that you came forth from God."* Probably, it was Peter himself who was the spokesperson. Now, again, the Lord had to rebuke and correct them.

Jesus asked, "*Do you now believe?*" This question was asked to give them an opportunity for a full self-examination. Though they imagined that they had unshaken faith which would endure every trial, Jesus told them that they were about to go through experiences that were severe and bitter. They would need more confidence in God. When we feel strong, that may be the moment when we are the weakest. In such times, we should examine ourselves. It may be that we are self-deceived. Trials might shake our faith to its foundation. Self-examination and appropriate correction are very much essential. To encourage self-examination, the Lord asked this question. And He further said that they would all go their ways and leave Him alone. But He said that His Father would be with Him. Once the Lord had told the Jews, "*And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"* (John 8:29). The Father was with Him in the hour of His suffering. Jesus is now moving forward with this confidence. Even in the dense darkness of our lives, when we are confident that the Father is present with us, it gives us confidence to face it head-on.

The utterance of the Lord from the cross, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*" may sound like a contradiction. But here He calls the Father "God." This is when He became the sin offering for humanity. He was taking the place of the sinners. As God, the Father, forsook Him. But in the Father-Son relationship, there was no separation. The Father was with Him. They are inseparably one. If they are separated, nothing can remain in its place. Because in Him all things consist.

About His moment on the cross, Barnes says,

> "Even then he had confidence in God—confidence so strong and unwavering that he could say, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," Luke 23:46. In all these sufferings he had the assurance that God was his friend, that he was doing his will, that he was promoting his glory, and that he looked on him with approbation. It matters little who else forsakes us if God be with us in the hour

> of pain and of death; and though poor, forsaken, or despised, yet, if we have the consciousness of his presence and his favour, then we may fear no evil. His rod and his staff, they will comfort us."[3]

This confidence of the Lord in the face of trials could be the possession of all His people in all their experiences. Jesus said, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). For those who follow Jesus, their experiences are paradoxical. *"In the world,"* they shall have tribulation. But in the Lord, they shall have victory. This is the privilege of all the children of God who are in the world, in the second *'little while'* waiting for the coming of the Lord.

31

The Lord's Prayer

The title 'The Lord's Prayer' is often used for a prayer Jesus taught His disciples at an early stage of His ministry when they asked Him to teach how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4). It begins with the words, *"Our Father which is in heaven…"* However, since it is a prayer that Jesus taught His disciples as a model prayer, we can call it a 'disciple's prayer.' If there is any prayer for which we could give the title 'The Lord's Prayer,' it is the prayer which is recorded in John's Gospel chapter 17, which is our present consideration. Here, the Lord prays for the Father's help for the death of the cross, for the Twelve, and all the believers in the church age. This prayer we may call as His intercessory prayer or the High Priestly prayer. After His sermon in the upper room, He prays. Normally, preachers pray before preaching. After preaching, normally, they feel relieved and do not pray. People pray only when they need help. However, prayer is needed after preaching. The Spirit should apply the truths that are shared. So, Jesus prays to His Father.

Nature of the Prayer

This prayer is the conversation between the First Person and the Second Person in the Trinity. The full understanding of certain truths and their depths is beyond human perception. One of the leaders among the Moravian Brethren, Stein of Germany, has suggested that this chapter should not be studied as it is a conversation between the Father and the Son. Some think that these words are 'ground which even angels fear to tread.' But if

this chapter is not intended for study or meditation, then this would not have been written and given to us. If it were so, then it would not have been spoken at the hearing of the disciples. As it is written and given to God's children, it is only their privilege to read, study, and meditate on it.

The following truths are evident about the prayer in this chapter.

It is not an ordinary prayer. The word rendered as '*pray*' is different from the common word used. The word used for "*I pray*" in verses 9, 15, 20 may be rendered as 'I interrogate' or 'I desire.' It is not the usual word used for prayer. Similarly, "*I will*" in verse 24 means 'I determine.' Thus, more than a prayer, what we have here is the counsel between the Father and the Son, the Persons in the Trinity.

The Lord is seen in His mediatorial character. He prays for Himself (vv. 1-5), His disciples, the eleven (verses 6 to 19), and for the believers in general (vv. 20-26). It is amazing to know that the believers now living, you and I, are also included here.

Jesus never prayed together with His disciples. They were only witnesses to His prayers. He never asked them to join Him in prayers. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord prayed alone, going further away from the disciples. The reason for this may be the nature of His relationship with the Father. It was different from the relationship the disciples had. When He called the First Person in the Trinity as Father, it was in His equality with Him in His essence and position. For the disciples, He was their Father because of His grace. This is evident from the words of the Lord in another context. He said, *"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"* (John 20:17). He could have said "*Our Father.*" But He separates Himself from them by saying, *"My Father and your Father."* In the chapter, Jesus mentions the Father about six times (vv. 1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). In these references, He calls the Father '*Holy Father*' (v. 11), and a righteous Father (v.25).

Notice the posture in prayer. "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven" (John 17:1). Nowhere in the Bible are we prescribed a posture for prayer. Nevertheless, we see various postures assumed in prayers. Solomon knelt and lifted his hands and prayed. Some have fallen prostrate before the Lord. Here, Jesus lifted up His eyes and prayed. This should not give us the notion that God is dwelling up or that heaven is up above us. But looking above acknowledges God as above us and greater than all. Thus, we see people looking up and praying. In a similar sense, heaven is said to be above. Jesus looked up and prayed to the Father.

Jesus Prays for Himself

The Lord begins with His own needs (vv. 1-5). Normally, we say that when we pray, we must give importance to others. But Jesus began with His own needs. But this prayer that He makes for Himself is not out of selfishness. He did not have an evil nature to become selfish. The glory that He demands of His Father here is what He deserves. The glory which He sought from the Father was for the good of His people, that their joy may be full. Five times the word 'glory' or 'glorify' occurs in these verses. This shows that the theme here is glory. But they do not have the same meanings. They refer to different kinds of glory.

The Lord began the prayer with a declaration about the confidence He had in the Father. He said, *"Father, the hour has come"* (v.1). The address "*Father"* shows His confidence in the love and the presence of the Father in that time of trial. He also had the confidence that all things were happening according to divine purpose and plan. He said, *"The hour has come."* The references to "*hour"* occur in this Gospel repeatedly (2:4; 7:6,8, 30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1). All these looked forward to the hour of His death on the cross. This was the hour for which the Lord had come to this world. It was through the sufferings of the cross that He would enter glory. Thus, the hour of His suffering was not a time of disgrace but his glory.

The Lord prays to the Father for glory. He says, "*Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him*

authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:1-5).

Jesus says, *"Glorify your Son."* The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains,

> "This request of glorification included sustaining Jesus in suffering, accepting His sacrifice, resurrecting Him, and restoring Him to His pristine glory."[1]

It was through the cross that the Lord would glorify the Father. The authority to save those who would believe in Him was given to Him by the Father. He would give them eternal life. The cross and the salvation of many who would believe would glorify the Father. In verse 4, the Lord said, "*I have glorified you on the earth.*" This refers to the life of Jesus Christ on the earth, from Bethlehem to Calvary. His death had not happened while Jesus was saying the prayer. It would be fulfilled after a few more hours, the next day. But, as far as the Lord was concerned, it was as if fulfilled, as He was already on the road to the cross. The passage ends with the petition that the Father would glorify Him with Himself with the glory which He had before the world was. This was fully answered in ascension and glorification.

"The only true God," a phrase used for God the Father, is often quoted by those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. But a clearer understanding would sort out any confusion. Barnes explains the phrase,

> "The only God, in opposition to all false gods. What is said here is in opposition to idols, not to Jesus himself, who, in 1 John 5:20, is called "the true God and eternal life."[2]

The various possible translations of the phrase in Greek are also helpful. Adam Clarke writes,

> "The words in this verse have been variously translated: 1. That they might acknowledge thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast

> sent, to be the only true God. 2. That they might acknowledge thee, the only true God, and Jesus, whom thou hast sent, to be the Christ or Messiah. 3. That they might acknowledge thee to be the only true God, and Jesus Christ to be him whom thou hast sent. And all these translations the original will bear."[3]

These possible translations suggested show that the phrase "*Only true God"* does not deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

In verses 6 to 19, the Lord prays for the disciples who were with Him. The Lord said, *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word"* (v. 6). Further, in verse 9 the Lord said, *"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours"* (v.9). These verses may give the impression that the Lord was praying for all those who were following Him while He was on earth. But in verse 12 He said, *"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled"* (v. 12). This shows that He was praying only for the eleven disciples who were with Him then. John 6:66 indicates that many people withdrew from following Him. Thus, the eleven disciples were the focus of prayer.

The descriptions of the Eleven are given in verses 6 - 8. Jesus said, *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."*

The following seven truths are seen about the Eleven in these verses. Firstly, they belonged to the Father. This is by way of election. God chose them for Himself and salvation in the past eternity. Secondly, they were taken out of the world. This shows that they were 'of the world' once upon a time. But God separated

them from the world. Thirdly, the Father gave them to the Son. This was to save them and secure them (6:37,39). Fourthly, the Lord manifested God's word to them. Fifthly, they have kept God's word. Sixthly, they believed that all things they experienced with the Lord were from the Father. The Father is the 'Fountain Head" in the Trinity. Seventhly, they accepted that Jesus was sent from the Father. All these descriptions seen here always apply to all the believers. But here, the Lord is speaking about the eleven disciples who were with Him then.

The Lord then gives the reasons for praying for them (vv. 9-11a). There are three reasons presented here. Firstly, the divine ownership over them. Jesus said, "*I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours"* (v. 9). As they belonged to God, it was His prerogative to care for them. Second, their transformation. The Lord said, *"And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them"* (v.10). When the Lord said *"I am glorified in them,"* He was referring to the great transformation that had come in them since they started following Him. They were no longer the same. They were now sharing the life and character of God. Now the Lord committed them to the Father. Thirdly, the Lord said, "*Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You"* (v. 11). The world is contrary to the Lord and His people. When the Lord was with them in the world, He kept them secure. Now, He was going to the Father. He gives them to the care of the Father. He shall secure them by sending the Holy Spirit to be with them forever.

Petitions in Prayer

The Lord presents four petitions for His disciples (vv. 11-19). Firstly, He prays, "*Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are"* (v. 11). The Lord addresses the Father as "*Holy Father.*" In the New Testament, we see the Father addressed with this title only here. Of course, holiness is also ascribed to God in other places (1 John 2:20; Luke 1:49). The Spirit is referred to as the 'Holy Spirit' in various passages in the Bible. Holiness is also ascribed to the Lord Jesus (Luke 1:35; John 6:69- ESV, NASB, DARBY). When

the Lord is praying for the keeping of His disciples, it is only appropriate for the Lord to address the Father as 'Holy Father.' James says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"* (James 1:13). He says, "*God cannot be tempted by evil."* This means God does not possess an evil nature or a sinful nature. He never triggers our sinful nature. Further, James says, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). He is the Father or Origin of lights. No darkness comes from Him. The address, *'Holy Father,'* refers to the holy nature of the Father, which assures us of only good things for us. To this Father, He commits His disciples for keeping. The assurance we have that all the good to come from the Father is due to this character of the Father. He keeps them by His 'name,' which indicates His authority.

Jesus tells about His care for them while He was with them. He says, "*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled"* (v. 12). Here, Jesus refers to Judas Iscariot. He went away in his own way, leaving the Lord. He became the betrayer. When the Lord asked to *'keep'* them He might have meant that He did not want another to break the company and go his own way. He wanted them to be together. Jesus prayed for Peter likewise, especially when Satan desired to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31,32). He wanted the eleven to be together, without being separated from the group.

Jesus prays that *'they may be one, as we are.*' This petition also includes their oneness. For the unity of the believers, the model given here is the oneness of the three Persons in the Trinity. The reference is not to the oneness in their essence, which is impossible for the believers. But the oneness mentioned here is the oneness in the will, words, and works (John 5:19,30,37,24). Father, Son, and the Spirit are one in all these areas. Similarly, believers also must have unity in these. Paul wrote to Corinthians, "*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus*

Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Despite all these desires and prayers, we see the divisions and fights in the churches and among the churches.

Secondly, the Lord prays for their joy. He said, "*But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves"* (John 17:13). Jesus had mentioned "*My Father"* (14:2), "*My name"* (14:26), "*My peace"* (14:27), and "*My love"* (15:10). Now He speaks about "*My joy."* This is the joy that continues irrespective of the circumstances. For Jesus, His crucifixion was very near. He knew all that would happen. Still, He could say about His joy. He wanted this joy to be their possession. The Lord said that the source of this joy is His words and prayer for them. He said that this was the reason why He prayed while He was with them in the world. For believers, the source of joy and rejoicing is the Word of the Lord and His present ministry for them.

Thirdly, He prays that the Father would keep them from evil. *"I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world"* (vv. 14-16). In verses 11 and 12, the word *'keep'* or *'kept'* occurs three times. It was used in connection with unity, as one. The word "*kept*" means to safe guard. But the word, "*keep"* in verse 15, is different. It means to keep as a shepherd would keep his flock. Shepherd keeps his flock from all kinds of evils. The Lord wanted His followers to be secured like that. The word, "*world"* seen repeatedly in these verses, means that system that is active around us which, under the control of Satan, with which he entices us from the Lord. The world is against the followers of the Lord, they being separated from the world.

Fourthly, Jesus prays for their holiness. He says, *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I*

sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (vv. 17-19). Even for God, holiness is the most important attribute. This attribute is celebrated in heaven (Isaiah 6:3). If for God this is the most important attribute, it is so with God's children.

Holiness comes by the work of the Word of God in our lives. Jesus said that it was the truth that sanctifies, and the truth is the word of God. Earlier, the Lord had told, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (15:3). The word of God regenerates (1 Peter 1:23), gives growth (2:2), helps in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:17), corrects and perfects (2 Timothy 3:16,17), raises from the dead (John 5:25) and now, sanctifies (17:17). The psalmist says, *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word"* (Psalms 119:9). Without aligning our lives with the truth, the word of God, sanctification is an impossibility.

The Lord said that towards this end, that is, for the holiness of the disciples, He sanctifies Himself. Jesus was not talking about personal sanctification. He had no sin to be sanctified. He is the thrice-holy One. Adam Clarke explains,

> "I consecrate and devote myself to death-that I may thereby purchase eternal salvation for them. There seems to be here an allusion to the entering of the high priest into the holy of holies, when, having offered the sacrifice, he sprinkled the blood before the ark of the covenant. So, Jesus entered into the holiest of all by his own blood, in order to obtain everlasting redemption for men."[4]

The Lord set Himself apart for the death of the cross that through that one sacrifice they may be sanctified forever.

In praying for the eleven disciples who were with Him then, He desired the Father for their keeping, for their joy, security from evil in the world, and for their holiness. Having made these petitions for the eleven, now the Lord would widen the scope of His prayer to include all those who would believe in Him, in the church age.

32

Divine Plan for Believers

The Lord would now widen the scope of His prayer. He would pray for all the people who would believe in Him through the ministry of the apostles and would believe in Him down the centuries, even all the believers in the church age. Thus, it includes us also. Is it not an amazing thing to remember that the Lord remembered and prayed for even the last person who would believe in Him in the church age!

Jesus prays, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word"* (17:20). These are the believers in the New Testament time. In verses 20-24, the Lord makes His petitions for all the believers. And in verses 25, 26, He announces His plans and concludes the prayer.

Petitions for all Believers

Jesus prays, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (17: 20-24).

The petitions are two-fold. Firstly, He prays for their unity. Secondly, He prays for their presence with Him in heaven. Thus, Jesus is praying for their unity and fellowship. These two show the two relationships, Godward and manward. We may refer to them as vertical and horizontal relationships. The summary of the scripture is these two relationships. When a lawyer came to the Lord and asked for the greatest of the commands, Jesus answered, *"'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'"* (Matthew 22:37-40). Paul shortens it further. He says, *"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'"* (Galatians 5:14). Here, the love for God is not exempted, but it is implied. Where there is love for humans, then love for God is present. In the great high priestly, intercessory prayer of the Lord, Jesus prays for these relationships of His people.

Jesus prays for their unity (vv. 20-23). He said, *"That they all may be one"* (v.21). Again, *"That they also may be one in Us"* (v. 21). Further, "*That they may be one just as We are one"* (v. 22). And again, He says, "*That they may be made perfect in one"* (v. 23). In the span of three verses Jesus tells this four times. These show how much the Lord desired their unity. Though the Lord desired their unity, we see divisions in the churches and among churches. Of course, though the church is thus divided, miserable here on earth, in Christ Jesus it remains as one body. With all the diverse understanding of the Scripture and their teachings, there cannot be unity on earth. But at the Lord's coming, when our comprehension of the teachings of the Lord shall be perfected, the divisions shall vanish.

In the description of the people of God, Jesus says that they would believe in Him through the apostles' preaching (v.20). Their words are His words, and their words are about Him. Thus, believing in them is believing in Him. Faith is the only condition for becoming the children of God. The cause of the Original Fall was unbelief in the word of God. Thus, the condition of faith for

salvation is only reasonable. Such ones, saved by faith, must live in unity as the children of the Heavenly Father.

The pattern for unity is given. *"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You"* (v. 21). The pattern for unity is the unity between the Father and the Son and the unity between the Son and His followers. Thus, there should be unity among the believers. The Lord had told this before. *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are"* (17:11). Adam Clarke asks in wonder,

> "This prayer was literally answered to the first believers, who were all of one heart and of one soul: Acts 4:32. And why is it that believers are not in the same spirit now?"[1]

As stated before, the unity the Lord desires for His people is not the oneness the Father has with the Son in essence, but in will, words, and works.

There are four kinds of unity in the scripture. Firstly, the unity between the three persons of the Trinity. Secondly, the union of the two natures in the Person of the Lord Jesus, His humanity and deity. Thirdly, the union of His people with Himself. He lives in them (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27). The illustrations of head and body, the bride and the bridegroom, etc., are given to explain this unity. Fourthly, the unity of believers among themselves. The Lord has brought this unity among the believers. But this must become experiential (Ephesians 2:14,15; 4:1-3; Galatians 3:26).

The Lord mentions two elements as the foundation upon which this unity is built. Firstly, the Word of God, and secondly, the glory which the Lord gave to them.

The Lord said, *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You"* (vv. 20, 21). The word was given, and they received it with meekness. It is this common faith that makes unity. It is like 'one foundation.' For the early church, the doctrines they received from the apostles

were the basis for fellowship. "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). The list of things they continued in began with the 'apostles' doctrine.' It is the Word of God that gives life. Another factor that provides unity is the glory He gave them. He said, *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one"* (v.23). The glory here may have the meaning of nature or character. By the word of God, we are born again, and we receive life. As we have His life, we have also His nature. Peter says, *"As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2 Peter 1:3-4). We are partakers of His life and nature. Love is one of His prominent natures. Love unites.

The Lord also explains why unity among His followers is essential. He states, "*That the world may believe that You sent Me*" (17:21). He further adds, "*That the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me*" (17:23). These verses show that only a community united in love can truly witness to the world about the One who was sent by the Father. If we are divided, the world will not be able to receive the testimony we give. There would be a lot of activity carried out in the name of the Lord, but it would be ineffective. It appears that this is especially true today. Unity would also be evidence of the love God has placed upon them. It would serve as proof of the love of the Father for them, just as He loved the Son. Without unity, these things will remain impossible.

Lack of unity has been a problem among God's people. It was lacking in the assembly at Corinth. God had tempered them together as a body (1 Corinthians 12:24). This indicates the act of God in making them one, to such an extent that they are inseparable. But practically, the church is seen as a shattered earthen vessel. It is torn to pieces, to such an extent that it cannot be put together. Paul instructed the saints at Corinth, "*Now I*

plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Though the church and churches are seen miserably divided, eventually this desire of the Lord shall be answered in its fulness. The church is one in Christ Jesus. When the Lord comes, the discord that prevails and pervades shall disappear, and unity shall take its place. Unto that unity, the Lord prayed here to the Father.

Jesus, then, prays for their presence with Him, their companionship. He says, "*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (v. 24). In 12:26, the Lord had promised His followers, those who serve Him, His presence. The Lord said, *"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour"* (John 12:26). If the Lord promised His presence to those who follow Him and serve Him, now He prays for the same.

While making this petition, Jesus uses the phrase, "*I desire."* It is a strong phrase. In explaining the phrase, Barnes says,

> "This expression, though it commonly denotes command, is here only expressive of desire. It is used in prayer, and it was not the custom of the Saviour to use language of command when addressing God. It is often used to express strong and earnest desire, or a pressing and importunate wish, such as we are exceedingly anxious should not be denied."[2]

Thus, this is an expression of the Lord's strong desire. The Father should grant it. And he did.

The Lord desires that those whom the Father gave Him would be with Him in heaven. A while ago, the Lord had promised this to these disciples. He said, "*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:2-3). The purpose for which He desires this is that they may

behold His glory. This '*glory*' is that glory into which He entered after accomplishing His work on earth. Paul says, "*Being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name"* (Philippians 2:6-9). Peter also says about, "*the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*" (1 Peter 1:11). This glory seems to be that special glory which the Father in everlasting covenant, has appointed for Christ, as the reward of the work of redemption.

The beholding of this glory is not just seeing it, but beholding it and sharing in the glory. Barnes comments,

> "The word 'behold' implies more than simply seeing; it means also to participate, to enjoy."[3]

Paul mentions this as a present experience also. He says, "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is the present possibility and experience. But there is a futuristic application. John says, "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2). The Lord was praying for their future experience, when the children of God shall see Him face to face and share in His glory. This portrays the great plan the Lord has for His own.

While the Lord demanded that His own should be where He would be that they may behold His glory, the basis or ground for the demand was the eternal love of the Father to the Son. Jesus said, *"For You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:24). The believers are accepted in the presence of the Father as the Father loves the Son. Paul says, *"He made us accepted in the Beloved"* (Ephesians 1:6). Those who belong to

Christ are received in the presence of God just as Jesus is received there. His worth is reckoned to their account. This is more than anyone can even imagine. As we belong to Christ, we are accepted in the presence of the Father, just as the Son is, with all His worth!

God's Plan for Believers

After the prayer, in verses 25 and 26, the Lord reverts to the matter of the eleven disciples who were there with Him at that moment. The Lord prayed and said, "*O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them"* (17:25-26). Notice how the Lord refers to the object of these words. "*These have known that You sent Me"* (v.25). "*And I have declared to them Your name"* (v.26). These statements are about the eleven disciples who were with Him.

In these verses, the Lord was not making any petitions or praying for them, but He was declaring His plan for the eleven. And at the same time, He was looking down the centuries following, to the whole church age, and announcing His plans for His own.

The Lord calls the Father the "*righteous Father*." This address is because of the work the Lord shall accomplish on the cross. Based on this work, the Father can act righteously. He would fulfil the demands of the Law by His life and death. That righteousness is reckoned to those who put their trust in Him. Thus, they are made righteous. All these are on account of what Jesus did by His one sacrifice. It seems the declaration, *"The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me,"* refers to their reception of the good of His death by faith. The knowledge of the Father by the Son and the disciples is mentioned separately, indicating the difference in nature and measure of the knowledge.

Further, the Lord said, *"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it"* (v.26). This refers to the ministry of the

Lord for three and a half years to these disciples. He declared the Father through His words and works. He could tell His disciples, "*He that has seen Me has seen the Father.*" Another time, He claimed, "*I and My Father are one.*" Through Him, they knew the Father. And when the Lord said, "*and will declare it,*" He was looking forward to the cross. His crucifixion would be the ultimate level of revelation. The love of the Father, wisdom, power, knowledge, holiness, grace, and all other attributes of the Father are seen on the cross. That is the fullness of revelation. This revelation shall continue further in the forty days after His resurrection and later by the Spirit of truth sent down to lead them into all the truth.

His declaration continues, *"that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* This may refer to the relationship of the Lord with His disciples in this church age. Love is poured into their hearts by the giving of the Spirit (Romans 5:5; 15:30). They have the privilege of the fellowship of the Father and the Son (14:23). Indwelling of the Spirit is a special privilege the believers of the New Testament possess. The Lord was looking to His plan for His people in this age and making these declarations.

Barnes provides an appropriate conclusion in his expositions to the Upper Room ministry. He says,

> "The discourse in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters is the most tender and sublime that was ever pronounced in our world. No composition can be found anywhere so fitted to sustain the soul in trial or to support it in death. This sublime and beautiful discourse is appropriately closed by a solemn and most affecting prayer—a prayer at once expressive of the profoundest reverence for God and the tenderest love for men—simple, grave, tender, sublime, and full of consolation."[4]

Amen and amen.

VI

Arrest and Crucifixion

"'I have told you that I am He. Therefore,
if you seek Me, let these go their way,'
that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke"
John 18:8-9

33

Jesus Enters Gethsemane

Jesus finished His sermon, which He started in the upper room, and concluded it with His great high priestly prayer. He would enter the Garden of Gethsemane. The events that should follow were foretold repeatedly by the Lord. All these events, though the experiences would be bitter, were the things which He looked forward to, and for which He came. All these happened in the latter part of the Passion Week. Jesus had told the disciples all that would occur in the Passion Week in Jerusalem. He said, "*Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again*" (Mark 10:33-34). This was an orderly announcement of all that would happen that week. The major events that occurred were His arrest, trials, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. These were signs Jesus had offered to the unbelieving Jews. To the Jews who questioned His authority to cleanse the Temple, Jesus said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*" (John 2:19). He said this about His body. Another time the Lord said, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matthew 12:39-40). Jesus told this to the Pharisees and the

scribes when they asked Him for a sign. Now these signs must be accomplished.

Ryle says, quoting Henry,

> "The office of the priest was to teach and pray and offer sacrifice. Christ, after teaching and praying, applies Himself to make atonement. He had said all He had to say as a prophet, He now addresses Himself to His work as priest."[1]

It should be good to be reminded that the events that would occur were not fully comprehensible to human eyes. These are the accomplishments of the work of redemption which the Son had undertaken in the eternal counsels of God, in the past eternity.

Stalker says,

> "But we fear to analyse the elements of the scene. We know that any conception of ours must be utterly unable to exhaust its meaning."[2]

But it is the privilege of all the redeemed to ponder on these events, which would make their redemption possible. This would lead to a life of gratitude and worship.

Going Across the Valley

Jesus left the city of Jerusalem and crossed the valley that divides the city from the Mount of Olives to enter a garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He agonised, foreseeing the things that should happen to Him. These are recorded in Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46, and John 18:1-11.

Jesus leaves the city of Jerusalem and goes beyond the city limits. Luke says, "*Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him*" (Luke 22:39). Luke states that He came out. John also indicates the same thing when he says, "*When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered*" (John 18:1). The prayer of John 17, the Lord might have uttered inside the city walls. Now the Lord comes out and goes toward the Garden of Gethsemane, located on the slopes of the mountain. The name Gethsemane is derived from two Hebrew words, which

mean 'oil press.' Thus, it was a place or field that had an oil press, for treating olives, to extract oil. This indicates that in the garden, there were olive trees and other trees. It may be assumed that it was on the lower slopes of the mountain. Luke mentions that this was a place where Jesus and the disciples used to resort.

E W G Masterman surmises,

> "Very possibly (Luke 21:37; 22:39) it was a spot where Jesus habitually lodged when visiting Jerusalem. The owner—whom conjecture suggests as Mary, the mother of Mark—must have given Jesus and His disciples special right of entry to the spot." He also says that the place that is presently seen as the location for the Garden of Gethsemane, where there are eight olive trees still, claimed to be from Jesus' time, might not be the spot. As Josephus informs that at the invasion of Jerusalem, Titus destroyed all the trees in and around Jerusalem. Thus, the Garden also might have lost all the trees and might have become without any trees and beyond identification.[3]

If not to Mary, as suggested, the Garden might have belonged to somebody close to Jesus, and they might have given Jesus and the disciples permission to use it whenever needed. In ancient times, there were the rich who owned private gardens. They are used for relaxation and meditation. John informs that Judas knew the place. John says, *"And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples"* (John 18:2).

Barnes tells about the Brook Kedron,

> "This small rivulet runs along on the east of Jerusalem till it is joined by the water of the pool of Siloam, and the water that flows down on the west side of the city through the valley of Jehoshaphat, and then goes off in a south-east direction to the Dead Sea."[4]

David had crossed this same brook when he fled from the kingdom because of the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 15:23). Now, David's Son crosses the same brook in His great day of humiliation. The brook is often mentioned in the Old Testament (1 Kings 15:13; 2 Chronicles 15:16; 2 Chronicles 30:14; 2 Kings 23:6,12). Kedron means 'dark waters.' Ryle, quoting Lampe, says

that the scapegoat, Azazel, was sent out to the wilderness this same way on the Day of Atonement.[4] Further, he says, that at the Roman invasion, Titus entered Jerusalem by this same way.[5]

The Hour of Temptation

After Jesus and the disciples entered the Garden, He asked eight of His disciples to wait there and went yonder with the three, Peter, James, and John, for prayer. Then, He left these three also, after asking them to sit and pray that they may not enter temptation. He went forward, leaving the three behind, and prayed. Here, we do not see Jesus praying with the disciples. He prayed alone to the Father. He wanted them to pray alone. The reason for this is the nature of the relationship He had with the Father. When Jesus addressed God as Father, it was because they were one in nature and essence. But we address Him as Father, because of God's grace. For this reason, He never prayed with them. Luke says, *"And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed"* (Luke 22:41). The distance, "a stone's throw," is suggested to be about "One hundred fifty to two hundred feet."[6] Here, the agony of His soul is described.

Eight disciples were not taken with Him to witness His agony. Only three of the eleven were taken to pray. The reason for excluding the eight may be because of their inability to witness His agony. He did not want them to be exposed to such deep distress. About this, Matthew records, *"And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it,*

Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand" (Matthew 26:37-46).

Matthew says, *"He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed"* (v.37). The words used to describe His distress are strong words. Leon Morris, quoting others, says,

> "This expression indicates the deepest possible emotion. The second word (deeply distresses) in particular is most expressive, and of the corresponding verb Lightfoot says, 'It describes the confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical derangement, or by mental distress, as grief, shame, disappointment, etc.' (on Philippians 2:26), while Swete thinks of it as describing 'the distress which follows a great shock … which may be worse than the sharp pain of a fully realized sorrow' (on Mark 14:33). It is a startling word to be used of the Master, and it impresses upon us that the distress of spirit which came upon Him with the cross in immediate prospect was no ordinary trouble."[7]

He told the three disciples, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me"* (Matthew 26:38). He wanted them to intercede for Him. He asked them to watch with Him. This shows the height of His stress. The movements of our Lord need to be understood. He goes with all eleven disciples to the Garden. Then, He leaves eight of them and takes only three ahead. There, He was sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then, He leaves the three disciples also behind, saying, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."* After telling this, He leaves them and goes further alone. Sensing the distress to be exceedingly great, He might have felt that it was a situation wherein human companionship was inadequate. So, He went further to be alone with His Father and prayed to Him for succour. Notice the posture for prayers. He fell on His face and prayed. This indicates the intensity of His prayer.

Yielding to the Father's Will

Jesus prayed, *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* Mark's record is more intense. He says, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will"* (Mark 14:36). *"Cup"* is a symbol of judgment or wrath. The psalmist says, *"For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down"* (Psalms 75:8). During the keeping of the Passover feast, a cup of wine called the cup of wrath was circulated to the participants. It reminded them of God's judgment on Egypt for not sending God's people from slavery.

Further, Adam Clarke draws a parallel between the words of the Lord here and the ancient method of killing criminals. He says,

> "It seems to be an allusion to a very ancient method of punishing criminals. A cup of poison was put into their hands, and they were obliged to drink it. Socrates was killed, thus being obliged by the magistrates of Athens to drink a cup of the juice of hemlock. To death, by the poisoned cup, there seems an allusion in Hebrews 2:9, Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man."[8]

Now the cup of God's wrath and judgment has come before the Lord. Here, in the words of the Lord, the grief He had while He was about to drink it is seen. He prayed to the Father that the cup might pass away from Him.

With this prayer, the Lord was not trying to escape the sufferings of the cross. He had come to the earth for this very purpose. In the prayer, the Lord was expressing His grief as He became the sin offering. He was made sin for the whole world (2 Corinthians 5:21). He bore our sins on His body (1 Peter 2:24). The words of the Lord must be seen and understood in this context. It was the reaction of the Sinless Saviour to the situation of becoming one with the sinners, to being made sin, sin offering, for them. For humans, this agony is beyond comprehension, as they are immersed in sin. Sin is natural for them. But for the

Lord, it was a matter of great grief. The prophet captures the Lord's sorrow and describes it in these words. He says, *"A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"* (Isaiah 53:3-4). The Lord was expressing His grief and sorrow as He approached the burden of the sins of the whole world. Some understand this prayer as Jesus' request to the Father to deliver Him from an early death. This interpretation is not acceptable, as everything was happening according to God's will. At the same moment when He prayed for the cup to pass over Him, He also yielded Himself to the will of the Father, in saying, *"not as I will, but as You will."*

Luke says, *"And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Luke 22:44). The word "*drops"* is a medical term, used for 'thick clots.' The word *"sweat"* is seen first in Genesis 3:19. After the Original Fall, the Lord said to Adam, *"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread."* But, in Gethsemane, the sinless Son of Man was sweating, undergoing the curse of Adam's race. Never had any man sweat like He did. And this was despite the strengthening administered by the angel from heaven (Luke 22:43).

Long-suffering of the Lord

The Lord's longsuffering with the disciples is also seen in His dealings with them in the Garden. When they entered the Garden, He told the disciples, *"Sit here while I go and pray over there"* (Matthew 26:36). Then He took the three among them, Peter, James, and John, further and said to them, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me"* (Matthew 26:38). When He went further from them to pray, He asked them to pray and *"watch with Him."* This may indicate that He wanted them to stay awake, and probably, pray for Him. After His first prayer, He came back to the disciples. Matthew says, *"Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?*

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41). In Mark's Gospel, Jesus calls Peter, "Simon." It is suggestive of His nature. Though the prayers of the Lord in the Garden, as recorded in the Gospels, are only two statements, it seems He prayed for a longer time. Jesus mentions it as "*One hour."* Jesus now asked them to pray for them, that they may not enter into temptation. Now, He goes the second time to pray. Matthew says, *"Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done"* (Matthew 26:42). In the first instance the Lord said, If it is possible, let this cup pass away. Now, He says, "*If this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.*" He knew that it could not pass away. The words show His submission to the will of the Father. He goes again the third time and says the same prayer (v. 44). And Jesus returning, found the disciples sleeping and resting. Luke says that they were sleeping from sorrow (22:45).

After Jesus returned to the disciples the third time, after His prayers, the words He spoke to them may be rendered differently. *"Sleep on henceforth, and rest!"* (Matthew 26:45- YLT). After coming from the third prayer, Jesus saw them physically exhausted and sleeping. He asked them to sleep and take some rest. Between verses 45 and 46, the Lord allowed them to take some rest. We do not know how much time they got to sleep. But the wonderful thing to notice is the long-suffering and the kindness of the Lord to His tired, exhausted disciples. While they slept, He sat there, taking care of them, without slumber or sleep. This is amazing! Then, when the time came, He woke them up saying, *"Lo, the hour is come nigh, and the Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of the sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand"* (Matthew 26:45, 46). Here, the Lord was not escaping the danger. He would face it head-on.

John did not record the agony of Jesus in the Garden. This may be according to the nature of the Gospel of John. He presents Jesus as the Son of God, that is, as God. Sorrow and grief belong to His humanity.

The way Jesus faced this time of intense sorrow and grief is an example for us in our problems. He brought His problems to the Father, being sure of His affection and succour. He knew that He was not alone. He prayed persistently and with perseverance. At the same time, He committed Himself to the will of the Father. Even in the intense sufferings, He kept His relationship with His companions, His disciples. And the Father sustained Him and answered Him, strengthened Him through it all. The writer to the Hebrews says, *"Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him"* (Hebrews 5:7-9). Probably, this refers to His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

34

Arrest in the Garden

John's narrative of the events in the Garden of Gethsemane is without any mention of the agony, which the Synoptic Gospels narrate in detail. This is according to the nature of the Gospel of John. It presents Jesus as God. God cannot be tempted. Thus, His temptations in Gethsemane are hidden. However, the narrative John gives is suitable for His deity (John 18:1-11).

After the Lord's prayers to the Father, in the Garden, the Lord came to the disciples and asked them to 'sleep on henceforth and rest.' We do not know how long they slept. Jesus was awake while they slept. When the Lord knew that it was time for Judas Iscariot to come and betray Him, He woke up the disciples and informed them that the hour had come for the Son of Man to be delivered into the hands of the sinners, and that the betrayer is near. The Lord said, *"Let's be going."* This was not an instruction to escape the moment, but the Lord was going to secure them, and He would face the situation that was coming on Him. This is narrated in the Gospel of John.

'Whom are you seeking?'

It is John who gives the details of the people who came to arrest Jesus, led by Judas Iscariot. *"And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to*

them, "Whom are you seeking?" (John 18:2-4). The most heinous act in human history was happening in the Garden. Judas, who enjoyed all the blessings from the Lord for three and a half years, now turns against Him for thirty shekels of silver and betrays his Master into the hands of the sinners. Judas knew where Jesus and the disciples would spend the evening. He brings the troops to arrest Him in the Garden. Luke calls it *"a multitude"* (22:47). Matthew calls them *"a great multitude"* (26:47). John describes them as *"a detachment of troops."* These are accounted for by commentators, as one-tenth of a Roman legion. That makes it about six hundred soldiers. *"Officers from the chief priests and Pharisees"* are the Jewish servants of these authorities. Synoptic Gospels say that they also carried *"swords and clubs"* (Mark 14:43; Matthew 26:47). These Roman and Jewish contingents, from the Temple security and the Tower of Antonia, were led by Judas Iscariot. Luke says, *"Judas, one of the twelve, went before them"* (Luke 22:47).

Jesus knew He would be arrested in the Garden. He knew all that would come to pass. But Jesus did not change the venue for retirement. He could have chosen some other place for rest and communion with the Father. Knowing that His hour has come, He goes to the same place where He often resorted. Barnes says,

> "For what purpose he went there is not declared, but it is probable that it was for retirement and prayer. He had no home in the city, and he sought this place, away from the bustle and confusion of the capital, for private communion with God. Every Christian should have some place—be it a grove, a room, or a garden—where he may be alone and offer his devotions to God. We are not told much of the private habits of Jesus, but we are permitted to know so much of him as to be assured that he was accustomed to seek for a place of retirement, and during the great feasts of the Jews the Mount of Olives was the place which he chose" (Luke 21:37; Matthew 21:17; John 8:1).[1]

The first incident that occurred when the multitude entered the Garden to arrest Jesus might be what John records. John says, *"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon*

Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now, when He said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, 'Whom are you seeking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,' that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none'" (John 18:4-9). John says that Jesus knew all things that would come upon Him. This indicates the omniscience of the Lord. This is a fact that John asserts for Jesus in many places in this Gospel. When they said that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth, He told them that it was He. When Jesus said, *"I am He,"* they fell to the ground. Though Judas was present, standing with the crowd, probably at the forefront, he had not come forward to identify Him to the authorities.

Pentecost explains the significance of the fall of those men when Jesus identified Himself. He says,

> "When Christ identified Himself, the soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground" (v. 6). The Greek verb for 'fell' used here may refer to 'one overcome in the battle by a superior' (Luke 21:24), or mean 'to fall down before high-ranking persons or divine beings' (Matthew 2:11; Revelation 5:14). The verb itself does not tell us whether the soldiers fell down because Christ exerted power over them or whether they fell down out of respect for His royal person. But whether voluntarily or involuntarily, those who represented the power of Rome were bowing before the Lord."[2]

The power and authority of the Son of God are evident here.

The words of the Lord, *"I am He,"* need explanation. It must be "I am." This claim of Jesus, or more appropriately, His self-disclosure, connects Him with Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God. When Moses asked the name of God who was sending him to Egypt, the Lord said, *"I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you"* (Exodus 3:14). This 'I am' claim of Jesus makes Him the manifestation of Jehovah-God.

'Let These Go Their Way.'

Jesus asked the people, who had come to take Him, whom they were seeking. They answered that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus retorted, *"I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way."* Here, Jesus was not requesting them not to harm His disciples. The Lord, whose power they had felt just before this, the effect from which they fell on the earth, is now giving a command to them to leave His disciples unharmed. Adam Clarke explains,

> "These words are rather words of authority than words of entreaty. I voluntarily give myself up to you, but you must not molest one of these, my disciples. At your peril, injure them. Let them go about their business. I have already given you a sufficient proof of my power: I will not exert it in my own behalf, for I will lay down my life for the sheep; but I will not permit you to injure the least of these. It was certainly the supreme power of Christ that kept the soldiers and the mob from destroying all the disciples present."[3]

It is not clear whether all eleven disciples were there with Him at this moment or not. Though some think that only the three, Peter, John, and James, were with Him, it is unlikely. When the Lord said to the three, *"Rise, let us be going"* (Matthew 26:46), He might have taken the three disciples to the eight who were left behind. He is not a Master who would forget even the least of them. This is evident in His prayer for the eleven. He said, *"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled"* (John 17:12). This was according to the will of the Father (John 6:39).

About the words of Jesus, John adds his comments and says, *"That the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none'"* (John 18:9). The formula here is often used in connection with the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. But here, it is applied to the saying of Jesus. A similar statement about the prophecy of Jesus is also seen in John 18:32.

Among the Twelve, one was lost. And he was now on the other side, hearing these words of Jesus. What thoughts might

have gone through his heart are not known. Or was he heartless! Were the eyes of Jesus fixed on Him now? Did their eyes meet? Was he expecting, as some think, that Jesus would escape?

Judas Identifies Jesus

Judas led the contingent of Roman and Jewish soldiers and servants, and they entered the Garden. Jesus, as seen above, went ahead and faced them, securing the security of His own. Now it was time for Judas to act and identify Jesus for the men whom the authorities had sent with Him. Matthew says, *"Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.' Immediately, he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?'" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him"* (Matthew 26:48-50). Mark intimates that Judas had informed them saying, *"Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely"* (Mark 14:44). He also intimates that he called Jesus, "Rabbi" twice (v. 45). Luke records a statement which others omit, "*But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"* (Luke 22:48).

Judas might have chosen the cover of the night to avoid the public. During the day, the crowd would always be around Jesus. They could turn against them if Jesus were taken before their eyes. He also instructed them that they must *"seize Him and lead Him away safely."* He did not want his plot to fail. He might have expected that Jesus would try to escape. Then he comes to the Lord and says, *"Greetings, Master."* The word translated as 'Greetings' means to rejoice, to have joy. This is the joy experienced when meeting a close friend after a while. This was used by Jews and Greeks, among friends. Judas uses this greeting when he meets His Master. Then he kissed Him. Jesus addresses him as "*friend.*" It means a companion or a comrade. Morris comments,

> "It is used in three other passages in the New Testament, and on every occasion, of people who are in some sense in opposition to the speaker, though they might have been presumed to be on good terms (Matthew 11:16; 20:13; 22:12)."[4]

The words after this, *"Why have you come?"* (Matthew 26:50), are rendered variously. NIV renders it as a command, in some it is interrogative, and others render it as a statement. The sentence is difficult to translate. But it was sufficient to trigger the conscience of Judas. But these words of grace did no good to him who became an instrument in the hands of the evil one.

In explaining Matthew 26:49, quoting Grimm–Thayer, Leon Morris says,

> "The meaning as to kiss much, kiss again and again, kiss tenderly," and adds, "In his anxiety to make sure that the Master was recognised, Judas was very demonstrative in his display of affection."[5]

Judas uses one of the most noble signs, which was used to express affection, as a means of doing the most heinous act in history!

Judas is not alone on this path. When Christ, or the cause of Christ, becomes a means of business and money-making, those involved are in the steps of Judas. Leon Morris says,

> "Some have become ministers of the church from low motives; some have used the veneer of respectability given by Church membership as a means of forwarding their business or social projects; some have profaned holy things by playing on the gullibility of their more simple fellows. But all these, in one way or another, are trying to compel the Christ into lines of their own choosing. They walk in the steps of their master, Judas."[6]

Matthew states plainly about the act of arrest. He says, *"Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him."* (Matthew 26:50-51). Mark also makes a similar statement (14:46). John gives more details of the arrest. "*Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him"* (John 18:12).

Sword Drawn Out

All four Gospels record the cutting off of the ear of the servant of the high priest, Malchus, by name. This happened immediately after they laid their hands on Him. But the details provided differ

from one another. They are not contradictory but only complementary.

Mark says, *"And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear"* (Mark 14:47). Matthew records, *"And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"* (Matthew 26:51-54). Luke, being a physician, tells how Jesus healed him. *"But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him*" (Luke 22:51). John tells us that it was Peter who cut his ear and provides the name of the servant. *"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"* (John 18:10-11). By the time John wrote his Gospel, Peter was martyred, and it was safe to disclose who cut the ear of the servant of the high priest.

A few hours ago, Jesus had talked to them about the swords. They said that they had two swords with them (Luke 22:36-38). One of them was with Peter. Now Peter drew that and cut the ears of a servant in the crowd. This was not the large sword Roman soldiers used to carry. It was only a dagger normally used for the preparation of feasts. Pentecost helpfully explains,

> "The Romans carried broad swords into battle. These swords were approximately a yard long and had a handle that could be grasped with two hands. The sword was raised high and brought down on the head of an adversary in order to crush that one's skull. Peter evidently tried to use the small dagger as a large broad sword and attempted to crush the head of the nearest adversary, but succeeded in only cutting off his right ear (John 18:10)."[7]

Peter was rebuked for his unadvised action. Jesus reaffirmed His commitment to do the will of the Father.

Fulfilment of Prophecies

Jesus now turned to the multitude, especially to their leaders, and told them that He was with them in the Temple daily and taught them (Matthew 26:55, 56; Mark 14:48, 49; Luke 22:52, 53). This may be a reference to His ministry during that Passion Week. But they could do nothing to Him. They wanted to eliminate Him, but they could do nothing. But Jesus said that now they could arrest Him and do what they would because the prophecies concerning Him should be fulfilled. Jesus was bringing to their attention the accuracy of the Word of God. If they had listened to Him with an open mind, they would have known that He was their long-awaited Messiah. But they would not heed what the Lord said.

Jesus told them that it was their hour and the power of darkness. That is, it was the time in which they were permitted to act in their malice, which they could not do before. God did not allow them to do anything till then. The prince of darkness could not proceed a hair's breadth against Him, but through divine permission. This is a matter of great comfort to God's people. None can act against them but with the sanction of their heavenly Father. He will not suffer any of those who trust in him to be tried above what they can bear. Their lives are secured with Him. His eyes are even on the sparrows that fall!

At this, the disciples fled from the Lord (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50-52). This was also a matter that He had foretold about the disciples (Matthew 26:31; John 16:32; Zechariah 13:7).

Mark adds a personal note to the narrative. He says, "*Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked*" (Mark 14:51-52). The passage does not reveal who this young man was. Some believe he was one of the men sleeping on that street. Others, considering the explanations provided, that he was a young man wearing a linen cloth and fleeing naked, think that it may be Mark himself. This note accompanies the fleeing of the disciples. People present there, caught him and said that he was a disciple.

These details suggest that he was not just a street boy; he was connected to the group. It is assumed that Mark's mother was a woman favourable to Jesus, if not a follower. This may be seen as a signature, Mark leaves on the word-picture for his Lord and Saviour. This indicates that if the disciples had remained, they too would have been arrested.

35

Trials Before the Jewish Authorities

Jesus, being arrested and bound by those who took Him over in Gethsemane, was taken for the trials before various authorities. There were six trials that Jesus had to face. They are, trials before Annas (John 18:13), Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57-68), Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:1; Luke 22: 66-71), Pilate (John 18:28), Herod (Luke 23:6-12), and again before Pilate (Luke 23:13). The first three are religious authorities and the last three are civil authorities.

Jesus Before Annas

Jesus' trial before Annas is recorded only by John (18:19-23). John says, "*And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year*" (John 18:13). Annas was the high priest during AD 6-15. His five sons succeeded him. During the time of Jesus' crucifixion, Caiaphas was the high priest. According to the Old Testament, the high priesthood was given in succession. When the father dies, the son takes his place. However, when the Romans came to power, they gained control over the office of the high priesthood and appointed high priests according to their desires. Those who were favourable to them got a longer tenure.

Annas was one of the most subtle high priests in Jewish history. All the businesses that were in the Temple precincts belonged to him. Morgan says,

> "He had become one of the wealthiest men of the time by extortion."[1]

Pentecost writes,

> "Annas owned the famous 'Bazaars of Annas,' which ran a monopoly on the sale of animals for the sacrifices and the stalls of money changers."[2]

These show the hold he had on the Jewish systems and society. Though he was not the high priest of the year, he wielded great authority over the people. The reason was that the high priest of the year was Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Thus, he had control over all matters. John says that Jesus was taken first to him, because Caiaphas was his son-in-law. Luke mentions the names of both together. *"While Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness"* (Luke 3:2). This shows that even when Caiaphas was in the office, authority remained with Annas. This explains why Jesus was brought before Annas first. Another reason often suggested is that he may be the one who organised the arrest of Jesus. He may be the one who bargained with Judas. Thus, Judas needed to bring Jesus before him and report the arrest. Presenting Jesus before him would prove that his mission was successful.

John intimates that it was Caiaphas who had once said of eliminating Jesus. He says, *"Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people"* (John 18:14). This speech of Caiaphas is recorded in John 11:50. He said this as the high priest in the office. Probably, this is recorded here to show that no good could be expected from him for Christ. Barnes notes,

> "This is referred to here, probably, to show how little prospect there was that Jesus would have justice done him in the hands of a man who had already pronounced on the case."[3]

Prophet Isaiah said, *"In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth"* (Acts 8:33).

In recording the words between Jesus and Annas, John refers to him as 'high priest.' This indicates the authority he wielded.

Though he was not officially the high priest of the year, the people revered him as such. John reports, *"The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret, I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed, they know what I said." And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"* (John 18:19-23). Robertson says of the intention Annas had in questioning Jesus. He says,

> "This was Annas making a preliminary examination of Jesus, probably to see on what terms Jesus made disciples, whether as a mere rabbi or as Messiah."[4]

This was the beginning of the trials. The questions of Annas were on the disciples of Jesus and His teachings. He might have asked these questions to gauge the influence Jesus had in the nation and the nature of His teachings. He might have thought that Jesus was attempting to start a sect like the Essenes or Zealots. But the Lord made it clear that He spoke publicly and had not taught any hideous teachings. He taught in the Temple and synagogues. The Jews had heard Him teaching. He could have verified it with them. When Jesus answered Annas accordingly, an officer struck Him, and Jesus questioned this.

At the beginning itself, it was indicated that the matters shall not be just or righteous. The proceedings of the trials were illegal, both in time and place. Adam Clarke says,

> "For the Talmud states, Sanhed. c. iv. s. 1, that-"Criminal processes can neither commence nor terminate, but during the course of the day. If the person be acquitted, the sentence may be pronounced during that day; but, if he be condemned, the sentence cannot be pronounced till the next day. But no kind of judgment is to be executed, either on the eve of the Sabbath, or the eve of any festival." Nevertheless, to the lasting infamy of these people, Christ was judicially interrogated and condemned during the night; and

> on the night too of the Passover, or, according to others, on the eve of that feast."[5]

Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas.

Jesus Before Caiaphas

Jesus is brought before the high priest, Caiaphas. He was the high priest of the year. The trial before him is recorded in Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65; John 18:14. We do not know how far the palace of Caiaphas was from the residence of Annas. Pentecost assumes that they resided in the same palace. He says,

> "The preliminary examination before Annas and the later hearing before Caiaphas during the hours of the night took place in the palace of the high priest, in which Annas also seemed to have resided. The palace of Caiaphas stood on the southern slope of the western hill, a short distance outside of the present city wall, but in what was then the finest part of the city."[6]

In this palace, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (Matthew 26:57) had also gathered. These were the members of the Sanhedrin council. This may not be a formal meeting of the council, but only an informal gathering.

Caiaphas was introduced to us by John in 11:49,50. In the Council meeting to discuss the ways of eliminating Jesus, he said, *"You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." On this statement John makes his comment and says, "Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad"* (John 11:49-52). He spoke about the necessity of Jesus' death, guided by the Spirit of prophecy. Now he is concocting the means of putting Him to death. This was recorded by John in 18:13,14.

Their first attempt was to find an accusation against Him, so that they could put Him to death. They sought false witnesses.

Mark says, *"Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' 'But not even then did their testimony agree'"* (Mark 14:55-59). They sought false witnesses because they wanted to secure a judgment on Him by fair or foul means. They sought witnesses to make it a judicial murder. They must have something that looked like an acceptable legal case. Deuteronomy 17:6 demands that at least two witnesses should be there who agree. This they could not get. None agreed with each other. Jesus did not have to refute any of these, as they could not agree on anything. Jesus was silent. He did not have to say anything. But the silence of Jesus was eloquent. This might have made the Jewish leaders restless.

Now, the high priest would use His authority to question Jesus. He stood up. This may be to move Jesus to respond to the accusations brought against Him. Mark says, *"And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?' But He kept silent and answered nothing'"* (Mark 14:60,61). This tactic also did not work. Jesus did not answer him. Standing in his official capacity, now Caiaphas would question Him with the ultimate question. *"Again, the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?'"* (Mark 14:61). Matthew says, "*But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!'"* (Matthew 26:63). This question, which the high priest asked in his official capacity, puts Jesus on oath. This was a serious question. All shrewdness and subtlety were used in making this question. In the first century, the title 'Christ' was not at all a divine title. It just meant 'Messiah' or the anointed. This title was used for those who were anointed as king, priest, or prophet. They were mere humans. They were called anointed. Thus, at this time, the Jews did not

have the idea that the Messiah would be God. Of course, the scriptures had sufficient evidence indicating that the Messiah shall be God. The high priest did not ask Jesus, *"Are you the Christ?"* But he added "*the Son of the Blessed"* along with that. This is a divine title. Thus, the question was serious. Morris says,

> "Incidentally, the 'Thou' in the high priest's 'tell us whether Thou be the Christ" is both emphatic and contemptuous. Caiaphas spared his prisoner nothing."[7]

The Lord cannot keep silent to the words of the high priest, which he asked in his official capacity. According to the Law, if one hears an oath which is blasphemous and is silent, he is guilty. Now, the high priest attempts to make Jesus say such a statement and force all present to turn against Him. The Law says, "*If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt"* (Leviticus 5:1).

Cor Bruins says,

> "For several reasons, Jesus then breaks His silence. First, He bows to the demands of the Law that He must now speak. Secondly, and far more important, He is the faithful witness to this truth that He is indeed the "I am" – Jehovah of Exodus 3:14. But He adds more, though He is essentially God, He is also Son of Man, and although now as Son of Man He is being mistreated before them, one day He shall appear to them glorious, in glory coming with the clouds to judge!"[8]

Now Jesus answers with these words. "*It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matthew 26:64). Jesus began by saying, '*It is as you said.*' Jesus agrees with what He said, and He adds further details. He claimed that He is the Son of Man and that He would sit at the right hand of the Power and return, coming on the clouds. The words were solemn. The Lord was telling them that a turning point is very near. The One who stood before them will rise after death and be honoured in heaven, seated at the right hand of power. The coming glorification, judgment, and return in power are all rolled up in the answer. He was making the

ultimate claim. He warned the high priest that he would see Him in glory. In this answer, echoes from Exodus 3:14, Daniel 7:13,14, and Psalm 110:1 are present. This was His ultimate claim of deity.

The high priest sensed the weight of what Jesus declared. Jesus claimed that He was the Messiah, and at the same time, His equality with the Father. Caiaphas's response was surprising. Matthew says, "*Then the high priest tore his clothes*" (Matthew 26:65). Tearing clothes expressed deep sorrow. This was a practice from ancient times (Genesis 37:29). A high priest should never tear his clothes. The Scripture says, "*He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes*" (Leviticus 21:10). Earlier, the high priest had prophesied about the necessity of the death of the Lord (John 11:49,50). But now, by tearing his attire, he was announcing the end of the age of the Law and all its rituals.

Hearing the words of the Lord, the high priest might have become very satisfied. He wanted such a statement from the mouth of Jesus to pin Him down. Now he could proceed to condemn Him. He said, *"He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?"* (Matthew 26:65-66). This he might have said with much elation. All his questions to Him had been with the desire that he would get something to bring the charge of blasphemy against Jesus. Now he has what he wanted. He asked for the judgment of others who sat there. They gave their verdict. They said, *"He is deserving of death"* (Matthew 26:66). The path to proceed was cleared.

This was followed by mocking of Jesus and beating Him (Matthew 26:67,68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65). These were actions of the Roman soldiers. Others might have gone for some relaxation. It might have been already midnight or early morning.

The Gospels tell what the mob and the soldiers did to Him. Matthew says, *"Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands. saying, "Prophesy*

to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?" (Matthew 26:67, 68). Mark records, *"Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, 'Prophesy!' And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands"* (Mark 14:65). Luke adds, *"Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, "Prophesy! Who is the one who struck You?" And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him"* (Luke 22:63-65). All these show indignity at the lowest level. They spat on His face. Hit Him with open hands and fists as well. They, in ridicule, asked to prophesy who hit Him. Luke says that many other things they spoke blasphemously against Him.

Jesus Before Sanhedrin

After the trial before Caiaphas in his palace, and after the physical torture through the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin. Matthew and Luke narrate this trial (Matthew 27:1; Luke 22:66-71). The Sanhedrin was the highest court for the Jews in matters of religion.

The Sanhedrin, or ecclesiastical court, according to its first constitution, was to consist of seventy honourable and learned men. The judges of the people should judge impartially for God (Numbers 11:16), but they degenerated. The Sanhedrin consisted of a malicious pack of Scribes and Pharisees. They were men full of malice and revenge. And over this august religious body, Caiaphas now presided; a head fit for such a body!

In the trial of Jesus in the palace of Caiaphas, Jewish leaders got sufficient hints to proceed, to incriminate Jesus, and to get him eliminated legally. Most probably, not all the members were there in the palace. In the morning, they came together for the formal, official meeting of the Sanhedrin. Matthew says, *"When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death"* (Matthew 27:1). Now, all the members might have come together. The informal meeting at night in the palace of Caiaphas has made their job easy. Now they know how to proceed with their business.

Luke's narrative shows that the way matters were conducted at the Sanhedrin Council was almost the same as it happened at the palace. They were only making things formal. They were now in the official chamber of the Sanhedrin. It is called 'the Hall of the Hewn Stone.' This was the gathering place of the Council during the Second Temple period, from the 6th century BC to the 1st century AD. It was built into the north wall of Jerusalem. It is given the name to contrast it from the buildings of the Temple, which were constructed of unhewn stones.

The Council asked Him whether He was the Christ or not (22:67). Jesus answered in the affirmative. He also indicated the insincerity in their questions. He said, *"Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You rightly say that I am"* (Luke 22:69-70). Jesus claims that He is the Son of Man, connecting Him to the one like unto the Son of Man in Daniel 7. The Jews had understood that the Son of Man is also the Son of God. Thus, they asked whether He was then the Son of God. Jesus answered in the affirmative. Jesus claimed that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of Man, and the Son of God.

The Council got from His mouth what they wanted, to bring charges against Him of blasphemy. They concluded the session by saying, "*What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth"* (Luke 22:71). They should now take the matters to the next level, before the civil authorities, the Romans.

36

Peter Denies His Master

While the trials of Jesus were progressing, two incidents happened in the background. They are the denials of Peter and the suicide of Judas Iscariot. Before proceeding to the trials before the Roman authorities, it is necessary to look at these events. Peter denied his Master when the trial before Caiaphas was in progress. The denials of Peter are seen in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-18,25-27).

There are only a few events and teachings recorded in all four Gospels. The repetition across all of them highlights the significance they hold in the Scripture. Therefore, the event we are considering now, the denials of Peter, is important. The lessons it imparts are significant. The practical lessons in this event carry great significance.

Peter Returns to the Scene

Just as the Lord had told, all the apostles had left Jesus alone and fled at the time of arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said, *"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'"* (Matthew 26:31). It was prophesied by Zechariah (13:7). Fulfilling these, all of them fled from Jesus and left Him alone. When Jesus was arrested, He said, *"But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."* Then, Matthew records, *"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled"* (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:49,50). Though all had fled, when

Jesus was before the high priest, at least two of them returned to the scene. John indicates this. He says, "*And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest"* (John 18:15). Simon Peter was one of them. The other disciple is not named. John only mentions him as '*another disciple.'* The word used here for '*another'* means another of the same kind. Thus, we assume that this other disciple was one among the Twelve. As we see in John's Gospel, John mentions a disciple whom he leaves unnamed. Sometimes he calls him the '*disciple whom Jesus loved.'* Traditionally, this disciple is taken as John himself.

John says that he was *"known to the high priest."* Though it is assumed that this unnamed disciple was John, there are other conjectures. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Judas Iscariot are in the list. But Judas is an unlikely candidate here. John says, "*But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in*" (John 18:16). If it were Judas Iscariot, we cannot assume that Peter would have taken the help of him. Because, by now, it was clear that Judas was the traitor. After the betrayal, we cannot assume that Peter would have taken any help from him. It shows that the unnamed disciple cannot be Judas Iscariot. William Barclay, in his commentary on John's Gospel, discusses these suggestions and probable conclusions.

Barclay gives certain other background information that affirms that 'another disciple' is John the apostle.

> "It is clear that John's father had a flourishing fishing business because he could afford to employ hired servants (Mark 1:20). One of the great Galilean industries was salt fish. Fresh fish was a great luxury because there was no way of transporting fish in such a way that it would remain fresh. On the other hand, salt fish was a staple article of diet. It has been supposed that John's father was in the salt fish trade and that he actually supplied the household of the High Priest. If that were so, John would be well known to the high priest and to his servants, because often it would be he who would bring the supplies."[1]

Quoting H V Morton, Barclay also gives evidence to show that Zebedee, John's father, had a building in Jerusalem, which the family might have used for their fishing business. If John was known to the high priest and servants in the palace, 'the other disciple,' as it is conjectured traditionally, must be John only. Peter and John returned after fleeing the scene. It was through John that Peter could enter the gate of the palace where Jesus was tried.

Though it must be John the apostle who helped Peter enter the gate, Thomas Scott, the commentator, suggests differently.

> "Expositors have generally supposed that this other disciple was John the evangelist: yet, as John was a fisherman of Galilee, it is not probable that he should be acquainted with the high priest, and have any influence with his servants: and it is not said that this disciple was one of the apostles. It is therefore more probable that some person residing at Jerusalem, and of rank superior to the apostles, was intended; that he, on this occasion avowed himself the disciple of Jesus; and having entered with him into the palace of the high priest, procured admission for Peter, who had before been excluded. —Nonnus, an ancient Greek author, renders it, 'and another new friend.'[2]

This shows that one cannot be dogmatic about the identity of *'the other disciple.'*

Peter went in and sat with the servants to see the end (Matthew 26:58). His desire to *"see the end"* means to know the outcome of these proceedings. This made him come to the palace, for he feared the worst. Peter's presence at the trial indicates the courage he possessed. The situation was very adverse. He had attempted the murder of the servant of the high priest. Thus, if he is arrested there, it would not be a surprise. Despite the risk, we see him present there. This indicates the courage of Peter.

Peter Warming Himself

John says, *"Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself"* (John 18:18). How was it so cold in the harvest season, in the

Passover time? This is a question often asked. Matthew Poole addresses this problem. He says,

> "Here is nothing in this verse which needs any explication, unless any should ask how it could be cold weather at that time of the year, (about April 14), especially in a country where it now was the time of harvest? Which may easily be resolved. It was now about three of the clock in the morning, and we know that in summer (the spring especially) nights are cold; besides that in those countries that are more equinoctial, the nights are longer, and consequently colder towards the morning, as the air hath had more time to cool."[3]

Cor Bruins tells from his experience,

> "Some may not realise it, but snow falls quite heavily in the Middle Eastern countries, in Lebanon, more than three to four feet. The writer has once witnessed hail in the streets of Beirut on the first of May. So, it was cold in that sad world of Peter's, and alas, also in Peter's heart."[4]

This explains how the early morning was cold enough to warm oneself.

Understanding Peter's movements is necessary. *"But Peter followed at a distance"* (Luke 22:54). This was followed by his entrance into the palace courts, with the help of the other disciple. Now he was with others in the courtyard. *"And Peter stood with them and warmed himself"* (John 18:18). *"Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard"* (Matthew 26:69). *"Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them"* (Luke 22:55). Further, we see Peter, below in the courtyard, warming himself (Mark 14:66,67). Though Peter has come back, he kept his distance from the Lord, probably considering safety.

Peter's Three Denials

The Gospel narratives of three denials, recorded in the four Gospels, are not similar. But they are not contradictory, but only complementary and supplementary.

The First Denial

The Jews seem to have employed women as porters at the gates (Acts 12:13). Peter was first tempted by the young girl who was keeping the gate.

All four Gospels mention the girl who brought the charge against Peter. Matthew says, *"And a servant girl came to him"* (Matthew 26:69). Mark, with an added information, says, *"One of the servant girls of the high priest came"* (Mark 14:66). Luke adds more to it and says, *"And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him"* (Luke 22:56). It is John who tells what she was doing there. "*Then the servant girl who kept the door"* (John 18:17). She was keeping the gate.

In the location of Peter, there are variations in the narratives. Matthew says, *"Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard"* (Matthew 26:69). Mark says, *"Now as Peter was below in the courtyard"* (Mark 14:66). Luke says that the denial occurred when Peter was sitting at the fireside. *"Seeing him as he sat by the fire"* (Luke 22:56). John only indicates that the denial happened when Peter entered the courtyard (John 18:15-17). The slight variations in the descriptions are not serious. Barnes helps us to reconcile these variations. He says,

> "Mark says, the first denial took place while Peter was 'beneath in the palace.' This palace was the large hall or court belonging to the residence of the high priest. The part of it where Jesus and the council were was elevated, probably, above the rest, for a tribunal. Peter was beneath, or in the lower part of the hall, with the servants, at the fire. Yet, as Matthew says, he sat without in the palace—i.e., out of the palace where they were trying Jesus—to wit, in the lower part of the hall with the servants—both narratives are therefore consistent."[4]

In the statement the damsel makes about Peter, there are variations, though not inexplicable. Matthew records it as, "*You also were with Jesus of Galilee"* (Matthew 26:69). Mark reports her words as, *"You also were with Jesus of Nazareth"* (Mark 14:67). Luke says, *"This man was also with Him"* (Luke 22:56).

John reports it as an interrogation. *"You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?"* (John 18:17). Though the wording is different, the content is the same. The girl was asserting that Peter was with Jesus.

Peter denies what she said. According to Matthew, Peter says, *"But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you are saying"* (Matthew 26:70). Mark is more detailed. *"But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying.' And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed"* (Mark 14:68). Luke is rather brief. He says, "*But he denied Him, saying, 'Woman, I do not know Him"* (Luke 22:57). John's is the briefest, *"He said, 'I am not"* (John 18:17). All denials are the same. Peter denies any association with Jesus. Only Mark mentions the rooster crowing.

The Second Denial

According to John, now Peter was in the courtyard, standing and warming himself along with the servants and officers. They questioned him and he denied again (John 18:18, 25). Luke says, *"And after a little while another saw him and said, 'You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"* (Luke 22:58). Mark says, "*And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them"* (Mark 14:69). Matthew records, *"And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"* (Matthew 26:71-72). According to Mark, the questioner was the same girl who had interrogated him before. But now she was telling others who were standing there about Peter. According to Luke and Matthew, '*another*' servant girl was the questioner. For John, it was the '*servants and officers.*' The first girl might have started the matter involving another girl. And they might have spoken to a few people standing there. They might have questioningly looked at him or questioned him. The denial was to all of them, especially to a man in the crowd. The denial now was with an oath (Matthew 26:72).

The Third Denial

The third denial occurred a little while later (Matthew 26:73; Mark 14:70). But Luke says that the third denial happened after about an hour (Luke 22:59). Probably, by then, Peter had become comfortable with the situation and the people. He might have started speaking with them freely. And when they heard his speech, they understood that he was a Galilean. And the question came from this understanding. "*And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you'*" (Matthew 26:73). Mark's record is also almost similar. *"And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, 'Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it'"* (Mark 14:70). From Luke's record, it is understood that there was one person who questioned him. He is highlighted there. *"Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this fellow also was with Him, for he is a Galilean*" (Luke 22:59). It is told that the Galilean dialect had a more Syrian cast than that of Judea. But it is John who identifies the questioner more specifically. He says, *"One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of his whose ear Peter cut off, said, 'Did I not see you in the garden with Him?'"* (John 18:26). This accusation might have given Peter a shock of his life. He might have feared an arrest now. This is the reason why his response was immediate and vehement. "*Then he began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!'"* (Matthew 26:74). Mark's record is also similar.

The Cock-Crowing

The cock-crowing at Peter's denials calls for explanation. Jammieson, Fausset Browne, in their commentary, explain,

> "As Mark is the only Evangelist who tells us that our Lord predicted that the cock should crow twice (Mark 14:30), so he only mentions that it did crow twice (Mark 14:72). The other Evangelists, who tell us merely that our Lord predicted that "before the cock should crow he would deny Him thrice" (Matthew 26:34; Luke 22:34; John 13:38), mention only one actual crowing, which was Mark's last. This is something affecting in this Evangelist—who, according to the earliest tradition (confirmed by internal evidence), derived

> his materials so largely from Peter as to have been styled his "interpreter," being the only one who gives both the sad prediction and its still sadder fulfilment in full. It seems to show that Peter himself not only retained through all his after-life the most vivid recollection of the circumstances of his fall, but that he was willing that others should know them too."[5]

Similarly, Cor Bruins also explains the cock-crowing. In commenting on Mark 14:68, referring to the first cock-crowing he says,

> "Only Mark mentions this. This was the earlier or 'midnight crow' which marked the beginning of the third watch, just as the 'morning crow' announced its close. The other Gospels refer only to the latter, whereas Mark distinctly mentions both.[6]

Barclay gives a slightly different explanation for the cock crowing.

> "The Roman night was divided into four watches from 6 P M to 6 A M. At the end of the third watch, at three o'clock in the morning, the guard was changed. When the guard was changed, there was a bugle call, which was called the *gallicinium,* which is the Latin for the cockcrow. Most likely, what happened was that as Peter spoke his third denial, the clear note of the bugle call rang out over the silent city and smote on Peter's ear."[7]

Three times the Lord had warned Peter about the coming denials. First, it was in the upper room. *"Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times'"* (John 13:38). This happened after the washing of the feet, and before Jesus started His sermon proper, recorded from John 14. In Matthew's record, Jesus warns about this on their way to the Mount of Olives. Matthew says, *"Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times'"* (Matthew 26:34). Thirdly, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord repeated this. *"Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch for one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Mark 14:37-38). Here, it was specially directed

toward Peter. The Lord not only gave him the warnings repeatedly but also prayed to the Father for him (Luke 22:31,32). Despite the repeated warnings, Peter fell to the temptations.

The Look of Jesus

This is the most touching scenes in the portrayals of the Passion Week. When the beloved disciple fell to temptation, the Lord turned and looked at him. Even in His severest trial, His eyes were on His erring sheep. And that, even in His hour of trial!

Luke gives the whole story of Jesus' look and its effect on Peter. He says, *"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So, Peter went out and wept bitterly"* (Luke 22:61-62). From this, we understand that Jesus could see Peter and hear his words. The place where he warmed himself was not very far from the place where Jesus was tried.

This look of Jesus is beyond our description. Was it a piercing look or a look of tenderness? We cannot say. Was it a passive glance or a reflexive gaze? We cannot tell. Whatever the manner, it was sufficient to break the rock! Peter broke down. He wept bitterly and hastily moved away from the place. Norman Crawford says,

> "Throughout the training of Peter, he was given many lessons from the animal kingdom. The draught of fish taught him that He would catch men (5:9); the piece of money in the mouth of the fish taught him that the Lord can provide for all need (Matthew 17:27); the crowing cock taught him his pride (vv.60-62), and the sheet let down from heaven, full of beasts taught him the oneness of Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:9-16). Events such as these are 'pegs' on which memories are hung."[8]

The lessons for practical lives are many in the event. Firstly, at the beginning of His public ministry, if the Lord had given the pattern for the use of the Word of God against temptations, here the Lord taught the importance of prayer in our fight against temptations. Secondly, temptations come most subtly. Peter did

not come back to deny the Lord. He came back to prove His faithfulness to the Lord. If the high priest had questioned him, he would have told him that he belongs to Jesus Christ. It is with that desire that he came back. However, the problem with Peter was that he never expected the temptation from a little girl. But Satan is smart enough to bring temptations through the least matters, the most unexpected quarters. Most Christians fail, not in murders or adultery or thefts, but in little things. Thirdly, failures are not final. If we come to the Lord in repentance, there are answers for all our problems with the Lord.

Peter's failure provides many lessons. Firstly, we see in him the problem of pride. When the Lord said that all would flee from Him, Peter said that even if all fled, he would not flee. He even said that he would die for Him (Matthew 26:33,35). The Scripture warns that pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 15:33; 16:18). This was the problem for Israel in Ai (Joshua 7). Paul's words to the Corinthians are worth remembering. He says, *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12). Secondly, the problem of compromise. Peter followed Jesus afar off. He stood at the place he should not have stood, with the servants and soldiers to warm himself. Then, he sat down (Matthew 26:58,69). These saw the downward shift. Thirdly, the problem of carelessness. He probably came back for an exhibition of heroism. But he was not prepared to face the temptation from a little girl. Carefulness and faithfulness in little things are important.

Jesus was their pattern in all things. But to give a pattern for restoration after failure, He could not provide. Because He could not fail or fall. He is sinless. After Jesus, Peter was the most senior in the group. His fall and restoration give a pattern for restoration. His restoration was in stages. Its completion was only after the Lord's resurrection.

37

Judas Ends His Life

If Peter is an example of true repentance and restoration, Judas Iscariot is an example of remorse and tragedy. There is no man so unfortunate to see the Son of God in the flesh, moved with Him, hearing and seeing what He said and did, but still ended away from the Lord and His blessings. He was so near to the kingdom but missed it utterly. In the upper room, Jesus was grieved over the path Judas took. He kept all eleven disciples without losing. But Judas broke the company and missed the blessing. Judas's life shows that a person can come even to the doorstep of blessing and still miss it. A person may be called an apostle, do many miracles, and still miss the reality, proving himself unreal. Judas proved himself unreal by departing from the Lord. He was never rightly related to the Lord. Jesus was never his Lord. He was only his Master. He learnt from Him but never submitted to Him.

In Judas, we have a contrast with Peter. Peter denied the Lord three times. That was a dark patch in the life of Peter. But he was restored. The Lord prayed for him, and after having a setback in his spiritual life, he was restored. He wept bitterly and returned to the fold. Later, just as the Lord had told him, he ministered to other believers. He was restored to ministry. But what a sad tale we have in Judas. The Lord had given him sufficient time to return. But he never returned. On the contrary, he committed suicide and went his own way and place.

It is only Matthew who gives the details of Judas's end (Matthew 27:3-10). Outside of the Gospels, the death of Judas is described only in Acts 1:18,19,25.

Some Questions Answered

When the matter of Judas is discussed, certain questions need to be taken up. Did not the Lord know from the beginning that Judas would betray Him? Since Jesus is omniscient, why was Judas chosen? What made Judas betray Jesus? How did such an unfaithful person become the treasurer among the disciples? Will he go to heaven? What about the variances between the narrative in the Gospel and the Acts? Some of these questions cannot be answered conclusively.

Explaining how the omniscient Jesus chose Judas as one among the Twelve, A B Bruce explains.

> "The only explanation that can be given is that, apart from secret insight, Judas was to all appearances an eligible man, and could not be passed over on any grounds coming under ordinary observation. His qualities must have been such that one not possessing the eye of omniscience, looking on him, would have been disposed to say of him what Samuel said of Eliab: "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." In that case, his election by Jesus is perfectly intelligible."[1]

We may put it this way: the Lord, as the Perfect Man, chose the best person available there to be a member of the group He was forming. He was not chosen to be a traitor. The act of betraying Jesus was Judas's own choice.

The Gospel mentions that Judas was a covetous man and that he took from the money bag. Still, why was he chosen and retained in that position? Again, we turn to Bruce for an answer. He says,

> "He got the bag to carry, we imagine, because the other disciples were all supremely careless about money matters, while he had decided proclivities towards finance, and showed a desire to have charge of the superfluous funds. All the rest would be only too glad to find a brother willing to take the trouble, and having imbibed the spirit of their Master's precept, 'Take no thought for the morrow,

they would not think of presenting themselves as rival candidates for the office."[2]

About whether he will be in heaven or not, the Bible is clear. Jesus had called him the *'son of perdition,'* a name given only to the antichrist. He had told that one of the Twelve was not clean. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus mentioned that one of the Twelve was lost. All these indicate that he went into perdition.

Judas, a Man of Kerioth

Among the Twelve, there were two persons with the name Judas. They are identified with their place. When Judas, who became the betrayer, is identified as Judas Iscariot, the man from Kerioth, the other Judas is identified as Judas who was *'not Iscariot'* (John 14:22). Judas, who became the betrayer is identified as *'Iscariot, the son of Simon'* (John 6:71; 13:2,26). *'Iscariot'* means 'a man of Kerioth.' Some suggest that Kerioth belonged to Moab, but it could be Kerioth-Hezron (Joshua 15:25). It is in the portion of Judah. This makes clear that if not the only Judean, he was the only non-Galilean among the apostles.

In the lists of the apostles, Judas Iscariot comes last. This indicates the spiritual backwardness of Judas. In the Gospels, when he is mentioned first, he is introduced as the one *"who also betrayed Him"* (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16). About a year before the betrayal, the Lord had indicated that there was *'a devil'* among them (John 6:70,71). Jesus said, *"But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him'"* (John 6:64). John also says about his creepy ways. He says, *"But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it'"* (John 12:4-6). A person like Judas to be in the company of Jesus is unimaginable.

Though it is difficult to imagine such a person, as one among the Twelve, it shows us the grace of God, which has no limits. It

reaches out to even the 'gutter-most' places. Offers people His grace, to even those who wallow in the mire of the world. The Lord took him as one of the Twelve, taught him, and trained him just as he did others in the group. He also sent him with others to the Galilean cities for evangelisation. He was also given power and authority to do miraculous acts (Matthew 10:1-4). He too, definitely, did all that. The opportunity that was open before him was beyond human imagination. He could have been sitting with those who would judge the twelve tribes of Israel, sitting on the judgment seat. He never surrendered his life to Jesus, as others did. He remained just as he was naturally. So near to the kingdom, he was, but he never made it.

Betrayal of Innocent Blood

As it is amply clear, right from the beginning, Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot would be the betrayer. Throughout the public ministry, by dealing with him, Jesus kept the door open for Judas to enter. But all that became futile. In the upper room, the Lord was with His dear, faithful disciples. He wanted to share with them spiritual truths of importance. That would be necessary for them to face the atrocities that would follow. They were useful for them to fulfil the mission they had to accomplish in the world after Jesus departed from them.

There was no need to keep Judas still in the company of His faithful disciples. It was time to separate him from them. The truths that He would share with them and the institution of the Lord's Supper would have no meaning with him. After washing feet and during the Passover meal, Jesus asks him to leave the group. John records, *"Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly"* (John 13:27). Jesus did things in such a way that Judas was not humiliated before others. John, who was leaning on the bosom of Jesus, might have got an inkling of who the betrayer would be. Apart from that, no one else knew who would be the betrayer. John says, "*Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night"* (John 13:30).

The Jewish leadership planned to apprehend Jesus only after the Passover. However, it was Judas's interposition that changed

their plans. He offered to betray Him without any public uproar. He would accomplish his mission. He got his money for the work he did, the thirty shekels of silver. Now, Jesus was not in the custody of Jewish leadership. In the trials before the religious authorities, He was condemned to death for blasphemy. Seeing the development of the matter, Judas was in remorse. Matthew records the aftermath (Matthew 27:3-10).

After being with Jesus and His disciples, what made Judas betray His Master? There are many suggestions given as answers for this query. Some say that it was for the greed for money that he did this. But this is not that convincing. Because he was getting money already. Judas was taking from the money bag, as he was the treasurer. He would have continued to get it. The money for which he betrayed the Lord was not big. Thus, greed is not the reason. Others suggest that it was his impatience that drove him into this. Dictionary on the Gospels says,

> "Judas thought to force Jesus' hand by pushing him into a confrontation."[3]

According to this view, Judas wanted Jesus to rule as king over the land. He wanted freedom from the Romans. This expectation was getting delayed. This suggestion explains that Judas betrayed Jesus to bring Jesus against the Jews directly, so that Jesus may act. But the words of Judas to the Jews when he betrayed the Lord in the Garden give a different picture. Judas told them, "*Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely*" (Mark 14:44). He did not want Jesus to conquer and rule. The Dictionary on the Gospels indicates another possibility. It says,

> "Judas was a disillusioned disciple retaliating against Jesus, not so much because he loved money, but because he loved his country and thought that Jesus had failed it."[4]

According to this, it was his disillusionment that drove him to this heinous action. Some suggest that it was his grudge against the Lord and the disciples that led to the betrayal. He was the only Judean among the group. Galileans were different from them. Thus, he might have always felt like an outsider. The other disciples

also might have dealt with him differently. Jesus might have had many occasions to correct him. All these might have caused a strong grudge to develop in him against the whole group, including the Master. This grudge might have brought him to act this way, in betrayal.

The reason for Judas to act cowardly may not be any one of the above reasons. It may be one or a mix of more than one reason. Impatience, disillusionment, grudge, etc., are sufficient footholds for the enemy to work his purposes through humans.

Remorse After Betrayal

Matthew says, *"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!"* (Matthew 27:3-4). For whatever reason, he betrayed the Master; now Judas is in remorse. He comes back with money to the Jewish leadership. He had decided to end his life. He cannot take the coins with him. It made no sense for him. He wanted to get rid of it. All who crave after the things of the world, wealth or whatever, shall at the end of life discover the futility of all that they have amassed in life. What an anticlimax for Judas's life!

When Peter wept and repented over the sin he had committed and returned to the Lord, the case of Judas was different. When he betrayed Jesus, he did not betray Him, thinking that He would escape the hands of the Jews and the Romans. He did not want Jesus to escape (Mark 14:44). But sensing the way things were developing, he now feels remorseful. He might have thought of how Jesus dealt with him despite what he had done to his Master. Jesus did not humiliate him in front of the other disciples. In the Garden, Jesus called him 'friend.' He might have noted His care for other disciples. Judas saw Jesus mistreated by Jewish leaders and Roman officials. All these might have now overwhelmed him. He might have now thought that an 'innocent' person should not be treated thus. But the remorse of Judas was different from the repentance of Peter.

Morris distinguishes the remorse of Judas from the repentance of Peter.

> "Matthew tells us that he 'repented himself' (KJV). The word he uses is *metamelomai,* and, since the usual verb in the New Testament for repenting is *metanoeo*, some exegetes have felt that Matthew's choice of words indicates that the emotion Judas experienced was remorse rather than repentance. This conclusion is sound, but the basis must be other than this piece of linguistics. *Metamelomai* does not occur very often, and when it is found, it sometimes denotes a genuine change of heart. Yet, while making full allowance for this, *metanoeo* is the verb with the richer content, and, while we cannot think that the occurrence of *metamelomai* proves the point, yet at least we can say that it harmonises with a state like remorse much better than would *metanoeo*."[5]

Overtaken by remorse, Judas said, *"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."* Judas was the first to testify about the innocence of Jesus. Others would follow.

If Judas had truly repented and come to Jesus, confessing his sin, and surrendered his life to Jesus, he, too, could have found deliverance from sin. But he went and told the religious leaders. They replied, *"What is that to us? You see to it."* At least, here they were right. They were now not concerned about Judas or his money. They could do nothing with the sin he had committed. What a sad state Christendom is in; we see this being repeated. People confessing sins before the people. But man can do nothing about sin. Forgiving sins is the prerogative only of God.

The Field of Blood

Matthew adds, *"Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore, that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the*

children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me" (Matthew 27:5-10).

Matthew says that he threw down the money toward the temple. The word used for '*temple'* means the sanctuary *(naos)*. This indicates that he threw the money towards the sanctuary of the Temple and left. He went and hanged himself. Luke, in Acts 1, gives details. *"Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood"* (Acts 1:18-19). The additional details here are not contradictory but complementary. That was a sad end to a man who was with Jesus for three and a half years.

The money was taken and, rather than putting it into the offertory, they bought the potter's field to bury strangers, which was called the Field of Blood. The strangers were not buried with the Jews.

Matthew asserts that everything, even the purchase of the Field of Blood, was according to the plan and purposes of God. He quotes from the prophets. But the quotation is not exact, and though Matthew says the source is the prophet Jeremiah, the verses are found in the prophecy of Zechariah (11:13). Morris explains,

> "It may be that Zechariah's passage was combined with Jeremiah passages like Jeremiah 18:2; 19:1, and so could be referred to as from Jeremiah. More probable is the idea that the quotation is taken from a book of Testimonies. It seems fairly clear that the early Christians had drawn up books containing useful quotations from various parts of the Old Testament, mostly the prophets."[6]

Probably, the book of Testimonies from which the quotation is made here might have started with Jeremiah passages and thus was called Jeremiah.

A true repentance and faith would have brought even a traitor like Judas into the fold of Jesus. Morris helpfully explains what true repentance is.

> "For repentance includes a recognition of the evil that is sin, a profound sorrow that we have sinned, a determined forsaking of the particular sin, and an amendment of life accordingly. It means a complete change of mind. It means seeing the sin repented of in a measure as God sees it."[7]

If Peter, the first among the Twelve, shows us how to repent, Judas, last among the Twelve, shows us how not to repent!

38

Trials Before Civil Authorities

The religious authorities had decided what to do with Jesus Christ. They got sufficient statements from the Lord Himself to incriminate Him. Caiaphas laid the groundwork for this and had it affirmed before the Sanhedrin. But they did not have the authority to put anybody to death. The right to give capital punishment, the Romans had reserved to themselves. Now, to put Him to death, they would have to present Him before the proconsul. So, Jesus was taken to Pilate. The trials before the civil authorities were before Pontius Pilate, Herod, and again before Pilate. These trials are recorded in Matthew 27:2, 11-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-25; and John 18:28-19:16.

Jesus Brought for Trials

Throughout the night, Jesus was standing on trial before the religious authorities. He was buffeted and ill-treated by soldiers, servants, and the mob. Now, He was brought before Pilate, bound. Jesus was bound when they arrested Him. John says, "*Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him*" (John 18:12). This happened in the Garden. Annas also sent Him to Caiaphas bound. "*Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest*" (John 18:24). The Sanhedrin also bound Jesus. "*And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor*" (Matthew 27:2). These show that He was

bound repeatedly. The people who were involved in and brought Jesus before Pilate were of the highest order. Matthew says, "*When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death"* (Matthew 27:1). Mark includes the scribes and the whole Council (Mark 15:1). John says, "*Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning"* (John 18:28). *"They"* mentioned includes all those who are mentioned in verse 12. "*Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him"* (John 18:12). Luke says, "*Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate"* (Luke 23:1). Here we see the mention of *'the whole multitude.'* Thus, all high authorities and the multitude have come to Pilate with Jesus.

The Roman Governor, whose permission was necessary for the capital punishment, was Pontius Pilate. Barclay, in his commentary on these passages, explains the trial before Pilate and gives some information about Pilate. He was the procurator of the province. He was directly responsible to the Roman emperor. He was above twenty-seven years of age, because that was the minimum age for the post of procurator. They come to this senior office after much experience in the lower levels. Pilate must have been a tested and proven soldier and administrator. He became a procurator of Judea in AD 26 and held this office for ten years. Then he was recalled from his post.

Pilate was not in good books of the Jews. The Jewish principles and practices for life and religion were contemptuous to him. Roman authorities were always careful in their dealings with the Jews. But Pilate was not always so.

Roman headquarters were in Caesarea. Roman standard was a pole with the Roman eagle, or the image of the reigning emperor, on top. The Governors, who ruled before Pilate, removed the image from the standard as it offended the Jews. But Pilate, on his ascension to power, refused to do so. This resulted in the resistance of the Jews, and after much contention, he had to yield. When he constructed an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem, he used the money from the Temple. This also created a rift between the Governor and the people. He was recalled

from his position because of the slaughter of a Samaritan crowd that gathered on Mount Gerizim.[1]

The crowd took Jesus to the Governor early in the morning (John 18:28). The Jewish leadership had determined and decided what to do with Jesus; they wanted to put Him to death. However, this decision needed to be ratified by the Roman Governor. Normally, he would be stationed in Caesarea, but during the festival season, he would be in Jerusalem. Many thousands of people would gather for the festival, making it essential for the rulers to ensure that law and order were maintained. Any minor problem could escalate into a major issue and get out of control. Thus, Pilate, the Governor, was in the city.

Pentecost says,

> "The Jews could not execute one legally, for Rome retained that authority. In order to carry out the sentence, the Sanhedrin had to obtain the approval of the Roman authorities. To get the permission, the Jews "led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor" (John 18:28).[2]

Quoting Shepard, Pentecost explains the time during which Jesus was brought before the Governor.

> "The term 'early' usually meant the fourth watch, from three to 6 AM."[2]

Morris gives a different view of the right of the Jews to decide on capital punishment. He says,

> "It is often said that Jews had no power to impose this sentence, and that this was the reason for their appeal to Pilate. This may indeed be the case, but it must be borne in mind that we do not know a great deal about the relationship of the Jewish administration to the Roman. A little later than this, it is on record that Stephen was killed without reference to the Romans, and we do not know of any repercussions. Of course, Stephen's death may have been due to mob action, a lynching rather than a judicial sentence (though the reference to the 'witnesses' in Acts 7:58 is against this). But there are other details recorded in secular historians which do not seem to have been due to Roman action.

> The question is a complicated one, and it is difficult to be dogmatic."[3]

Gene A. Getz indicates that this right to pass judgment for capital punishment was granted to the Council only after the church was formed. He says,

> "In Jerusalem, seventy men comprised the 'Great Sanhedrin.' Though this group represented a number of subgroups – priests, well-to-do families, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees - at times they were all identified as "elders" (Luke 22:66). This elite group in Israel continued to function after the church was born. By this time, the Roman Empire had given them the authority to inflict capital punishment on those who violated Israel's religious laws, which had proliferated considerably over the centuries. It was this group of "elders" that sentenced Stephen to death (Acts 6:12,15; 7:54-60)."[4]

Probably, the Jewish leaders were taking extra care in securing permission from the Roman authorities, so that they would involve the military if there were any public uprising.

In the Hall of Judgement

Jesus was brought before Pilate. Probably, he was living in the palace of Herod. John says, *"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18:28). Praetorium is the "Hall of Judgment* (KJV)." This is rendered as 'the governor's headquarters' (ESV), 'the palace of the Roman governor' (NIV), 'the Roman governor's residence' (NET), etc. Modern research, it seems, has given more details about the identity of 'the Praetorium.' Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels says,

> "The official residence of the Roman prefect *(Praitorion)*, where Jesus' hearing before Pilate took place (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, 33; 19:9), is today identified by many researchers with the new palace constructed beginning in 20 BC, by Herod the Great. Its location was in western Jerusalem, south of the modern citadel. Its existence is presupposed in the story of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12). There is, however, no local tradition

> of any kind in support of this. The tradition for the Fortress of Antonio on the North West corner of the Temple square is very late and decisively contradicted by archaeological investigations at the convent of the Sisters of Zion. The most ancient reports from Christian travellers, finally made intelligent by recent excavations, refer to an area on the west slope of the Tyropoeon Valley opposite the southern corner of the Temple. This is where Josephus, probably with some archaeological support, locates the Hasmonean royal palace."[5]

John says they did not enter the Praetorium to avoid ceremonial defilement. They had to eat the Passover meal. For seven days, they were supposed to eat unleavened bread. There should not be any leaven in all their quarters (Exodus 12:18,19). As the palace belonged to Herod, and Pilate was stationed there, they might have suspected any leaven in the area. Thus, they did not enter the palace. John's statement, "*that they may eat the Passover,"* has caused many discussions. Jesus and the disciples had eaten the Passover meal in the evening. Were they eating it a day earlier? Or, is there a discrepancy between the records of the Synoptic Gospels and John's record? Tasker gives the following explanation for reconciling the records.

> "It may be, however, that by the Passover in this verse the whole Passover festival, which lasted seven days, is meant; and that the expression eat the Passover refers not to the main Passover meal which may have already taken place, but to the remaining meals that would be taken in the Passover season."[6]

Quoting Edersheim, Pentecost explains that the Passover mentioned is not just the meal of the eve of the Passover, but to all the Passover sacrifices, especially to what was called the Chagigah, or festive offering.[7] In the light of these explanations, the apparent contradiction is reconciled.

Seven Steps in the Trial

There are seven steps seen in the trials before Pilate. Firstly, he asked the Jews about their accusation against Jesus. *"Pilate then went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?"* (John 18:29). Probably, he asked this question, indicating that Jesus did not look like a criminal in his sight.

Secondly, the Jews answered Pilate. They said, *"If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you"* (John 18:30). In the trials before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders had decided that Jesus should die for blasphemy, for claiming that He is the Son of God. But before the Roman authorities, they did not bring that accusation, as it was not a valid reason for the Romans to give capital punishment to a person. Thus, they only said that He was an evildoer. Thirdly, Pilate evades responsibility by saying, *"You take Him and judge Him according to your law"* (John 18:31). This might have implied that it was not a serious matter in which he should be involved. Fourthly, the Jews expressed openly what they wanted. They said, "*It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death"* (John 18:31). John says that matters were moving toward the direction of the fulfillment of Jesus' words (Matt. 20:17–19; 26:2; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32 John 18:32). Jesus also had told the manner of His death (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 33; John 18:32). The accusation which Luke says they brought before Pilate, they might have mentioned now. *"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King"* (Luke 23:2). Fifthly, the first examination of Jesus occurred. *"Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate, therefore, said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"* (John 18:33-38). Sixthly, Pilates gives his opinion about Jesus. He said, *"And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all"* (John 18:38). Seventhly, the Jews come up with more serious

accusations. John says, *"But they were the more fierce, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place'"* (Luke 23:5).

The mention of Galilee here gave Pilate the indication that Jesus belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod. Pilate attempted to put the matter before Herod. The reluctance of Pilate to be involved in the judgment may be due to his experience with the Jews in the past. He did not want another instance of trouble with the Jews, which could cost him his position.

Jesus Before Herod

Only Luke mentions the trial of Jesus before Herod. This was Herod Antipas, who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. He had heard about the works of Jesus Christ. Luke says that *"He sought to see Him"* (Luke 9:7-9). Now the opportunity came to meet Jesus.

Luke says, *"And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now, when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day, Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other"* (Luke 23:7-12). Luke says that these two, Pilate and Herod, were at enmity before.

Norman Crawford says,

> "In describing the former enmity, Luke uses one of his words *prouparcho* ("for before they were")."

The only other occurrence of this word is in Acts 8:9. LXX has the word in Job 42:18 also. Crawford says,

> "The examples of the use of this word indicate that it refers to a former condition of long standing, which is like true of the enmity between Pilate and Herod."

This explanation indicates that these two were at odds for a long time. The reason for this enmity between them is unknown. Crawford has this to say about this enmity.

> "The cause of the enmity between Pilate and Herod is not known, but officials of the subjugated lands fell in and out of favour with Roman authorities with regularity. The intrigues and jealousies of such men fed many such quarrels."[8]

But with this communication between them about Jesus, the ice thawed in their relationship.

Herod was exceedingly glad to see Jesus, thinking that He would show some miracles before him. He took Him as a showman or spectacle before him, to entertain him and his courtesans. Luke says, *"He desired to see Him"* (Luke 9:9). He did not know that the Person before him was not a spectacle but the Saviour of the world and the King to whom submission is due. Herod asked Him many things, but to none of them did Jesus answer. He stood silent. The Jewish leaders brought many accusations against the Lord. The Lord was still silent. This was followed by mockery, contempt, and arraying Him with a gorgeous dress. He sent Jesus back to Pilate, seeing nothing incriminating against Jesus. Later, Pilate would say about the trial before Herod, *"No, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him"* (Luke 23:15). Truly, the Lord should have been freed as they could find nothing deserving of death. But, as Darrell Bock rightly says,

> "Justice would suggest His release, but justice is not at work here."[9]

Jesus Before Pilate Again

Herod could not find any incriminating charges against Jesus. He stood silent throughout the time of His trial before him. Neither did He refute any of the charges that were brought against Him. Herod concluded that Jesus had done no wrong. This

understanding about the Lord and seeing the silence of the Lord should have turned him to the Lord. Then, he should have let Jesus go free. He could have done it as Jesus was in his jurisdiction. But nothing of this sort happened there. He neither turned to the Lord nor did he release Jesus. But rather than exercising his right to release, he decided to send Jesus back to Pilate. Herod had heard about the Lord as a miracle-worker. But Jesus did not do any miracles before him for his entertainment. This might have made Herod think of Jesus as a pretender. As Jesus did not do any miracles before him, he might have supposed that Jesus was fooling the public. Thus, He was sent back to Pilate.

As Jesus was sent back to Pilate, it was Pilate's responsibility to decide on Jesus. He found no fault in Him. Herod also sent Him back to him, indicating the same conclusion. At the same time, Pilate did not want to go against the desires of the Jews. As he did not want any rift with the Jews, he now tries to release Jesus to please the Jews.

There are four ways in which he tried to release Jesus.

Firstly, Pilate attempted to release Jesus by substitution.

During the time of the Passover, it was customary for the Roman authorities to release a prisoner as a goodwill act towards the Jews (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19; John 18:39,40). Mark says, *"And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion."* Matthew calls him a *"notorious prisoner."* Luke adds, *"Who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder."* John says, *"Now Barabbas was a robber."* Probably, Pilate chose him as a substitute against Jesus, thinking that the Jews would never choose Barabbas in the place of Jesus. Barabbas, in Aramaic, means 'son of the father.'

James Stalker states the injustice in this substitution. He says,

> "It was an unruly unjust thing to do; because, first, it was treating Jesus as if He were already a condemned man, whereas Pilate had himself a few minutes before declared Him innocent; and,

> secondly, it was staking the life of an innocent man on a guess, which might be mistaken, as to the fancy of the mob. No doubt, however, Pilate considered it kind, as he felt sure of the disposition of the populace; and, at all events, the chance of extricating himself was too good to lose."[10]

Some of the records render the prisoner's name as 'Jesus Barabbas (NET).' This similarity in the names might have led Pilate to place him over against Jesus.

But the things worked contrary to what Pilate expected. The crowd here was not the Galilean crowd, which was more inclined to Jesus. But this was the Judean crowd. They were under the influence of the Jewish leaders. Mark says, *"But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them."* (Mark 15:11). They chose Barabbas and asked to release him for them. Then Pilate asked, *"What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"* (Mark 15:12). He might have thought that some among them would demand Jesus' release. Or, he hoped that they would ask him to release Jesus also. But they clamoured for His crucifixion (Mark 15:13). The mob's persistent demand foiled the first attempt of Pilate.

While the attempt to release Jesus by substitution was going on, another interesting matter occurred there. It was the interposition of the wife of Pilate in the matter. She attested to the innocence of Jesus. Matthew says, *"While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him"* (Matthew 27:19).

James Stalker states, based on tradition, that the name of this woman was Claudia Procula. How she knew about the innocence of Jesus is not known. Stalker explains,

> "Probably, while Jesus was away at Herod's place, Pilate had entered the palace and told his wife about the singular trial and the importance which Jesus had made upon his mind. When he left her, she had fallen asleep and dreamed about it; …… and of course, there might be many causes why a lady should fall asleep in the daytime. Her dream had been such as to fill her with

a vague sense of alarm, and her message to her husband was the result."[11]

Secondly, Pilate attempts to release Jesus after chastising Him.

Luke says, *"I will therefore chastise Him and release Him"* (Luke 23:16). John gives the details of the things that they did to Him. *"So then, Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they struck Him with their hands'"* (John 19:1-3). There are five kinds of afflictions that they inflicted on Him. After all these afflictions, He was brought before the Jews. John says, *"Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, 'Behold the Man!'"* (John 19:5). Pilate might have thought that they would be satisfied with the physical afflictions inflicted on Him. But see the response of the people. *"Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'"* (John 19:6).

Thirdly, Pilate attempts to release Jesus by his authority.

It seems Pilate was becoming frustrated. Matters were not moving as he wanted. He says clearly that he found no fault in Him. John records, *"Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."* The Jews answered him, *"We have a law, and according to our law, He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." From then on, Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar"* (John 19:6-12). When Pilate asked the Jews to take Him and crucify Him, he was trying to escape his duty.

Now the Jews made clear what they wanted Pilate to do. They did not want anything less than a death sentence for Jesus. They claimed that Jesus must die according to their Law. When Pilate heard this, he was afraid. Pilate asked Him where He was from. But Jesus stood silent. Then he mentions the authority he had, to do anything he wanted. Jesus then says that this authority was from above. What He meant was, if Heaven had not permitted, none could have done anything to Him. John says, *"From then on, Pilate sought to release Him."* This desire he had from the beginning, but now he is more vigorous. But the Jews blocked his attempts with their threats. They said that if he released Jesus, then he would not be "*Caesar's friend."* This meant that they would complain to the emperor about the governor. Tiberius, the emperor, was a wicked man. He was known for humiliating his subordinates for any reason. Roman authorities knew very well about the hope of the Messiah, which the Jews held very dearly. Any official favouring the Jews in this hope and helping them in any way cannot be the *"friend of Caesar."* Thus, this was an ultimate threat hurled at Pilate.

Fourthly, Pilate tried to release Jesus by stating the truth.

John says, *"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"* (John 19:13-15).

Pilate now comes and sits on the Pavement. It is called in the Hebrew language as Gabbatha. The judgment seat is there. Pilate is going to do his final act. The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels explains,

> "Gabbatha could refer to the rock cliff, still visible today, opposite the Wailing Wall. The Greek name *lithostrotos* that occurs in the same context (John 19:13) may refer to a paved square in front of the Praetorium."[12]

Matthew records that Pilate washed his hands, showing his innocence in the matter. *"When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children"* (Matthew 27:24-25). It was a custom among the Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans to wash their hands in water as a token of innocence and to show that they were free from guilt. In Deuteronomy 21:1-10 and Psalm 26:6, this custom is alluded to. The people readily took on them the blame of shedding the innocent blood, and on their generations.

In less than forty years after they took on them this blame, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were overthrown and destroyed. More than a million people died in the siege by the Romans. Thousands more had been killed by famine, disease, sword, and their blood ran down the streets like water. Thousands were crucified. There were no crosses for crucifying, and there was no sufficient place to plant the crosses. To this day, the curse remains on them. They have been a nation scattered and persecuted almost everywhere, and a hissing and a byword among men. Truly, they received on them and their generations what they desired.

John says that it was about the sixth hour (v.14). In the record of Mark, there is an apparent contradiction. He says, "*Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him"* (Mark 15:25). There are many suggestions given for explaining this difference in records. Some resort to explaining it away by saying that there is a scribal error. Some say the difference is because of the variance between Roman and Jewish reckoning. Some even say that a reconciliation is impossible. Ellicott says,

> "St. John's statement of time (twelve o'clock) seems opposed to that of St. Mark, who states that the Crucifixion took place at 'the third hour' (nine o'clock), and no solution of the discrepancy is wholly satisfactory."[13]

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible gives a different explanation. It says,

> "That the day was divided into four parts, each part containing three hours, and were called the third, the sixth, the ninth, and the twelfth hours; and not only that time, when one of these hours came, was called by that name, but also from that all the space of three hours, till the next came, was called by the name of the former; for instance, all the space from nine O' clock till twelve was called 'the third hour,' and all from twelve till three in the afternoon 'the sixth hour.' Hence the time of Christ's Crucifixion being supposed to be somewhat before, but yet near our twelve of the clock, it may be truly here said, that it was about the sixth hour, and as truly by Mark the third hour; that space, which was called by the name of the third hour, being not yet passed, though it drew toward an end."[14]

The number of suggestions given shows that one cannot be dogmatic about the matter.

Sitting at the judgement seat, when Pilate presented Jesus saying, *"Behold, your King!"* and asked *"What shall I do with your King?,"* it seems, he was once again trying to find if there would anything come from the Jewish mob, which would give him a means of release for the prisoner, whom he knew was innocent. But they retorted, saying that they had no other king but Caesar. This was followed by the handing over of Jesus into the hands of the Jews and the Roman soldiers to be crucified. John says, "*Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away*" (John 19:16).

Throughout this trial, Pilate is seen as a man confused and under great stress. Normally, when a criminal is tried, he should look tense. But it was the contrary here. It was not the person on trial who was under stress and tension, but the judge who was in utter disarray. This is evident from his movements in the trial. John records his seven movements. Firstly, when Jesus was brought to the Praetorium, Pilate came out to meet them. John says, *"Pilate then went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?"* (John 18:29). Secondly, John says, "*Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"* (John 18:33). Here, he goes in. Thirdly, he comes out. *"And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no*

fault in Him at all" (John 18:38). Fourthly, he goes in. *"So, then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him"* (John 19:1). Fifthly, Pilate comes out bringing Jesus with him. *"Pilate then went out again, and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him"* (John 19:4). Sixthly, he goes in with Jesus. "*And went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer"* (John 19:9). Seventhly, now finally, he comes out with Jesus. "*When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha"* (John 19:13). The number is normally taken as a number for completeness. In these seven movements, we see a judge completely confused. Jesus, amid all these hemming circumstances, stood firm and was in perfect control.

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On the Way of Sorrows

The word, crucifixion, comes from the Latin roots 'crux,' meaning cross, and 'figere,' meaning 'fasten.' Thus, crucifixion essentially is fastening a person to a cross. It means 'to impale on the cross.' Assyrians and Babylonians probably invented this means of punishing hardcore criminals by crucifixion. Persians adopted this as a mode of punishment after the sixth century BC. The Romans adopted this from them. It continued as a heinous mode of punishment until Constantine banned it in the 4th Century AD. Later in history, it resurfaced in certain places to persecute Christians. It is the most excruciating, heinous, inhumane way of punishing a human being. This punishment was demanded by the Jews for Jesus.

The charges the Jews brought against Jesus were the following. Firstly, the charge that Jesus said He would destroy the Temple (Matthew 26:62). Secondly, the charge that He claimed to be the king. *"And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King'"* (Luke 23:2). Thirdly, that He was an evildoer. *"They answered and said to him, 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you'"* (John 18:30). Fourthly, He perverted the nation. *"And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King'"* (Luke 23:2). Fifthly, that He stirred up the people. *"But they were the more fierce, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee*

to this place'" (Luke 23:5). Sixthly, He forbade paying taxes (Luke 23:2). Seventhly, He claimed that He is the Son of God. *"The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God'"* (John 19:7). Though they could not prove any of these charges, they in their subtlety connived to bring accusations to get their desire about Him fulfilled, to crucify.

Pilate knew that the Jews wanted to kill Him because of their envy. He would deliver Him from their hands. He could have just passed a verdict about the Lord's innocence and defended with the soldiers at his disposal, if at all any Jewish uprising had happened. But Pilate did not want to take risks. He desired to secure his position. If there is any complaint against him from the Jews to the emperor, he would be called back. As noted before, he had problems with the Jews at the beginning of his tenure as governor. He did not want a repeat of it. He allowed the cries and clamour of the Jews to prevail. He delivered him to them. Luke records, *"So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested"* (Luke 23:24). The soldiers took over Jesus, and they would lead Him to the cross. Before we go the way of the cross, *'Via Dolorosa,'* there are certain other matters important to note that preceded it.

Soldiers Mocking Jesus

This is detailed in Matthew 27:27-31 and Mark 15:16-20. Before the mockery of the soldiers, Caiaphas had mocked Jesus (Luke 22:63), Herod mocked Him (Luke 23:11), and Pilate also had mocked Him (John 19:1-3). Now, soldiers took over the mockery of Jesus. After the verdict of death is given, the criminal would be handed over to the soldiers. They are free to do anything with the criminal. It is time for soldiers to have sport and fun. After the crucifixion also, they mocked Him.

Jesus was taken to the Praetorium. Luke says, *"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him"* (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16). Jesus was in the Gabbatha. Now He was taken back inside. The place may be the Tower of Antonio, in the palace of the governor. This was the place where all the soldiers were during

the festivals. The *"whole garrison"* of soldiers was brought to Jesus to mock Him. This may come to about one tenth of a Roman legion, that is, up to about six hundred soldiers. Such a big band was arrayed against One Person. And Jesus was probably exhausted. Since the time He came to the city, He was busy with ministry, and in contentions with those who came to trap Him in words. His body was the only one of its kind, it being stained by no sin at all. *"In Him was no sin."* Thus, we may say, He had the best physique among all human beings who ever lived on the earth. Still, the toil of the week might have made Him exhausted. Now, the soldiers weakened Him mentally and physically with their mockery. The following are the things they did to Jesus in mockery.

They knew the charge against Jesus, which the Jews brought against Him. They said that Jesus had claimed that He was King. The theme of their mockery was based on this charge.

Firstly, Jesus was stripped of His robe, and a purple robe was put on Him. Matthew says, *"And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him"* (Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:17). This must be of His upper garment. Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible says,

> "For one man to spit upon another, as these soldiers afterwards did on Christ, or to strip him of His garment, according to the Jewish canons, were punishable with a fine of four hundred pence."[1]

This is estimated to be more than 12 pounds. But they did to Jesus whatever they desired.

The scarlet robe put on Him was, probably, from one of the soldiers. Roman soldiers wore purple or scarlet robes. They put this to mock Him as king. Those who lived in royal palaces wore purple-coloured dresses. Matthew calls it a scarlet robe. Scarlet colour was derived from the worm mentioned in Psalm 22:6. *"But I am a worm, and no man"* (Psalms 22:6). Isaiah says in the words of the Lord, *"Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as*

wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Sins are compared to scarlet here. The scarlet-coloured robe was put on the Lord. This reminds us of what Jesus became for us on the cross. He became sin for all humanity.

Secondly, a crown of thorns was put on His head. *"When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head"* (Matthew 27:29). Mark also gives the same details (15:17). It seems that this crowning was the second crowning. What John records, probably, is the one that was done before, when Pilate mocked Him. *"And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe"* (John 19:2). That was before He was handed over for death. The crowning at the hands of the soldiers happened after Jesus was handed over to the Jews for crucifixion.

One source (Wiktionary) informs that this crown for Jesus was made from a plant called Nabk. It is grown in North Africa and the Middle East. It is a thorny, shrubby tree. They had ivy-like leaves and long thorns. But Barnes says,

> "What is the precise species of shrub denoted here is not certainly known. It was, however, doubtless one of that species that has sharp points of very hard wood. They could therefore be easily pressed into the skin and cause considerable pain. Probably they seized upon the first thing in their way that could be made into a crown, and this happened to be a thorn: thus increasing the sufferings of the meek Redeemer."[2]

Adam Clarke gives an alternate opinion about the crown of thorns. He says,

> "It does not appear that this crown was intended to be an instrument of punishment or torture to his head, but rather to render him ridiculous; for which cause also they put a reed in his hand, by way of sceptre, and bowed their knees, pretending to do him homage. The crown was not probably of thorns, in our sense of the word: there are eminently learned men who think that the crown was formed of the herb acanthus."[3]

Quoting others, he says further that the phrase 'crown of thorns' may very well be translated as an acanthine crown or wreath, formed out of the branches of the herb acanthus, or bear's

foot. This, however, is a prickly plant, though nothing like thorns, in the common meaning of that word.[4] Though the popular opinion is that the crown was with long thorns, the other views noted above indicate that one cannot be dogmatic about the matter. Whether it is a shrub with long thorns or 'a prickly plant,' it reminds us of the 'thorns and thistles' that started growing on earth as the curse of the Original Fall (Genesis 3:18). The consequence of that Fall has now come on the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly, they gave in His right hand a reed. Kings commonly carried a sceptre in their right hand. They were made of ivory or gold, as a sign of their authority. Now they took a reed or a staff and placed it in the right hand of the Lord. This, they put in his hand, in imitation of a sceptre, to deride Him, the king of the Jews. It is not improbable that this was a staff or stick that somebody standing nearby had as his walking stick.

Fourthly, they saluted Him. Mark records, *"And began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"* (Mark 15:18). It may be rendered as, "And they began to greet Him, 'Greetings, King of the Jews.'" (Scripture Direct). The soldiers had no special malice against Jesus. But these hard-hearted military men were making the best of the opportunity. The occasion allowed them to show their contempt for the Jews by mocking Jesus as their King. The word 'Greetings' has the meaning of 'be happy' or 'keep rejoicing.' What a sheer contempt for the *'Man of Sorrows!'*

Fifthly, they bowed their knees before Him and worshipped. *"And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"* (Matthew 27:29). Mark says, *"Bowing the knee, they worshiped Him"* (Mark 15:19). This 'worship' was not necessarily an homage rendered to a deity. They were doing this in mocking Him as the king of the Jews. Albert Barnes comments,

> "Mocked him with the appearance of homage. The word worship here denotes only the respect and honour done to princes and kings. It does not refer to any religious homage. They regarded him as foolishly and madly claiming to be a king—not as claiming to be Divine."[5]

Sixthly, they spat upon Him. This was done before the Sanhedrin also. Now, the soldiers spat on Him again. This is the utmost contempt they lavished on Him. The mouthful of spittle of the soldiers falling on the face of Him whom angels adore! I remember, in my childhood days, hearing a sermon by an elderly Lord's servant, referring to this act of contempt and with grief saying that he would ask Michael and Gabriel in heaven, when he reached heaven, where they were when the wicked men spat on the gracious face of the Lord! This servant of the Lord is now in heaven. We do not know whether he asked the angels or not. But this was not an unexpected event for the Lord. In His Spirit, the prophets had foretold this. *"I did not hide My face from shame and spitting"* (Isaiah 50:6).

Seventhly, they smote His head with the reed. *"And took the reed and struck Him on the head"* (Matthew 27:30). When Matthew says "*the reed,"* Mark says "*a reed."* Probably they took the same reed that was placed in His hand like a sceptre. All the other things they did were intended to break His heart, but this one was to break His head. Mental and physical afflictions were inflicted on Him.

After the mockery of the soldiers, Jesus was taken to Golgotha for crucifixion. Matthew says, "*And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified"* (Matthew 27:31).

Darell Bock observes,

> "In a Roman context, the guilty party would go to the cross naked, but clothing Jesus appears to be a concession to Jewish sensitivities about nakedness."[6]

On the Way to the Cross

The soldiers are now leading Jesus to Golgotha to be crucified. The journey from Praetorium to Golgotha normally takes only about fifteen minutes. But moving with a large crowd, and after all the travails He went through, would have taken a longer time. Jesus is now on the path called *'Via Dolorosa,'* which means 'the way of sorrow.' The Man of Sorrows in the way of sorrows!

There are certain facts to be noticed here, on this way to the cross, like the person who helped in bearing the cross, the lamenting daughters of Jerusalem, and His fellows in this way.

Simon, the Cyrenian: John says that Jesus bore the cross and went to Golgotha. *"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha"* (John 19:17). But the Synoptists give additional information. Matthew says, *"Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross"* (Matthew 27:32). Mark adds the details of Simon's sons. He was *"the father of Alexander and Rufus"* (Mark 15:21). Luke adds and says, he *"was coming from the country"* (Luke 23:26). *"Country"* here means countryside or farm settlement. Probably, he was coming from his day's labour.

'Cyrene' was a city of North Africa with a large colony of Jews. Simon might have been a Jewish proselyte going to the feast.[7] MacArthur says,

> "Cyrene was a Greek settlement located west of Alexandria on the North African coast of the Mediterranean, directly south of Greece in what is modern Libya."[8]

When soldiers with Jesus were coming from the Praetorium, Simon was coming from the 'country.' Probably, he was a proselyte who came from his native place to Jerusalem for the Passover and was living in some village on the outskirts of the city. Or he was living in a nearby community or farm for his business matters. There are conjectures that he was a secret disciple of Jesus, and that this was the reason why he was forced to bear the cross. Matthew says, *"Him they compelled to bear the cross."* L. Morris explains the word "compelled." He says,

> "The word translated 'compelled' is ultimately of Persian origin, and goes back to the institution of the Imperial post. In order that messages should be transported with speed to the uttermost parts of the Empire, the Persian monarchs provided a system of posts at strategic intervals. However, on occasion, the system was bound to break down, and it was provided that a responsible officer under such circumstances could press into service horses, vessels, or even men. No matter what they happened to be doing at the

> time, men could be compelled to give their services to the government. From this use, the word came to denote forced service in general, and thus was quite applicable here."[9]

Simon was thus forced to bear the cross of Jesus.

Jesus was probably extremely exhausted. The accusation would be written and hung on the neck of the criminal, for all to see and read. Four soldiers would be walking closely. The criminal was expected to bear his cross, wholly or partially. They might have sensed the condition of Jesus, that even before reaching the spot, He would be dead, thus foiling their clamour for crucifixion. This made them seek a person to carry the cross for Jesus. And that lot fell on Simon. Luke says that he bore the cross *"after Jesus"* (Luke 23:26). Probably, he bore the whole cross or the rear end of it *'after'* Him.

We are not told when Simon was converted. For the festival of Pentecost, people from Cyrene had come to Jerusalem (Acts 2:10). It indicates that Jews were residing there, and through them, some might have come to know Jehovah. Simon may be one among such proselytes. Wm Barclay surmises that "Simon Niger" (Acts 13:1), is the same person.[10] His sons were well known to the Romans. That is the reason why Mark, writing to the Romans, mentions the names of his sons, *"Alexander and Rufus."* Probably, Rufus in Romans 16:13 is the same person.

Daughters of Jerusalem lamenting: Luke only gives the details of these lamenting women from Jerusalem. *"And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"* (Luke 23:27-31). Apart from the women following Him from Galilee, there were women from Jerusalem and Judea viewing the atrocities that were put on Jesus. They were weeping and crying at the despicable sight of Jesus. The Lord asked them to think of

the tribulations that shall come on their generations, and cry for them. He was looking forward to the destruction that would come on Jerusalem and Judea in AD 70, at the hands of the Romans.

The words of the Lord to the lamenting women (Luke 23:28-31) are the only words the Lord uttered on the way to the cross. He asked them to cry for the generations. He was not asking them to shed tears in sympathy for them, but tears of true repentance, and tears in prayer for the repentance of that wayward, faithless generation. Verses 30 and 31 indicate that Jesus was looking forward to a distant, future fulfilment of these words. The same language is seen in Revelation 6:16, 17, and 9:6. These look forward to the time of the Great Tribulation, when God's judgment would be poured out on all the world. It shall be the time of 'Jacob's trouble,' which shall have no equal for tribulation in all human history. The Lord saw these afar and asked them to repent and pray for the repentance of their generations. The Lord shall turn their situation of troubles when they turn to the Lord in repentance. His heart went out to their healings even amid His sorrow.

Verse 31 calls for explanation. Jesus said, *"For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"* The most popular explanation takes the green tree as the righteous Lord and the dry tree as representing guilty sinners. The difficulty here is that Jesus suffered more than anybody else. In the context, it is better to take the dry tree as a reference to the guilty Jerusalem, which shall be judged, in AD 70, by the Romans. *"They"* here, probably, refers to the Romans. The Scofield Bible gives a helpful paraphrase of this verse: "If the Romans condemned to death those they admitted to be innocent, how would they deal in the future with those whom they found guilty?" According to these explanations, the Lord was indicating the terrible time of judgments that shall come upon the Jews. Earlier, the Lord Himself had lamented over them (Luke 19:41-44).

Fellows in the journey: Luke records about two criminals who were led with Jesus on this way. *"There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death"* (Luke 23:32). Other Gospels only say that these two were crucified with Him.

However, it is Luke who informs that they were also led on the way with Jesus. The word *"others" (heteros),* which Luke uses to describe these two criminals, means 'others of a different kind.' They were not like Jesus. They were of a different kind, being criminals. What Jesus had foretold was being fulfilled here. Jesus had said that He would be reckoned as one among the transgressors (Luke 22:35-38). Isaiah prophesied, *"And He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"* (Isaiah 53:12). More of these two criminals shall be seen from the narratives on crucifixion.

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The Crucifixion

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the most heinous act in human history. It was the worst kind of injustice meted out to the most righteous Person who ever walked on the face of the Earth. Peter would later summarize the life and ministry of Jesus in these words, *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him"* (Acts 10:38). To such a One they gave death on the cross, the most excruciating death, as a recompense.

This was the most disgraceful and one of the cruellest means of death ever invented. A Roman citizen was never administered this mode of punishment. It was reserved for slaves, foreigners, or provincials. The modes of execution among the Jews were strangulation, beheading, burning, and stoning. In ordinary circumstances, the Rabbis were most reluctant to pronounce a death sentence. Judges were expected to fast on the day of such a sentence. These show how serious the matter was in their view. It was supposed to be meted out only to the rarest of cases.

There were mainly five forms of crosses. Firstly, a plain stake to which the victim was nailed. This was an upright wooden post. Secondly, the Tall cross, in a 'T' shape. Thirdly, the Greek cross, with four arms of equal length. Fourthly, St. Andrew's cross, consisting of two beams obliquely crossed. Fifthly, the traditional types in which Jesus was put. This was with a crossbar, a little below the top of the upright post. The method of crucifixion, in

this case, was to set the main, vertical, wooden post upright on the ground. Then the victim was laid on the crossbar with outstretched hands. Then, the hands are tied to the bar. Then, nails are driven by a hammer into the palms or wrists. While the victim was writhing with pain, the crossbar would be raised and fixed to the upright post. Then the feet will be nailed separately or together with a long nail. There, the body was left to hang in agony, sometimes for two or three days, until death from pain and starvation ensued.[1]

In all four Gospels, the narratives of the crucifixion are given. The narratives are recorded in Matthew 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:33-38, and John 19:17-24.

The crucifixion did not happen accidentally. It was foretold and anticipated. Among many other Old Testament passages, Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 provide vivid prophetic descriptions of Jesus' death. Jesus Himself had indicated about this matter (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32; Matthew 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:18,19). Many other similar passages narrate the death of Jesus. For the writers, it was not a matter to hide, but one that should be shared and be excited about. Major portions of the Gospels are narratives of the Passion Week.

We may consider the narratives of the crucifixion and death of Jesus with the following points.

Firstly, the place of crucifixion.

All four Gospels give details about the place of crucifixion. Matthew says, *"And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull,"* (27:33). Mark also gives the same details. Luke gives more details. He says, *"And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him"* (23:33). John also states what the first two Gospels stated. He says, *"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha"* (19:17). Except for Luke, all three other Gospels name the place as *'Golgotha.'* Matthew and Mark give the meaning of the word. It means 'the place of a skull.' Luke names it differently. He calls

it 'Calvary,' which means the same as 'Golgotha.' 'Calvary' comes from the Latin word 'Calvaria,' which means 'the skull.'[2]

There are two theories about the origin of the word Golgotha, meaning 'the place of a skull.' First, it is suggested that many skulls of crucified victims were found on this hill. Second, some believe the hillock was shaped like a skull. The idea that the name comes from skulls scattered there is not proven, as it would have been considered contaminating and therefore not allowed by the Jews, especially near Jerusalem. So, this may not be the reason for calling the place Golgotha. The other theory must be the explanation. Leon Morris explains,

> "The reason for the name is probably the shape of the hill. Some have thought that it might derive from the fact that the skulls of executed criminals lay there, but there are at least two strong objections to that. The one is that the 'fact' is far from proven, and Jewish scruples were such that unburied skulls would not be permitted to lie about. The other is that, in any case, it is difficult to see why the skull, rather than some other part of the skeleton, would be chosen to name the hill. 'The place of bones' seems more logical."[3]

The reason for calling it Golgotha, 'the place of a skull,' is almost certain. It is the skull-like shape of the hill.

The place where Jesus was crucified, Golgotha, was just outside the city of Jerusalem, about a fifteen-minute walk from the city. It is interesting to notice that the 'son of the Israelite woman' who blasphemed the God of Israel was asked to be put out of the camp. *"Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him"* (Leviticus 24:14). Naboth was also taken outside the city and stoned to death (1 Kings 21:13). This was done to Stephen also (Acts 7:58). Thus, Jesus suffered outside the city of Jerusalem.

Secondly, Jesus was offered sour wine.

Just as it was administered to anyone who was put on the cross, Jesus also was given a sedative drink. Matthew says, *"They gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had*

tasted it, He would not drink" (Matthew 27:34). Mark says, *"Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it"* (Mark 15:23). In the description of the concoction offered to Jesus there is no contradiction in the Gospels. Roman soldiers used to drink sour wine. This, they probably drank to numb their human sensibilities, to enable them to do this inhumane act. This they offered to the victim to help Him endure the pain, sedating or numbing the sensibilities. Leon Morris says,

> "This humanitarian custom appears to have been practised by the Jews from the early times, Scriptural support for the practice being claimed in (Proverbs 31:6)."[4]

Matthew only says that He tasted it. Nevertheless, both records say that He did not drink it. They offered it to help Him go through the ordeal with less pain. But for Jesus, entering glory was through suffering. He came to that situation to suffer for the sake of the sinners. He wanted His faculties to be fully sensitive to what lay ahead of Him.

At the beginning of His public ministry, Mary wanted Him to perform a miracle at the marriage at Cana and show His glory. But Jesus said, *"Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come"* (John 2:4). Jesus meant that the thought she had about glory was different from the thinking that He had. She thought this came by working a miracle. But for Jesus, it came through suffering. Peter says, "*The sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*" (1 Peter 1:11). Jesus knew this order: sufferings and then the glory. This is the order for all who follow Christ. There is a time of suffering and a time of glory that follows.

Thirdly, Jesus prays for forgiveness.

Luke says, "*Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'"* (Luke 23:34). This prayer Jesus made when matters had come to the ultimate point. They were now about to put Him on the cross. Then Jesus prays to the Father for them. In explaining this prayer, Norman Crawford says,

> "The imperfect tense of 'Said' means that He kept on saying it. When they nailed Him to the tree, He said, 'Father, forgive them;'

> when they mocked Him and scoffed at His claims, He said, 'Father, forgive them;' when they shouted for Him to come down from the cross, He said, 'Father, forgive them.'"[5]

He further explains the word "Forgive." It means to

> "Forgive one who has wronged the sufferer, but *aphiemi* also has the meaning 'to lay aside, to leave, to let be, to allow, to hold back'. To this writer, this suits this context. He asked God to let be, that is, to hold back the wrath that His tormentors deserved. It bows redeemed spirits in worship that He who prayed that wrath should be restrained from falling on them, yet bared His own soul to the full weight of wrath divine."[6]

Knowing the greatness of their sin, Jesus prayed this.

The first martyr in biblical history and the first martyr in Christian history were similar in some matters. When the offering of Abel was accepted, Cain was envious and murdered Abel. God asked Cain, *"Where is Abel, your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground"* (Genesis 4:9-10). What kind of a cry was this? Was it for vengeance on Cain or for forgiveness? It, most probably, seems to be for forgiveness. Because we do not see any punishment given to him for his sin. The punishment was only a banishment from the presence of God. At the same time, with a mark on him that no one would kill him. *"And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him"* (Genesis 4:15). When the writer to the Hebrews described the realm of the New Testament believers, among many other things he says that they have come "*to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel"* (Hebrews 12:24). If the blood of Jesus speaks better things than of Abel, then the blood of Abel spoke good things in comparison. This must be for forgiveness, not for vengeance. The first martyr in Christian history, Stephen, also prayed similarly at his martyrdom. *"Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep"* (Acts 7:60). These were pleas to

God for the abundance of grace when sin abounded to its highest mark.

Jesus might have prayed this prayer when His body was nailed to the crossbar and raised to fix it on the post. A wooden piece in the middle of the post might have acted like a seat to rest the weight of the body, lest the body tear away from the cross. Geikie, in Pentecost, says,

> "It was probably at this moment of inconceivable horror that the voice of the Son of Man was heard uplifted, not in a scream of natural agony at that fearful torture, but calmly praying in Divine compassion for His brutal and pitiless murderers."[7]

In these end times, when persecution of the church is increasing manifold, in multiple ways, the attitude of the Lord in His hour of agony, and the way His servants, the martyrs, faced persecution, are patterns for believers to follow.

Fourthly, dividing the dress among soldiers.

The soldiers who put Jesus on the cross had the right to divide the clothes of the criminal put to death. All four Gospels narrate the details of the division of Jesus' garments. Matthew says, *"Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots"* (Matthew 27:35). This prophetic utterance is seen in Psalm 22:18. Mark records, *"And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take"* (Mark 15:24). Luke is rather brief, when he records, *"And they divided His garments and cast lots"* (Luke 23:34). John's record is the most comprehensive. He says, *"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said, therefore, among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore, the soldiers did these things"* (John 19:23-24).

Normally, the outer garments of a man consisted of four parts: headgear, the outer cloak-like garment, a girdle, and sandals. Pentecost says,

> "Four soldiers under the leadership of a centurion were assigned to each criminal being executed. It would be the privilege of the soldiers conducting the execution by crucifixion to divide the personal property of the crucified among themselves."[8]

Jesus, as a Jew, might have had all four parts of dress. The soldiers cast lots and divided the four pieces among themselves. Then the robe of Jesus was left. John describes it. *"Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece."* Probably, this was the handiwork of some woman who had been close to the group of Jesus and the disciples, who supported their ministry with their means. This robe would have been of high quality. If torn into four pieces, it would benefit nobody. So, they wisely decided not to divide it but to cast a lot for it, and that would become the possession of one of them.

Crawford says,

> "One man left the cross that day who wore the garment of Christ."[9]

The one to whom the lot fell might have rejoiced at what he gained, while others might have felt a bit envious.

The soldier who got the robe reminds us of the robe of righteousness that the Lord freely gives to all those who come to Him in faith. This is called the doctrine of imputation. The Lord took the sins of the whole of humanity on the cross and died for the world. Thus, the sins of all were imputed to Him. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus, His righteousness is imputed into his or her account.

Fifthly, superscription of the cross.

This is recorded in Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38, and John 19:19-22. None of these records is the same. *"And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS"* (Matthew).

"And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mark). *"And an inscription also was*

written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke).

"Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore, the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, 'I am the King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written" (John).

Scofield Reference Bible, in its comment on Matthew 27:37, considering all elements from the four records, suggests that the title might have been 'This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Barnes explains the variance in the four records as follows. He says,

> "But the difficulty may be easily removed. John says that the title was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. It is not at all improbable that the inscription varied in these languages. One evangelist may have translated it from the Hebrew; another from the Greek; a third from the Latin; and a fourth has translated one of the inscriptions a little differently from another. Besides, the evangelists all agree, in the main point of the inscription, viz., that he was the King of the Jews."[10]

When the victim was led to the place of crucifixion, the accusation against him was written and hung around his neck, and at the time of crucifixion, it was hung over his head. Sometimes a person was employed to carry this before the criminal while being taken to the place of execution. This was done for all to see. Nothing is said about the accusation being written around the neck when Jesus was led to Golgotha. But it was put over His head, on the cross, as a superscription.

The superscription was written in three languages - Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Hebrew was the religious language. Latin was the official language, and Greek was the cultural language. Pilate wrote it in mockery. It seems he was mocking not just Jesus but the Jews also with the writing. The Jewish leaders sensed this and wanted an alteration in the writing, to which Pilate did not

acquiesce. It is interesting to notice that this writing, as far as we know, is the earliest writing on Jesus, so to speak. One of the malefactors crucified with Jesus might have addressed Him as King by seeing this writing. As the writing was in all the major languages of the time, we may say that He is declared the King of all.

When the Jews saw Jesus on the cross, they might have at first rejoiced in the fact that their wish to crucify Jesus was granted, but when they read the inscription stating that He was their King, their thoughts squirmed in them. Their desire to alter the writing was not fulfilled. But a day shall come when they shall turn to Him in faith, and recognize that the One whom they pierced was the same one who is their King and Deliverer. Until then, the nation wallows in the quagmire.

Sixthly, the malefactors crucified with Jesus

There were two malefactors crucified with Jesus. The details of this are given in Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27,28; Luke 23:33; and John 19:18. Nothing more of the robbers is told in the passages. Leon Morris says,

> "Our translation (KJV) tells us that they were 'thieves', but the Greek might be better rendered 'brigands.' It is not petty thieving of which they had been convicted."[11]

This crucifixion with the brigands, Mark says, was according to the prophecy. Isaiah prophesied, *"And He was numbered with the transgressors"* (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus had foreseen this identification with the brigands. Luke records, *"And He said to them, 'When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?' So they said, 'Nothing.' Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end'"* (Luke 22:35-37). Paul says that He was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus was crucified in the centre. The brigands were one on the right hand and the other on the left. This was deliberately done to humiliate Jesus, accounting Him as the worst among the three. Luke records one of the most exquisite events that happened at the crucifixion. It was the conversion of one of the brigands. Luke says, *"Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'"* (Luke 23:39-43). When the Gospels say that Jesus was in the middle and the thieves were on His right and left, most probably, the crosses were not in a straight line. The crosses of the thieves might have been a little forward from where they could see the superscription over Jesus' cross. The repentant robber might have read it and understood that Jesus is the King.

Many have tried to identify the thief who repented, depending on legends and traditions. He is called variously by different people: Dismas, Demas, and Dumachus. Some make him a brigand who robbed the rich to divide it among the poor. Some even say that he was the son of a leader of a band of robbers. When Jesus and His parents were fleeing to Egypt, he delivered Jesus from some robbers who attacked the holy family.[12] These are just unverifiable stories from traditions.

Seventhly, mockery at the crucifixion.

Jesus was mocked even when He was on the cross. These are seen in Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32, and Luke 23:35-37. He was mocked by people, rulers, thieves, and soldiers when He was on the cross. Pentecost summarises,

> "On three previous occasions, Christ had been subjected to mockery; first, by the Sanhedrin and their servant officers (Luke 22:63-65); second, by Herod's soldiers (23:11); and third, by Pilate's soldiers (Matthew 27:27-30). Now, He once again was subjected to mockery by those who passed by the place of crucifixion (vv. 39-44)."[13]

Some of them said, "Save yourself." Others said, "Come down that we may see and believe." Matthew says, *"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise, the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing"* (Matthew 27:39-44). None spared the opportunity to mock Him!

Eighthly, the Lord committed His mother to the care of John.

Many around the cross loved Him to the utmost. *"And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons"* (Matthew 27:55-56). Also, see Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49, and John 19:25.

A comparison between the names in Matthew 27:55, 56 and Mark 15:40 indicates that Salome is the wife of Zebedee, and thus the mother of John. Comparing this with John 19:25, it is assumed that Salome is Jesus' "mother's sister." Edersheim says,

> "Thus Salome, the wife of Zebedee and St. John's mother, was the sister of the Virgin, and the beloved disciples the cousin (on the mother's side) of Jesus, and the nephew of the Virgin. This also helps to explain why the care of the mother had been entrusted to him."[14]

John records how the Lord committed His mother to his care. *"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home"* (John 19:26-27). Even in that time of suffering, He did not forget His duty to His mother.

41

The Death of Death

According to Mark, Jesus was crucified at 9 AM, in the *'third hour'* (Mark 15:25). This is as per the common Jewish reckoning, according to which the day began at 6 AM. In the Gospels, there are two ways of reckoning the time. One is the Roman and the other is the Jewish. John, in his record, follows the Roman way, and Mark follows the Jewish way. According to the Roman reckoning, the day began at midnight, a practice like the present-day worldwide reckoning. Thus, John states that the trial proceeding began at 6 AM (John 19:14). Mark puts the time of the crucifixion at the 3rd hour. These indicate that the crucifixion happened around 9 AM.

William Kelly says,

> "It would seem that John adopted a different reckoning of hours, from midnight to noon, as we do. Certainly, the Romans did for their civil day. And it suits all the mentions of hours in the Gospel of John excellently, besides falling in with Mark's 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours of the natural day from the sun."[1]

Jesus was crucified at about 9 AM. During the first three hours on the cross, there was daylight around. From 12 PM to 3 PM, there was darkness. Matthew says, *"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land"* (Matthew 27:45). The last thing that happened before the darkness set in was committing Mary to John's care. This is recorded only by John (19:25-27). The movements of John during the time of trials and the crucifixion need to be noticed.

John gives a detailed record of the trial before Pilate. He was there and witnessed it. It seems, after the trials, he immediately went to meet some of the other disciples and the women who could be found, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. Then, he returned to Golgotha to witness the crucifixion. He records the death with much detail. This indicates that he was witnessing these. When the Lord was nailed to the cross, it seems, he left the scene, now to bring the women to Golgotha. John was there with the mother of Jesus and the other women, viewing the last stages of the crucifixion. John says, *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene"* (John 19:25). We see them *"by the cross."* John was also there. This became the occasion for Jesus to commit His mother to the care of His disciple, John.

After receiving the mother of Jesus into his care, it seems John left the scene for some time, taking Mary to a place where she would be secure. He says, *"And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home"* (John 19:27). This may be the reason for the absence of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the records of Matthew and Mark. Matthew says, *"And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons"* (Matthew 27:55-56). The same record is seen in Mark 15:40 also. These were now *"looking on from afar."* This may be the scene after John left with Mary. These women, with John, who were standing near the cross, might have moved a little farther and waited to view the crucifixion. After leaving Mary in a secure place, he might have come to the scene of crucifixion to witness the matters following (John 19:35). Referring to the service of John the beloved disciple, at this crucial moment, Edersheim says,

> "A more delicate, tender, loving service could not have been rendered than this. Alone, of all the disciples, he is there, not afraid to be near Christ, in the Palace of the High Priest, before Pilate, and now under the cross. And alone he renders to Christ this tender service of bringing the women and Mary to the Cross,

> and to them the protection of his guidance and company. He loved Jesus best, and it was fitting that to his manliness and affection should be entrusted the unspeakable privilege of Christ's dangerous inheritance."[2]

Mary's other children were not present there as they did not believe in Jesus until then. It is said that John, in that same hour, took Mary to his home. Most probably, he might have taken her immediately and temporarily to the Upper Room.

Darkness at Noon

The second half of the hours Jesus lay on the cross began. These are the three hours of darkness. Matthew says, *"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land"* (Matthew 27:45). This detail is recorded in Mark 15:33. It is not clear whether this darkness was local or universal. Luke's record seems to indicate that it affected everyone universally. Luke says, *"Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened"* (Luke 23:44-45). Barnes explains the darkness thus,

> "This could not have been an eclipse of the sun, for the Passover was celebrated at the time of the full moon, when the moon is opposite to the sun. Luke says, Luke 23:45, that "the sun was darkened;" but it was not by an eclipse, but, perhaps, by the vapours and clouds that preceded the earthquake."[3]

Probably, this darkness was felt extensively, though it affected Judea mainly. Barnes further refers to a witness from a Roman astronomer who most probably refers to the darkness at the time of Jesus' death. He says,

> "This darkness was noticed by one at least of the pagan writers. Phlegon, a Roman astronomer, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, which is supposed to be that in which our Saviour died, says, that "the greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known happened then, for the day was so turned into night that the stars appeared."[4]

Unto this darkness, we have a contrast from the time of the birth of Jesus. At His birth, there was supernatural light enlightening the field in Bethlehem where shepherds were

watching over their flock. Luke says, *"And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:9-11). The glory of the Lord shone around them in the field. But at His death, darkness filled the land.

The darkness at the death of Jesus reminds us of the ninth plague that came on the people of Egypt. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may even be felt." So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days"* (Exodus 10:21-23). This was God's judgment upon Egypt. Now, on the cross, the Lord was taking the sins of the world and bearing the judgment due upon the whole world. The Lord said, *"But this is your hour, and the power of darkness"* (Luke 22:53). The Lord said this to those who came to arrest Him. The Lord was speaking about the darkness in a spiritual sense. But on the cross, He was literally in darkness.

In the Hours of Darkness

The following are the things that happened during the hours of darkness.

Firstly, the fourth utterance of Jesus from the cross.

There were seven utterances from the cross. The first three were uttered before the darkness. The latter four were uttered in darkness. The first three were for others, and the last four are for Himself. The first among the four utterances in darkness was, *"Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani."* This is found in the first two Synoptic Gospels. *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" Immediately, one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with*

sour wine, and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him" (Matthew 27:46-49). Mark 15:34-36 also gives the details of this utterance. This is the only utterance among the seven utterances that Mark records. In the prophetic spirit, the psalmist recorded this centuries before (Psalm 22:1).

When Matthew says that Jesus addressed God as "*Eli,"* Mark states that He called Him *"Eloi."* But there is no contradiction. Cor Bruins explains and states,

> "Eloi here is the Aramaic form of the word, whereas in Matthew, 'Eli' is the Hebrew. There is therefore no reason at all to suppose that they misunderstood what Jesus was saying. He is also said to have cried these words with a loud voice."[5]

The original words, whether Eli or Eloi, are kept here for the readers so they understand how they misunderstood that He was calling Elijah. In this first statement, where Jesus referred to His Father as 'God,' He was becoming our Substitute. Taking our place in His humanity, He called Him God. He was made a sin offering for sinners (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The relationship of Jesus with the first Person in the Trinity, when Jesus died on the cross, must be clearly understood. In the death of Jesus, He was not forsaken by His Father. Jesus said, *"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me"* (John 16:32). This shows that the Father was with Him even in the time of His suffering. As His Father, He did not forsake Him, but as God, when Jesus took sinners' place, He was forsaken. Thus, He cried, *"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?"* This cry was uttered at the 'ninth hour,' that is, at 3 AM. Thus, it was toward the end of the three hours of darkness. What all was happening before, in the three hours of darkness, is not known. The transaction in these hours on the cross, or the complete meaning of the cry about the forsaking, is beyond human conception. Leon Morris says,

> "When we face such a matter as the bearing of man's sin, we have passed beyond the limits of man's understanding, and thus

> we must display a reverent reserve in our interpretation. Yet this we may say, that His being forsaken of the Father means that His people will never be so forsaken."[6]

As once He was forsaken for our cause, there is no reason why believers should ever be forsaken.

Secondly, the fifth utterance of Jesus from the cross.

The fifth utterance of Jesus from the cross was, *"I thirst."* It seems this cry followed immediately after the one considered before. This is recorded in three Gospels, except Luke's Gospel (Matthew 27:48, 49; Mark 15:36; John 19:28, 29). John says, *"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth."* Matthew and Mark do not record the utterance but record the offer of the drink of vinegar, which Jesus received from them. Vinegar was the sour drink soldiers and workmen used to drink.

This vinegar was not the kind of drink mixed with gall or myrrh, which Jesus rejected. It was a kind of sedative, offered before crucifying, to lessen the physical pain.

Adam Clarke describes the vinegar offered to Jesus when He said, "I thirst." He says,

> "This was probably that tart small wine which we are assured was the common drink of the Roman soldiers. Our word vinegar comes from the French *vin aigre*, sour or tart wine; and, although it is probable that it was brought at this time for the use of the four Roman soldiers who were employed in the crucifixion of our Lord, yet it is as probable that it might have been furnished for the use of the persons crucified; who, in that lingering kind of death, must necessarily be grievously tormented with thirst."[6]

Jesus was offered it on a sponge, having been raised on a reed. He accepted it and drank it. It was necessary to moisten His lips to utter the declarations following this. This was in fulfilment of what the psalmist had prophesied (Psalm 22:15).

Thirdly, the sixth utterance of Jesus.

The Lord declared, *"So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit"* (John 19:30). Only John records this utterance. This was uttered immediately after drinking the sour wine. This indicates that all that He had undertaken in the past eternity in connection with the redemption of humanity was finished. Before entering human history, the Lord declared His intention to fulfil the will of the Father. *"I delight to do Your will, O my God and Your law is within my heart"* (Psalms 40:8). While Jesus was on earth He said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work"* (John 4:34). In the evening of the day before He went to the cross, He prayed to the Father, *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"* (John 17:4). He claimed that He finished the work. It was going to be finished the next day. The past tense here indicates the definiteness and the determination of the Lord to fulfil it. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He surrendered to the will of the Father, saying, *"Not My will but Thy will be done."* Having finished all the work involved in redeeming humanity, He cried and said, *"It is finished."* The accomplishment here is only about the work of redemption. There were yet more scriptures to be fulfilled. He shall also fulfill them. But here He fulfilled all that is involved in the work of redemption. What He had undertaken in the past eternity, He came, went to the cross, and completed them.

Pentecost explains,

> "The word translated 'It is finished' *(tetelestai)* was used in Greek commercial life. The term signified the completion of the transaction by the full payment of a price or the discharge of a debt by a completed payment."[7]

Fourthly, the seventh utterance of Jesus.

Luke says, *"And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last"* (Luke 23:46). Having declared that He has finished the work of redemption, Jesus addresses

the First Person in the Trinity as the 'Father.' The Jewish mothers used to teach their little children a small prayer to say before going to bed. It was, *"Into Your hand, I commit my spirit"* (Psalms 31:5). Mary might have taught this prayer when Jesus was small. The training she gave when He was small, He never forgot. He uttered it now to the Father before He went to His sleep of death.

The Gospels give different descriptions of His death. *"Yielded up His spirit"* (Matthew 27:50). *"Breathed His last"* (Mark 15:37). *"Having said this, He breathed His last"* (Luke 23:46). *"And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit"* (John 19:30). All these indicate that His death was voluntary. He was committing His spirit to the Father. Jesus had told of this nature of His death in advance. He said, *"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:18).

Fifthly, the veil of the temple was rent.

At the death of Jesus, certain miraculous events happened. They were not just random events. They were significant for their spiritual meanings. They were the renting of the veil, the earthquake, and the resurrection of certain saints.

The renting of the veil is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. "*Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"* (Matthew 27:51). *"Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"* (Mark 15:38). *"The veil of the temple was torn in two*" (Luke 23:45). This veil separated the holy place from the Holiest of All. It was there in the Tabernacle and the Temple (Exodus 26:31-33; 2 Chronicles 3:14). The Temple, in the time of Jesus, was Zerubbabel's Temple, which was modified and beautified by Herod the Great. The veil of this Temple was rent.

Pentecost provides the measurements of the veil. Quoting Edersheim, he says,

> "The veils, before the Most Holy Place were 40 cubits (60 feet) long, and 20 cubits (30 feet) wide, of the thickness of the palm of

> the hand, and wrought in 72 squares, which were joined together, and these veils were so heavy, that, in the exaggerated language of the time, it needed 300 priests to manipulate each."[8]

These descriptions indicate how huge and heavy the veil was!

This veil, covering the Most Holy Place, indicated that the entrance to the presence of God was restricted (Hebrews 9:8, 9). But the renting shows that entrance into the presence of God is open to all. The descriptions of the renting are instructive. It was torn from top to bottom, not from bottom to top. This indicates that the entrance into the presence of God is God's provision. It is His making. It was torn into two parts. God could have torn the veil into ten or a hundred pieces. However, it was divided only into two parts. This indicates that there is only one way to the presence of God. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, the life"* (John 14:6). Luke says that it was rent *"in the midst"* (KJV, YLT, etc). In the details about the making of the veil, there were cherubim in the middle with embroidery work. Cherubim are often taken as the representation of all the redeemed. Thus, the renting, signifying the death of Jesus, indicates the death of all to be gathered in Christ, as dead with the death of Christ (Hebrews 10:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Sixthly, earthquakes at Jesus' death.

Matthew says, *"And the earth quaked, and the rocks were split"* (Matthew 27:51). The splitting of the rocks may be the result of the earthquake. This also explains the meaning of the cross. When the Mosaic Law was given, similar occurrences had happened (Exodus 19:16, 18). It announced the emergence of the Old Covenant. In the present occurrence of the earthquake, at the death of Jesus, the earthquake meant the coming of the New Covenant. It was based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Seventhly, certain saints were resurrected.

This detail is given only by Matthew. He says, *"And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many"* (Matthew

27:52-53). As the saints who rose from the dead went and appeared unto many in the city, we may assume that these were some of the saints who lived and died during the time of Jesus. Though they were risen at the time of Jesus' death, they left the grave only after Jesus rose again. The reason for this may be that Jesus might be the first fruit of those who rise from the dead. This opening of the grave and the rising of the saints from the dead indicate the victory of Jesus over sin and death. The sin problem was solved by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Adam Clarke expresses the difficulty some have about these verses (Matthew 27:52,53). He says,

> "Some have thought that these two verses have been introduced into the text of Matthew from the gospel of the Nazarenes; others think that the simple meaning is this:- by the earthquake, several bodies that had been buried were thrown up and exposed to view, and continued above ground till after Christ's resurrection, and were seen by many persons in the city. Why the graves should be opened on Friday, and the bodies not be raised to life till the following Sunday, is difficult to be conceived. The place is extremely obscure."[9]

This sounds like a natural explanation to explain away a supernatural occurrence.

Responses to the Death

Many witnessed the death of Jesus. Matthew says, *"So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons'"* (Matthew 27:54-56).

Mark says, *"So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!' There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who*

also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem'" (Mark 15:39-41).

Luke says, *"So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!' And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things'"* (Luke 23:47-49).

The above narratives from the Synoptics give details about the men and women around the cross, near and far. A comparison of the passages provided more information and clarity.

The seven utterances from the cross are often referred to and are familiar to many. But the seven utterances to the cross are unfamiliar to most. These are statements various people told to Jesus or about Jesus when they witnessed Him die on the cross. These are, by them that passed by (Matthew 27:39,40), the thieves (Luke 23:39), the penitent thief (Luke 23:42), Jewish leaders (Matthew 27:41-43), those who stood by (Mark 15:35,36), soldiers (Luke 23:36,37), and the centurion (Mark 15:39).

If, in the utterances to the cross, mainly, the wickedness of humans is evident, in the utterances from the cross, the grace abounding on sinners is evident. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!

42

Buried With Honours

The Romans normally did not care for the burial of the crucified victims. The death of the crucified itself may take hours or even days. Then the body is putrefied and degenerates and falls from the cross. But Isaiah prophesies and indicates the burial plans of those who murdered Jesus. He says, *"And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:9). This indicates the mind of those who put Jesus on the cross. They wanted to make one pit and put all three bodies in it. They tried to put Jesus' body with the thieves. But God did not allow that. He was buried in the tomb of a most honourable man, Joseph of Arimathea. Facts about this decent burial accorded to Jesus are given in the Gospel narratives.

Jesus had foreseen and foretold about this burial in His words to the unbelieving Jews. *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:39-41). This sign involves His death, burial, and resurrection.

Hastening the Death

According to the Mosaic Law, the bodies should not remain on the cross overnight. *"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely*

bury him that day so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). About the matter of the burial of Jesus and the two malefactors, Jews were more concerned about their burial as Golgotha was near the holy city of Jerusalem. Normally, the death of those who are crucified takes many hours or even days. For the Jews, it was the festival season, and the Sabbath was nearing. Thus, it was necessary to hasten the deaths, to complete the burial. The Jewish leaders take steps to speed up matters.

John says, *"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." And again, another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced"* (John 19:31-37).

That Sabbath was *'a high day.'* It was called the *'high day'* or 'great day,' as it was the Sabbath after the Passover. *"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it"* (Leviticus 23:6-7). The Sabbath that was coming in was also the weekly Sabbath. Thus, the day on which Jesus died was the 'preparation day' for the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). They should hasten the burial without delay.

Breaking of Legs

When the body is hanging on the cross, the victim breaths by giving force to the legs. When the body is lifted slightly by pushing

up, forcing the legs, thus relaxing the chest section and lungs, the victim exhales air. When the legs are loosened, the chest cavity expands, as the body is suspended on the nailed hands, and thus air is inhaled. This is how people who are crucified breathe when they are hanging on the cross. But when the legs are broken, breathing becomes impossible. The chest cavity remains expanded. The person dies of suffocation. This was one of the most inhumane ways to hasten death. The Jews now attempted this for the three victims.

They came to Pilate and asked for permission to break the legs of the victim. Having received the permission, they came. The soldiers come to the thieves first. The reason for coming first to them may be the position where they were crucified. Though it is told that the thieves were crucified to the right and left of Jesus, they were not crucified in a straight line. Probably, the thieves were, though on the right and left sides, in front of Jesus, facing Jesus. That is how one of them could read the superscription over Jesus' cross at His head, and could understand that He was the King. As they were crucified in front of Jesus, the soldiers came to the thieves first, then they came to Jesus. Or by looking at Jesus, it was clear enough that He was already dead. As Jesus was already dead, they did not break His legs.

This was followed by the piercing of His side by one of the soldiers, who was standing nearby. Probably, he doubted whether Jesus was truly dead or not. The victims crucified normally do not die that fast. This may be the reason why the soldier pierced His side. We are not told which side was pierced. John testifies that immediately blood and water came out from Jesus' side. This made certain that Jesus was truly dead. These executioners were trained Roman soldiers. The order they received was to break the legs of the victims. If they are not doing this, there should be a good reason for it. Thus, it was essential for the soldiers to make sure that He was dead. By piercing the side of Jesus, he was confirming His death.

John MacArthur explains,

> "Doctors tell us that blood flowing into the pericardium, the sac about the heart, would coagulate and separate into the red clot (blood) and the liquid serum (water)."[1]

Ryle, quoting Sir James Simpson, says that the medical reason for the death of Christ was "the rupture of the heart because of strong mental emotions."[2] The psalmist says, *"Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink"* (Psalms 69:20-21). The sufferings that He underwent within His heart must be far surpassing what He went through outside, in the body.

This piercing of Jesus' side and a death without breaking of legs were necessary to happen for scriptural reasons. These were foretold in the scripture. Psalmist says, *"He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken"* (Psalms 34:20). Instructions for the paschal lamb also prescribed that its bones should not be broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). In describing the events of the Glorious Appearance, Zechariah says, *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn"* (Zechariah 12:10). If the Israelites as a nation must turn to Him 'whom they pierced,' then He should be pierced. The Roman soldier, while fulfilling His duty, was making way for the fulfillment of the prophecies. Psalmist says, *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise You"* (Psalms 76:10).

Joseph and Nicodemus

Jesus gave up His spirit at about 3 PM. The preparations for burial might have happened immediately after this. As stated before, the authorities wanted to put all three corpses in one pit and finish the matter. But matters took a turn with the coming of Joseph of Arimathea. His burial was in the sepulchre of this rich man. Matthew says, *"Now when evening had come, there came*

a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus" (Matthew 27:57). Mark describes him as, *"Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God"* (Mark 15:43). Luke adds, *"A good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed"* (Luke 23:50-51). These show the prominence of this man. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, but he had not consented to the decisions about the death of Jesus. He was rich, good, and just. He was a secret follower of Jesus. However, the death of Jesus moved him to decide to come to light and do his part in honouring his Master.

Joseph was of Arimathea. This was a small town about twenty-five miles north of Jerusalem. Some take it as Ramah (1 Samuel 7:17), but Barnes expresses the difficulty in identifying the place. He says that it is uncertain where Arimathea was. There were several cities with that name in Judea. It is commonly supposed to be the same as Ramah. Luke says that this was a "city of the Jews," and it is probable, therefore, that it was in the tribe of Benjamin, and a short distance from Jerusalem.[3] He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Mark says, *"Coming and taking courage, went into Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus"* (Mark 15:43). Here, the word for '*body*' is *soma*. Verse 45 says, *"So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph"* (Mark 15:45). The word for '*body*' here is '*ptoma.*' Quoting Darby, Cor Bruins says,

> "Mr Darby, in his notes, tells us that Joseph asked for the body-*soma*- and that Pilate granted him the body-*ptoma*, which means a corpse. Notice the different values these two men attached to the precious body of Jesus; for Joseph, it was indeed precious, the Tabernacle of God on earth; for Pilate, it was just another dead man's corpse."[4]

After making sure from the centurion that Jesus was dead, Pilate permitted Joseph to take the body. Mark notes, *"Pilate marvelled that He was already dead"* (Mark 15:44).

Nicodemus also joined in the burial with Joseph. This is recorded only by John. He appears in John's Gospel about three

times (3:1; 7:51; 19:39). Both were disciples in secret. But the cross made the change. Now they came out into the light to do their part at the death of Jesus. There is a symbolic indication of progression in the case of Nicodemus. In all three places, he is mentioned as one who came to Jesus in the night. But the time of the day at which he was seen in the three passages in the Gospel is worth noting. Firstly, he is seen at night (3:1). Secondly, he is seen in the twilight (7:51). This is evident as the council members go to their residences and Jesus goes to the mountain to spend the night. Thirdly, in the daytime (19:39). The burial happened immediately after death, after 3 in the afternoon. The progression from darkness to twilight and from twilight to light is evident. This indicates how the Lord leads a person from darkness to light, in stages. The spiritual growth of a person happens in stages, step by step.

John says, *"Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now, in the place where He was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby"* (John 19:39-42). Matthew says, "*When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed" (Matthew 27:59-60). Mark also gives a similar narrative* (15:46). Luke adds and says that in the tomb "*no one had ever lain before"* (Luke 23:53). Jesus was conceived in a womb which never bore anyone before. He travelled on an ass that never carried anyone before. And now, He was laid in a tomb where no one had ever lain. The reason for laying His body there, John says, was that it was nearby and it was the preparation day for the Jews. Probably, what this means is that the body could have been buried in a tomb dug for Jesus alone. He could have been taken to Capernaum and buried there among the people of His city. However, it was the preparation, and the Sabbath was

drawing in. So, they kept His body in a tomb nearby, in Joseph's tomb. In His death and burial, He was with the rich.

There is an important matter to notice here. Until Jesus finished the work of redemption, the Father allowed the sinners to handle the body of Jesus. They did whatever they could. But after He completed His work, and declared that He had finished it, and after giving the evidence that He was dead, the Father did not allow any sinners to handle that body. He was given into the hands of the wicked men, for some time, to complete the work of redemption for all humanity.

Mourners at the Burial

Joseph and Nicodemus were not the only ones who were present at the burial. Matthew notes, *"And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb"* (Matthew 27:61). It seems that after the men who buried Jesus left the place, these women waited. Mark says, *"And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid"* (Mark 15:47). *"The other Mary"* is identified here. Luke says, *"And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid"* (Luke 23:55). This seems to indicate that there were more women to witness the burial. John does not say any details about those who were present at this time. It seems he was not there at the time of the burial. After Jesus' side was pierced, he might have left the scene to join Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the list of the women, Matthew and Mark mention, Mary Magdalene stands first. This indicates her love for the Lord.

Securing the Tomb

The Jewish leaders became uneasy at witnessing such a death. The miraculous things that happened, including the tearing of the veil in the Temple, might have unsettled their heart. Morris gives another interesting piece of information from the Jewish traditions. He says,

> "It is interesting to notice that the Jewish historian, Josephus, says that there was a great light of the Temple at Passover time.

> According to the Talmud, this took place forty years before the destruction of the Temple. Jorome says it was written in the Gospel according to the Hebrews that the lintel of the Temple was broken. These sayings seem to point to a recollection among the Jews that something very unusual had happened in the Temple just about that time."[5]

This denotes, apart from the miraculous events that occurred at the crucifixion, as recorded in the Bible, that other events took place. All these might have confused the Jews. They wanted to avoid any mischief that could happen.

Matthew records the steps they took to secure the tomb. He says, *"On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, 'Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, After three days I will rise.' Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard"* (Matthew 27:62-66). They secured it by two things: by sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Adam Clarke says,

> "The guard was to take care that the disciples should not steal him away; and the seal, which was probably the seal of the governor, was to prevent the guards from being corrupted to permit the theft. So, everything was done which human policy and prudence could, to prevent a resurrection, which these very precautions had the most direct tendency to authenticate and establish."[6]

The first deception and the last deception that the Jewish leaders mentioned to Pilate (Matthew 27:64) are explained by John Heading. He says,

> "The first error is the people believing on Him in His life; the second error is the people believing after His death, supposing Him to be alive again."[7]

Leon Morris, referring to securing the tomb by sealing it and keeping the watch, says,

> "Christians have always been grateful for this final action of Jesus' enemies."[8]

It provides evidence of God's power in resurrection and the credibility of Jesus' resurrection.

VII

Resurrection and Ascension

"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."
Matthew 28:5-6

43

Risen Indeed!

The Jewish leaders requested that Pilate secure the sepulchre to prevent any mischief by the disciples of Jesus. They could take the body and say that Jesus rose again from the dead, just as He had told them. Pilate allowed their request. The tomb was sealed, probably by the governor's seal. The watch was also set around the tomb. Despite all precautions, Jesus rose from the dead, just as He had foretold. If the death on the cross was His victory, the resurrection was His triumph, its expression and celebration. The truth of resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith.

The narrative of the resurrection is recorded in Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-10.

Burial and Resurrection Events

The burial happened quite some time before the beginning of the Sabbath. Joseph and Nicodemus buried Him in Joseph's new tomb (John 19:38,39). John says how Jesus was buried. Nicodemus brought "*a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury*" (John 19:39-40). Matthew says Joseph "*wrapped it in a clean linen cloth*" (Matthew 27:59). Myrrh was a resin, and the aloe was pulverized wood. Both these were aromatic (Psalm 45:8). The spices were wrapped between the folds of the linen to embalm the body partially.

Some have found the quantity of the mixture abnormal. They say that a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes was enough to embalm two hundred dead bodies. But, Adam Clarke says, that it may be observed that great quantities of spices were used for embalming dead bodies when they intended to show peculiar marks of respect to the deceased. And quoting Josephus, he says, a great quantity was used at the funeral of Aristobulus, and it is said that five hundred servants bearing aromatics attended the funeral of Herod.[1] These secret disciples of Jesus were showing their love to their Master at an appropriate time. After the burial, Joseph and Nicodemus left the place. The women who were watching the proceedings were still there. Matthew's record indicates this fact. He says, *"When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb"* (Matthew 27:59-61). They were only witnesses to the burial. They could not actively show their respect to the Lord. But it seems they had that in their mind, to show respect. Luke indicates this when he says, *"And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment"* (Luke 23:55-56). This indicates that though they could not honour their Master at the time of His burial, they wanted to do the same later.

From these women, three of them came back to the tomb to show their respect to the Lord, early on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath. Mark says, *"Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?"* (Mark 16:1-3). Probably, the sealing of the stone and the setting up of security happened after they left the tomb, after the burial. Luke's record indicates that there were other women, apart from those

who are named here. He says, *"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared"* (Luke 24:1). Verse 10 also refers to other women who were involved.

While the women were coming to the tomb, their concern was about the stone at the entrance. But when they arrived at the place, they saw it being removed. Matthew gives the details. He says, *"And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men"* (Matthew 28:2-4). This probably happened just before the women reached the place. The earthquake was the effect of the coming of the angel. It is understood that another angel joined in after this. Luke says, *"And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments"* (Luke 24:4). These *'two men'* were two angels.

As the tomb was now open, Mary Magdalene might have thought that somebody had taken the body away. She responded immediately. She ran to update Peter and John. John says, *"Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him"* (John 20:2). She might have thought that somebody might have taken the body after the Sabbath and laid it somewhere else. After giving the information to these two disciples, she returned to the tomb. The other women, meanwhile, entered the tomb. Mark says, *"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed"* (Mark 16:5). Matthew says, *"But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay"* (Matthew 28:5-6). The angels gave information about the resurrection to the other women who remained at the tomb. They went in and verified the absence of the body.

According to the information Peter and John received from May Magdalene, the two disciples came to the tomb. John says, *"Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes"* (John 20:3-10). Mary Magdalene remained at the tomb, and she was rewarded for this by becoming the first person to have seen the risen Lord. The other women, having received the command from the angels to inform the other disciples, as they went, met Jesus. They shared the news with others. These were followed by a series of appearances of the Lord to His own in various situations and manners, showing them that He is alive. This continued for forty days.

Attempts to Deny the Resurrection

The truth of resurrection was attacked by the enemy right from the beginning. Jewish attempts to prevent the resurrection were in vain. Jesus rose again from the dead. The resurrection occurred after the Sabbath, when the first day of the week began.

If the truth of resurrection is denied, the Christian faith cannot stand. Thus, from the beginning, attempts to disprove resurrection have been rife.

Matthew records the first attempt to deny the resurrection. He says, *"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's*

ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matthew 28:11-15).

"Now while they were going" shows that the women were going to tell others about the resurrection. This would bring new problems to the Jewish leaders. The matter should be put under control before it spreads. So, they resorted to bribery and lies. Their coming together with the elders looks like the gathering of the Sanhedrin. However, this may not be the gathering of all the members of the Council. It was a gathering of the prominent Council members. The whole Council would not be summoned to decide a matter of this kind. This involves lies and bribing. Thus, secrecy was necessary. They might have summoned only the minimum number of Council members. The lies they concocted involved saying that the soldiers were sleeping while on duty, which can cause severe punishment. But the Jewish leaders undertook to sort out any problem that the soldiers would face by telling such lies.

Apart from this early attempt by the Jews to deny the resurrection of Jesus, there have been many other arguments also propounded by the enemies of the gospel to deny the resurrection truths. Josh McDowell summarizes some of the arguments that are brought to deny the resurrection.[2]

The Swoon Theory: This theory was first proposed by a man named Venturini and propagated by a group of Muslims, known as Ahmadiyya. According to this theory, Jesus did not die. When Jesus was put on the cross, they say, Jesus only went into a swoon, which means He went into an unconscious state. After He was buried, because of the effect of the myrrh and aloes used for the burial, He revived and came out of the grave.

The Hallucination Theory: According to this theory, Jesus never resurrected. What the disciples saw as Jesus risen were only illusions or their imaginations. They were so full of expectation that Jesus would rise again that even a shadow would have given them the feeling that Jesus had come back.

The Wrong Tomb Theory: This theory says that the women went to the wrong tomb. They quote Matthew 28:6 to prove this. *"But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay"* (Matthew 28:5-7). They say the angels told them that He was not in the tomb where they went, but elsewhere, and that they were calling the women to see the body in the other tomb.

These theories, propounded, do not deserve any answer at all. At the outset, all these indicate that these are excuses people make just because they do not want to believe a reliable historical event. Jesus was indeed risen.

'According to the Scripture'

The resurrection of Jesus was foretold in the Old Testament and of the Lord Jesus. In the prophetic spirit, the psalmist says, *"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore"* (Psalms 16:10-11). Isaiah also says, *"He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied"* (Isaiah 53:10-11). Similarly, Psalm 23, although it focuses mainly on the death of the cross, in the latter part from verse 22 onwards indicates a victory over the grave, a resurrection.

The Lord also foretold about His resurrection. John says, *"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). He said this somewhat at the beginning of His public ministry. Later to the Jews who asked for a sign He said, *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40). In a figurative language the Lord was telling about His death, burial, and resurrection. Towards the middle of His public ministry the Lord said, *"From that time Jesus began to show to*

His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Matthew 16:21). Later, while in Jerusalem, few months before the Passion week, He said, *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:17-18). On His way to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus announced this in clear terms to the disciples (Matthew 17:22,23; 20:17-19; 26:32). This is why Paul says that the resurrection was 'according to the scripture' (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Jesus' predictions about His resurrection are in the following references: Matthew 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19; 26:32; 27:63; Mark 8:31-9:1; 9:10; 9:31; 10:32-34; 14:28,58; Luke 9:22-27; John 2:18-22; 12:34; Chs. 14-16.

He is Risen Indeed

The crucifixion of the Lord was witnessed by all those who were present at the scene and the passersby. The burial was seen only by those who cared for Him. The ascension, another important event, was witnessed by His disciples. But the resurrection had no witnesses. The evidence of it was also given only to those who believed in Him. This is the order in His dealings with humanity. They must believe first, and then enjoy salvation and its blessings. While Jesus was on the cross, certain people asked Him to come down that they might believe (Matthew 27:42). Nevertheless, the Lord says, *'Come and see.'*

We do not know at what time Jesus came out of the tomb. He had come out before the angel opened the tomb. The opening of the tomb was not for Jesus to come out, but for the women to go in and see that the body was not there. Jesus had said that He should be *"three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40). This does not mean three full days. Pentecost quotes Shepard,

> "This could not mean after seventy-two hours. The method of calculating time among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans would

make the 'three days in the tomb' mean one whole central day and any part of each of the two other days."[3]

This indicates that Jesus would have risen any time after the Sabbath and after the beginning of the first day of the next week.

Referring to the significance of the absence of any witnesses to the resurrection moment, Moore says,

"Had these writers been inventing a fiction, such an omission would have been incredible. This fact being the main fact of the story, it would have been narrated with details of time and attendant circumstances in the most careful manner, so that all cavil should be excluded. But inasmuch as there was really eyewitness to the fact itself, in its actual occurrence, they refrain from recording that occurrence, with a strict and scrupulous regard to historical accuracy that is very striking; and that is one of those minute marks of absolute verity that would never occur to an inventor, but which, when brought to our notice, illustrates the conscientious and careful truthfulness of the writers in the most convincing manner."[4]

Though witnesses of resurrection are absent, it does not mean the matter is implausible. There are many sufficient proofs provided in the Gospels for the resurrection. Firstly, the post-resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Paul wrote this around AD 55. This might have been written before the Gospels were written. Some of these witnesses were still living. Secondly, the open tomb (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24). Thirdly, the evidence of the grave cloths (John 20:6,7). Among these writings, John's Gospel was the last one written. John wrote toward the end of the first century.

Josh McDowell says,

"After more than seven hundred hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundations, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic fact of history."[5]

For all those who love Him, the resurrection truth is 'the most fantastic fact of history.' It is the cornerstone of Christian faith.

44

Appearance to Mary Magdalene

For the church, in the early times, post-resurrection appearances were the primary evidence for the Lord's resurrection. It was essential for them to testify to the fact that the Crucified had risen, and the faith of converts depended upon the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then all preaching and faith are in vain, as Paul states elsewhere. Apart from the post-resurrection appearances, the formidable pieces of evidence the early church had were the empty tomb and the grave cloths. Unto those who deny the resurrection, it was essential for them to produce the body. The absence of the body sufficiently proved the fact of resurrection.

There are eleven post-resurrection appearances. Including the visions that were given to Stephen, Paul, and John, which were post-ascension, the total appearances are fourteen. The first among these is the Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18).

Mary is a very ancient name in the Hebrew language. In the Bible, the various forms of the same name are seen. The earliest form is the name Miriam. She was Moses' sister. When Moses was placed among the bulrushes on the Nile riverside, we see her as a helper for the saviour of Moses, who later became the saviour to Israel (Exodus 2:3,4,7,8). The parallel here is worth noting. Mary Magdalene is seen here, waiting at the sepulchre of

Jesus, ready to carry away the body, if needed. Marah is another form of the word. The word is first seen in Exodus 15:26, in connection with Israel. They came to Marah, and the water there was bitter. The people could not drink it. The Lord then showed Moses a tree whose branch Moses cut and put in the water, and it healed. Later, we see the same name taken up by Naomi. When she returned from Moab, people came around her and asked, *"Is this Naomi?" She answered, 'Don't call me Naomi, call me Marah.'* Naomi means pleasant. Her situation was not all that pleasant. She was in bitterness. And her condition was bitter (Ruth 1:20). However, the Lord turned her situation, and made it enjoyable. At the end of the Book of Ruth, when the women in the neighbourhood called her Naomi, she had no issues with the name. In the life of Mary Magdalene, the Lord wrought a transformation. In her experience, we see a sinner woman turned into a saint, a servant of the Lord.

The character of Mary Magdalene is well captured and described in the following passage from Herbert Lockyer. He says,

> "She is mentioned fourteen times in the Gospels, and from references to her we can see clearly what she did and how she did it. A striking feature in eight of the fourteen passages is that Mary is named in connection with other women, but she always leads the list, implying that she occupied the place at the front in service rendered by godly females. In the five times where she is mentioned alone, the connection is with the death and resurrection of Christ (Mark 16:9; John 20:1,11,16,18). In one instance, her name comes after that of the mother and the aunt of Jesus. She stood close by the cross with these women, but because of their relation to Jesus, it would not have been fitting to put her name before them (John 19:25). No women, however, superseded Mary in her utter devotion to the Master."[1]

In the present passage, where we see Mary at the tomb of Jesus, her devotion to the Lord is seen at the highest level.

Mark says, *"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons"* (16:9). This verse tells that Jesus first

appeared to Mary Magdalene. But it is John who gives the details of this appearance. According to John, we see Mary going through three stages: grieving, realizing, and witnessing.

Mary Seen Grieving

Mary is seen in her grief in John 20:11-13. Peter, John, and the other women left the tomb and went back. But Mary stood there still. A woman to remain there all alone is unimaginable. But she stood there alone. This shows her utter devotion to the Lord. And she was rewarded for her commitment by being the first person to have seen the Lord after the resurrection.

John says, "*But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him"* (vv. 11-13).

True to the meaning of her name, Mary is seen grieving over the loss of her Lord. As it was noted before, Mary means bitter. And she was in bitterness. But the interesting fact is, there was no reason for her to be grieving. There were only reasons for rejoicing. All that was essential for her comfort and consolation was provided. But she, amid all that, in ignorance, was crying. This is always the case in human experience. When the sons of Jacob wanted to take Benjamin to Egypt, Jacob could not contain his pain. He said that all things were against him. He thought that Joseph was dead by then. Simeon, then with Joseph, he thought was lost. Benjamin, he thought, was going to be lost. But were all things against Jacob? Not at all. All things were working toward the good of Jacob. Joseph was alive and was the ruler in Egypt. Benjamin was going to meet his brother Joseph. After some more time, Jacob would also go and meet Joseph. All things were working together for his good (Genesis 42). But he thought that all things were against him!

Though the meaning of 'Mary' was bitterness, and that she was truly in bitterness, the meaning of the name of her place,

Magdala, was encouraging. Magdala means 'a tower or a castle.' This indicates that she was cared for and secured as in a castle or tower. But she was not aware that things were working out for her good. Mary was standing outside the tomb. While she wept and cried, she stooped down and saw inside the tomb. Two angels were sitting inside. But her attention was only on what was not there. The body of Jesus was not there. She, with other women, was at the tomb to honour the Lord. They had come with the things to anoint Jesus. But now the body was missing. But instead of pondering on what was absent, she should have thought of the matters that were there. There were two angels in the open tomb. They were sitting at the two ends of the tomb. One at the side where the head was, and the other where the feet were. These positions remind one of the cherubim at the two ends of the Mercy seat (Exodus 25:20; 2 Chronicles 3:13). Their faces were turned toward the Mercy seat and the Ark. The ark of the covenant denotes the presence of God. The Mercy Seat points to divine mercy in dealing with the sins of His people. The cherubim were at the two ends, viewing intently into the mysteries of God. Of course, the two angels in the tomb of Jesus were not looking at the place where Jesus' body was laid. It seems the presence of the two angels at the two positions was a message that Mary should have understood. It was an indication to her that no human beings could have taken the body from between them. If the body were absent from the tomb, she should have understood that it was a supernatural event. It was not a matter to grieve upon. It was done by God alone. With the presence of the angels there and seeing their positions, she should have understood that none could have stolen the body from the midst of them. However, Mary did not get the message correctly. She kept weeping.

Then the angels asked, *"Woman, why are you weeping?"* This question may be to stir her mind. It indicated that there was no reason to weep. The tomb was open before her. The presence of the angels seated with her should have instructed her. Apart from these, the Lord was standing just behind her. She was in the centre of all these. She was well fortified and secured. Amid all these, she cried and wept.

Mary Now Realizing

While she was crying, thinking that all was lost, she might have turned halfway and seen the Lord standing behind. But she did not know that it was the Lord. John records the conversation that ensued, which ended in her realisation that it was Lord Jesus.

John says, *"Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"* (John 20:14-17).

Here, Mary realizes that Jesus is alive. Her tears turn to triumph. She revels in the fact that her Master lives. At first, she did not recognize Jesus. The reason for this may be that the Lord might have appeared in a different form. Or her eyes were blinded from recognising Jesus. And, further, she never expected such an appearance. She assumed the body was taken away from the tomb. She did not want anybody to take the body and destroy it dishonourably. Thus, thinking that it was the gardener, she asked him about the whereabouts of the body.

Pentecost explains,

> "The authorities believed that the body of a criminal would defile a tomb and prevent its further use. Hence, Mary supposed that they planned to dispose of the body by the normal procedure used for a criminal. This would be to consign it to the fires of the valley of Gehenna. Mary desired to prevent such a disposition."[2]

The body of Jesus was kept in Joseph's new tomb, as it was near the place of crucifixion. She thought that after the Sabbath, they would have removed the body before decomposition to

cremate it elsewhere. Before anything like that happened, she wanted to carry the body away.

Jesus asked her why she was weeping. And further enquired of her, whom she was seeking. Jesus might have asked these to strike up a conversation with her. Thinking that he was the gardener, she asked where he had kept Jesus' body. She said that she would take the body herself. She did not want anybody to dishonour the body. Her supreme devotion was evident in all this. She was not thinking about the weight of a corpse and how difficult it would be for her to carry it away. Whatever the trouble, she did not want anybody to dishonour the body of the Lord.

Jesus responds to her devotion. He called her '*Mary.*' He appeared there, probably, in an unfamiliar form. She could not recognize Him. But now the call was recognizable. It was in the same voice, tone, and tenderness. She recognized His voice. Her response was immediate. She called Him, *'Rabboni.*' It was the term of highest respect. Some were called 'Rab' and more honourable were called 'Rabbi.' Those who were given the highest honour were called 'Rabboni.' It was this address she rendered to Jesus. From the words of Jesus, *"Do not cling to Me,*" it is evident that she was clinging to Him. Pentecost says,

> "That she clung tenaciously to Him is implied in the Greek word Christ used when He said, 'Do not hold on to Me" (v.17).[3]

She was holding Him firmly with the idea that she would not now leave him to disappear or depart.

She did not want Jesus to depart now. She wanted the continuous fellowship. So, she clung to Jesus. Unless this desire of Mary is understood, the words Jesus said after this cannot be understood properly. Jesus said, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." She desired a closer and continuous fellowship. So, she clung to Jesus. But Jesus said that she should not cling to Him and that He was not yet gone to the Father. This indicates that the closer fellowship is possible only if Jesus ascends into the presence of the Father. Jesus also told her to go and tell

the disciples that He was going to the presence of the Father. This did not mean He was immediately going to the Father, but it refers to the ascension on the fortieth day.

Referring to the Father as *"My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"* is also worth noting. Jesus could have said, *"Our God and our Father."* But that is not what He said. He separates them from Him when He mentions the relationship with the Father. The reason for saying this is the nature of the relationship of Jesus with the Father and the nature of the relationship they had with the Father. By nature, God is His Father, but to the disciples or any believer, it is by grace (Psalm 22:22; Hebrews 2:11). Similarly, when Jesus addresses the Father as God, it is different from the way humans call. They call Him God from the position of the creation, whereas Jesus calls Him God as the Head of the new creation. This is the reason for separating them from Him when He spoke about the relationship with the Father and God.

If Mary longed for a closer fellowship with Jesus, it would become possible only if He ascended to the Father. He ascended on the fortieth day, the Holy Spirit descended, and the possibility of a closer fellowship became possible. The Spirit unites us with God and one another. He directs believers into all truth, which makes us grow in the knowledge of the Lord. This leads to greater fellowship. The intimate and closer fellowship Mary desired is possible in this age, the church age.

Mary Goes Witnessing

Jesus asked Mary to go and tell the disciples about the resurrection (v.18). She becomes an apostle to the apostles! The charge that was given to testify to the fact of His resurrection and ascension to the apostles was obeyed immediately. John says, *"Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her."* Here, Mark gives more information. He says, *"She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe"* (Mark 16:10,11). Mark says that they were mourning

and weeping. They needed the message of hope very much. However, the sad fact is that though the right message was given to them, they did not believe in Him. Weeping could have given way to joy only if they had put their trust in her words.

Mark gives the disciples an interesting description. He describes them as *"those who had been with Him."* This reminds us of the purpose for which the Lord chose them. Mark says, "*Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons"* (Mark 3:14,15). They were appointed to be with Him. For three and a half years, they were with Him. They heard Him and saw Him. They learnt from Him and were trained by Him. Now they were supposed to be the messengers. They were not ready to believe the message about the resurrection that Mary shared with them. The Lord shall remove their unbelief by appearing to them. Till then, they continued mourning and weeping.

In contrast to the disciples who were still in unbelief, how blessed was the state of Mary Magdalene. She became the person whom the Lord sent with the message of resurrection first. She became the first witness to the resurrection. Indeed, she is not one of the official witnesses of the resurrection as recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-9. The reason for this omission is not clear. Probably, it is because the public witnesses appointed were only men. Thus, women are omitted. But if the list of all the post-resurrection appearances is made, Mary is the first one in the list. Jesus appeared to her first. And she became the first one to carry the message to the disciples. The reason for this privilege accorded to her is evident. She was the only one remaining there, at the tomb. When other women, Peter, and John left the tomb, she was still there, expressing her utter devotion to the Lord (John 20:11). And she was rewarded and honoured for this devotion.

On another occasion, Jesus had said that the more forgiven shall be more loving (Luke 7:47). Jesus was giving the reason for the devotion of the 'sinner woman' who anointed Him at the house of Simon the Pharisee. This may also be applied to Mary.

She showed more devotion because she received more from the Lord. Mark says that out of her seven demons were cast out (Mark 16:9). Thus, she loved more. Each believer must consider himself or herself as more forgiven. Paul considered himself the chief among the sinners (1 Timothy 1:12-15). This shall lead us to a higher devotion and better service.

45

Women with the Message

Among the women who came to the tomb to honour Jesus, John focuses only on Mary Magdalene. Matthew mentions only about two women (28:1). Mark tells about three (16:1). It is Luke who records a somewhat complete list of the women who had come to the tomb (Luke 24:10). After considering Mary Magdalene, now the matter of the other women must be considered. This event is recorded in Matthew 28:5-15, Mark 16:6-8, and Luke 24:5-11.

Luke says, *"It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles"* (Luke 24:10). Whether all of them were there when they came to see the tomb is not clear. Probably, three of them, as seen in Mark, came, and others joined them when they were going to the disciples. Those who were sent by the angels, having seen the open and empty tomb, might have shared the news of resurrection with other women as they were going, and they too joined them. Mark records that they were afraid and they did not share the matter with others. "*So, they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid"* (Mark 16:9). This may only mean that they did not go on publishing the matter. They might have shared with women who enquired, seeing them fleeing and then delivered the message of resurrection to the disciples. Thus, by the time they reached the apostles, they were more in number, as seen in Luke's record.

When Mary Magdalene saw that the tomb was empty, she ran away from there to share the news with Peter and John. At that time, the other women entered the tomb. It is Matthew who gives more details about the experience and movements of these women. He says, *"But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you'"* (Matthew 28:5-7). The angels told them not to be afraid. There were many reasons for them to be afraid. It was early in the morning. The stone at the mouth of the tomb was removed. When they came to the tomb, the question among them was, *"Who will remove the stone for us?"* Now the question was, *"Who has removed the stone?"* They were puzzled. The watchmen were alarmed at the events they witnessed, like the earthquake, the opening of the tomb, and the events at the arrival of the angel. In this situation, when they saw the angel in the tomb, whether they recognized him as an angel or not, the alarm and fear might have doubled. Sensing this, the angel said, *"Do not be afraid."* The angel said that he knew why they were there at the tomb. He told them that Jesus was risen. Then they were asked to go to the disciples and share the message of resurrection. In the following verses, it is told that the women left the tomb with the message, and Jesus Himself met them on the way (28:8, 9). And Jesus also gave them the instruction to give the message to the eleven disciples.

"They Departed Quickly"

As soon as they received the instruction from the angel, they quickly departed from the place. Their state of mind is evident in the Gospels. Luke says, *"He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" And they remembered His words"* (Luke 24:6-8). When the words of the Lord were brought to their remembrance, they remembered and realized

the facts. Mark says, *"So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed"* (Mark 16:8). They were fleeing in haste. Matthew says that they ran with fear and great joy (Matthew 28:8).

The followers of the Lord were not the mighty or weighty ones of the world. What Paul tells us about the believers in general may also be applied to the disciples and the followers of Jesus. He says, *"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). These women who came to the tomb, being women, we may say that they were the weakest among the followers. But such were chosen to bear the message of the resurrection to the disciples.

This has been the pattern always. The Lord, taking people who are not prudent, worldly-wise, and using them for His glory, is a pattern seen throughout the Bible. When Gideon went against the Midianites, he had about thirty-two thousand people with him. The Lord said that with such a big number, He would not give the Midianites into his hands. He had to reduce them to a mere three hundred people before God could give victory over the Midianites. God had to wait till Abraham became a hundred years of age before He could give Isaac to him. Peter had to go through various steps of brokenness before God could use him. God touched the sinew of Jacob before He would bless him. There are many instances to illustrate how the Lord works.

Dr. R W Dale, a congregational theologian and preacher, writes about what he felt and told D L Moody after listening to his sermon in Birmingham, England, in 1895. He wrote,

> "I told Mr D L Moody that the work was most plainly of God, for I could see no real relation between him and what he had done.

> He laughed cheerily, and said he should be very sorry if it were otherwise."[1]

Most of the people whom the Lord used in history testify to this fact. Paul says, *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"* (2 Corinthians 4:7).

"And As They Went"

As they went to bring the message to the eleven disciples, Jesus appeared to the women. Matthew says, *"And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' So, they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me'"* (Matthew 28:9,10). This happened after Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Because the Bible clearly says that the Lord appeared unto Mary Magdalene *first* (Mark 16:9). The appearance to these women was the second. After coming to the tomb, as per the information received from Mary Magdalene, Peter and John returned to the other disciples. The women were also going to the Eleven.

In the word of the Lord which He spoke to these women, many truths are interesting and good for application in life. The following four truths should be noted. Firstly, Jesus greeted them. The Lord said, *"Rejoice."* King James Version renders it, "*All hail."* This was how some people greeted in olden times. Similar greetings are seen in Acts 15:23 and James 1:1. Though it is a greeting with one word, the word used is rich in meaning. Moore explains the word used here.

> "Hail is a verbal form now nearly obsolete, though substantially retained in the word 'hale', 'healthy' in a different spelling. It means, literally, all health, all kinds of healths, bodily and spiritual, and indicates a condition necessary as a prerequisite to any rejoicing."[2]

This explanation shows that the greetings, though it is only one word, are rich and beautiful. The Lord wants us to be healthy, spiritually and physically. He wants His people to keep rejoicing.

In this world, which is filled with all sufferings and trouble, believers have every reason to rejoice in the Lord. John says, *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers"* (3 John 2). This is the desire of the heavenly Father for all His children. Unto the women who were fleeing in alarm from the tomb, the Lord wishes continuous joy. He calmed them down just as He would calm the agitated sea. These greetings of the Lord might have filled them with much joy and peace.

Secondly, they *"held Him by the feet and worshiped Him."* When they held Him by the feet, Jesus did not rebuke them as He rebuked Mary Magdalene (John 20:17). As explained before, Jesus was dealing with her, knowing her desire and intention. She was holding on to Jesus, as if she would not let Him go away. She desired His continuous presence. That would become possible only after Jesus ascends and the Spirit descends from heaven. But these women were holding His feet in honour of Him. They were only doing obeisance to Him. They worshiped Him.

The acceptance of worship shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. Only God should be worshiped. No creation, including angels, could be worshiped. When John was about to fall before the angel in worship, the angel stopped him from doing that (Revelation 22:8,9).

There are seven instances in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is seen as worshiped. Firstly, the wisemen worshiped Him (2:11). Secondly, the leper worshiped Him (8:2). Thirdly, the ruler worshiped Him, when Jesus raised his daughter (9:18). Fourthly, His disciples worshiped (14:33). Fifthly, the Canaanite women worshiped Him when He healed her daughter (15:25). Sixthly, as seen in the present passage, the women at the tomb worshiped Him (28:9). Seventhly, the disciples worshiped Him (28:17). This was just before the Lord gave them the Great Commission. All these seven instances, where He is seen worshiped, are evidence for the deity of the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly, Jesus comforted them. He said to them, *"Do not be afraid."* As seen before, they were alarmed and afraid. There

was every reason for them to fear. But Jesus said that they should not fear. Immediately after giving comfort, Jesus gave them a responsibility to do. He did not tell them about their duties until they were comforted. Jesus knew what was needed first for these women. He comforted them.

Fourthly, the Lord sends them to the Eleven. He said, *"Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."* This was what Jesus had told before He went to the cross. He had told them that He would go before them to Galilee (Matthew 26:32). This was the only appearance to the disciples according to the prior appointment. All other appearances were accidental. But now the Lord asked the disciples to go to Galilee, where He would meet them. This message for the Eleven He sent with the women.

All these experiences, such as being greeted by Jesus, meeting and worshiping Him, being comforted, and entrusted with the duty to tell the disciples the message of resurrection and about going to Galilee, were all received in the path of obedience. When the angel sent them from the tomb, they went immediately. In the path of obedience, they experienced all these. Blessings are always received in the path of obedience. This is evident in the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to the servants at Cana of Galilee. She asked them to do whatever He asked them to do. They did what Jesus said. The obedience was rewarded with blessings. This is a constant rule throughout the Scripture.

Cover-up of Resurrection Truth

When the women went to spread the message of resurrection, another group of people ran to cover up the truth of the resurrection. This has always been the case in history. The resurrection truth is the foundation for Christianity. If this is proved wrong, Christianity or the Christian faith cannot stand. Thus, Satan has been active right from the beginning to suppress this truth. There have been many theories attempting to explain away the fact of resurrection. This attempt to cover up the resurrection was the first among them.

Matthew narrates that in 28:11-15. *"Now, while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."*

The Jews had sealed the tombstone and kept the watch to avoid the theft of the body. They thought the disciples would come and steal the body to claim that Jesus was risen. Now, what a paradox, the Jewish leaders are bribing the soldiers to make a story saying that the disciples came and stole the body.

The soldiers had seen the coming of the angel and felt its effects, such as the earthquake, etc. Thus, they were sure about the resurrection. They might have also noticed the absence of the body. Then they should have believed in the fact of resurrection and become the followers of the Lord. But instead, "*some of the guards*" went to the chief priests and told the story. They consulted with the elders. This consultation may be an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin Council. They might have searched out the details and confirmed that the resurrection has happened. Instead of finding ways to deny it, they could have received the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. But they found out ways to deny the plain truth. They bribed the soldiers to lie about the fact of resurrection. They made them say they slept in the night, and the disciples came and stole the body. They were left to watch over the tomb to avoid a theft. They were not supposed to sleep during the duty time. Thus, if the story reached the governor, it would be risky for them. Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders assured them that any such eventualities would be taken care of by them. Matthew says that this story was told among the Jews even while this Gospel was in writing. People prefer to believe a lie rather than proven truths. This has always been the nature of humans.

Commenting on this 'theft theory,' Frank Morrison says,

> "So far as I know, there is not a single writer whose work is of critical value today who holds that there is even a case for discussion. We know these eleven men pretty well by their subsequent actions and writings. Somehow, they are not built that way. There is no trace of the daring sort of ringleader who would have had the imagination to plan a coup like that and to carry it through without detection. Even if it had been possible, and the disciples the men to do it, the subsequent history of Christianity would have been different. Sooner or later, someone who knew the facts would have been unable to keep them hidden."[3]

A matter to notice is that not all the soldiers went to the Jewish leaders. We do not know what the rest stood for. It is not told why they did not go with their friends to the chief priests. Nothing is said about them. Probably, they did not want to deny the fact of resurrection. The Council members would have recognized the fact. Probably, there were some among them, like Nicodemus, who wanted to stand for the truth. However, this 'theft theory' was spreading even after many years, since the time of its occurrence.

Matthew, in his narrative of the resurrection, presents two groups of people going from the place where the resurrection occurred. One group is the group of women. They were afraid and alarmed. They were going with the message of resurrection to the Eleven. They were women, the weaker section in society, so to speak. But they were strengthened by the angels and the Lord. Still, they went trembling. The other group was the security. They knew that a supernatural event had happened. They went, took a bribe to spread the lies around. They were strong security men. They, too, could have stood on the side of truth and spread the fact of resurrection. But they missed the great opportunity in life. It is important to be on the right side.

46

The Emmaus Road

As a tribute to Mary Magdalene's devotion and love for Jesus, He appeared to her first. The second appearance was to the women, which was for their obedience in delivering the message of resurrection to the disciples. Following this, Jesus likely appeared to Peter, (1 Corinthians 15:5; Luke 24:34), possibly to bring him to repentance. Afterwards, He appeared to two of His followers travelling to their village, Emmaus, which was the fourth appearance of Jesus Christ. Mark summarises this fourth appearance in two verses, but Luke provides more detail in twenty-three verses (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35). This encounter was with the two disciples heading to their hometown, filled with doubt and disappointment. Referring to this sequence of His appearances, Moore says,

> "First stands love, second obedience, third penitence, and fourth doubt, with an honest desire for life."[1]

The appearance of the Lord to the two disciples traveling to Emmaus is narrated in detail by Luke. Anyone who ponders this narrative would long to have walked with the three, two disciples and the Stranger, and have had the Emmaus Road experience.

Griffith Thomas says, "The story of the walk to Emmaus gives us one of the fullest and most beautiful of the resurrection appearances of Christ." He further writes, quoting Plummer,

> "This narrative is peculiar to Luke, and is among the most beautiful of the treasures which he alone has preserved for us. He almost certainly obtained his information from one or the two disciples,

> and probably in writing. The account has all the effect of personal experience."[2]

In the Way to Emmaus

Two of those who were followers of Jesus, one named and the other unnamed, were on their way to their village when Jesus appeared unto them. Mark briefs the narrative in just two verses. *"After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either"* (Mark 16:12,13). Luke narrates the event in detail. He says, *"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened"* (Luke 24:13,14). Luke says about the group of people to whom the women had shared the message about the resurrection. It was not only to the apostles. He says, *"Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles"* (24:9,10). *"To all the rest"* indicates that it was not just the apostles. There were others also present there. These two people who travelled from Jerusalem to Emmaus were people among *'the rest.'* Verse 18 says, *"Then the one whose name was Cleopas,"* and it seems the associate with him was his wife.

These were going to their village, Emmaus. Plummer says,

> Emmaus "is about seven miles north-west of Jerusalem, in the beautiful Wady Beit Chanina, and the tradition in its favour dates from the crusades."[2]

This was the village of these two people. The name of one of them was "Cleopas." One online resource suggests the meaning of the name as 'the whole glory,' 'famed of all,' or 'very renowned.'[3] Probably, the name indicates the kind of person he was. A similar name is seen in the list of onlookers of the crucifixion. John says, *"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."* It is not clear whether these are the same

person or not. Some people assume that he was one of the seventy. Whether the Clopas, the husband of Mary (John 19:25), is the same person or a different one is unclear.

The companion of Cleopas was most probably his wife. Both compelled Jesus to stay with them the night. If the house did not belong to both, they would not have welcomed Him to the house in that manner. They both compelled Him to abide with them. Another matter to notice is that in the list of witnesses which Paul furnishes in 1 Corinthians 15, he did not include these people. In the list, none of the women are included. Only men are included in the list of witnesses. Thus, this is omitted because one of them was a woman. If so, it may be Cleopas and his wife returning to their village.

They were discussing the events that happened related to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke says, *"And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him"* (24:14,16). They were close followers of the Lord, probably one of the seventy, as stated before. They witnessed the events that occurred during those days, and they were concerned about them. There were many things for them to discuss and reason about. Now, Jesus was coming after them in a form unrecognisable to them. Luke says that their eyes were restrained from knowing Him. Jesus walked faster and caught up with them. He joined their conversation. Jesus did that in a way any other stranger would do.

Jesus asked, "*What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"* (24:17). They looked sad and sorrowful. Probably, they were speaking in a hushed tone, serious and slow. Probably, they also halted while talking seriously. Any passersby would take note of it. When Jesus enquired about the matter, it was Cleopas who answered. *"Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"* (24:18). The NET note to this verse says, "There is irony and almost a sense of

mocking disbelief" in this question. Another version says, "Are you possibly the only one living near Jerusalem who does not know about the things that happened here in these days?" (NASB). Cleopas got it wrong. This 'Stranger" was the only one who knew exactly what happened there in those days. Their eyes were forbidden from seeing the identity of the Person who had come to them walking. To the question of Cleopas, like a stranger, Jesus asked, *"What things?"* (v. 19). Luke records the answer they gave to Him.

Their Expectation About Jesus

The answer was from both, it seems. *"So, they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see"* (vv. 19-24). In their words, their expectations about Jesus of Nazareth, the events of those days, and their uncertainties and disappointment about the developments are expressed candidly.

Reminiscing about Jesus' life and ministries, they said, He was '*a Prophet mighty in deed and word.*' It is necessary to notice that they referred to Him only as a '*Prophet.*' His close followers had considered Him as the Messiah. These two followers would have had this same view about Jesus. But the way He died might have made them hesitant to use the word Messiah about Him now. Thus, they mentioned Him as the Prophet only. That was a designation none can deny. He was *"mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."* This indicates that the excellence of Christ in deeds and words was well known. They were not

done in secret. This was followed by a reference to what was done to Him. Though it was proved that He was a genuine Prophet, the Jewish leaders delivered Him into the hands of the Romans and got Him crucified.

Their disappointment at the death of Jesus is evident from their words. They said, *"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."* This means they expected Him to be their Messiah. They expected that Jesus would redeem them from Roman rule. This may be the expression of their kingdom expectation. This is followed by the sharing of the report of resurrection brought by the women who saw Jesus risen. Their report of the vision of angels, the absence of His body in the tomb, and so forth. They said that the report of the women 'astonished' them. They could not believe what they heard. The phrase *'they came saying'* indicates their attitude to the report of the women. They were still in disbelief. And some of them went to the tomb and saw it open. But they did not see Jesus. This seems to mean that they did not see Jesus as the women saw or as they claimed to have seen. This might have strengthened their disbelief and doubts.

This conversation with the 'Stranger' shows their dismay and disillusionment. They were now returning to their village, Emmaus. This may be a return to their things to chart a new course in their own lives. The One who was everything for them has gone, and they thought that they would have to think about the future. But the following conversation with Him changed the course of their life again. It made them return to their company in Jerusalem. This was all for the interposition of the 'Stranger.'

Things Concerning Himself

After they shared their feelings and disappointments, it was the turn of the 'Stranger' to speak in answer. The Lord was in a different form before them. The eyes of these disciples were refrained from recognising Him. Now the Lord opens their understanding. Luke says, *"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to*

enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself'" (vv. 25-27). Now, it was the turn of the Stranger to address the problem.

This was like the incident in Egypt, where Joseph was imprisoned. There were two officers of Pharaoh in the prison with him. One morning, he saw both in distress. He asked about their problem. They shared it with him. Joseph interpreted their dreams and told them about their future (Genesis 40:7). Jesus dealt with these two disciples in the same manner. He asked them about their problem. He dealt with their troubles. His address to them was very harsh. He told them that they were *"foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe."* The word translated as *'foolish'* means 'without comprehension,' 'ignorant,' 'mindless,' or 'stupid.' Referring to other lexical aids, an online resource explains;

> "The word has a distinct moral connotation emphasizing the culpability of the subject. It describes one as thoughtless, intellectually negligent or reckless, failing to think responsibly about a matter, having no sense, implying that one should have known better. It is not so much a lack of education, intelligence, or mental capacity, but the lack of mental concentration, a failure to engage the mind and think through the implications of something, blocks out better judgment."[4]

This explains the state of their mind, the meaning implied in the word *"foolish."* Paul also calls the believers in Galatia "*foolish*" (Galatians 3:1). *"Slow of heart to believe"* is the result of this state of foolishness. They could not understand and accept what the prophets had spoken. For this, searching the scriptures was essential.

Jesus made it clear that whatever happened in Jerusalem in connection with the crucifixion should have happened. He should enter glory having suffered. Thus, suffering was essential. They were according to the prophetic word. In Luke's Gospel, there are certain things recorded that must or should have happened. These are the following.

Jesus should be about His Father's business (2:49).

He must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also (4:43).

He must suffer many things, be rejected, be slain, and be raised (9:22).

He must first suffer many things and be rejected by the generation (17:25).

That which was written of Him must be accomplished in Him (22:37)

Christ ought to have suffered these things and entered His glory (24:26).

All things written in the OT concerning Him must be fulfilled (24:44).

When Paul came to Thessalonica, he had a similar exercise with the Jewish community there. There was a synagogue there. Luke records, *"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ"* (Acts 17:2,3). This reasoning he had with them helped certain people to open their minds and turn to the Lord. These travellers to Emmaus also had a similar transformation.

Jesus taught them truths about Himself from various parts of the Scripture. Luke says, *"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (v. 27). *"Moses and all the prophets"* may denote the whole of the Old Testament. This may be the same as the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. In various ways and means, Jesus is presented in the scripture. They are seen in their prophesies, types, institutions, certain personalities, in events, and even in the aspirations of the saints of old. We do not know what all passages were referred to in this great Bible study, taken by the Greatest Bible Teacher. He spoke about Himself from various parts of the Bible. He might have told them about the Seed of the woman, and how through the seed of Abraham all nations should be blessed, Melchizedek, Lion of the

tribe of Judah, the Passover Lamb, on and on, the Lord might have continued. This was the most excellent and spectacular Bible study that was ever conducted on earth. Geldenhuys says,

> "The Saviour, who knows the Word of God perfectly, because of His intimate union with the Spirit who is its Primary Author, expounded to them in broad outline all the scriptures that referred to Him, from the first books of the Old Testament and right through the end."[5]

"He expounded to them in all the scriptures" tells us how He taught them. The word used here means to interpret or translate. He opened the scriptures and made them understandable to them. This means staying close to the text. He was not imposing any allegories or speculative ideas on the Scripture. He shared with them what came from the Word of God.

Jesus Turns in With Them

Luke says, *"Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them"* (vv. 28, 29). Jesus did not want to enter their house uninvited. When they were near the village, He indicated that He would go further. But they *"constrained"* Him. The word used here is a strong word. Spurgeon explains,

> "They not only invited Him, but they held Him, they grasped His hand, they tugged at His skirts, they said He should not go."[6]

They compelled Him to go with them. The reason was that it was getting dark. More than this reason, it was to have the Teacher home, for extended hours of instruction from the Scripture. For this desire, they compelled Him to go with them.

Jesus did not disappoint them. He went with them to their house. This was followed by the disclosure of His identity to them. Luke says, *"Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight"* (vv. 30,31). This breaking of bread

and eating was not the Lord's Supper. These two knew nothing about the Lord's Supper as they were not there at the institution of it, as only the Eleven were present. This was only eating their normal dinner.

In the manner of having dinner, there was something characteristic of Jesus that helped them identify the 'Stranger' as Jesus. It may be in the way He took the place of the host when dinner was provided. Or it may be the way He said the blessing over the food. Or it may even be by seeing the pierced hand while He broke the bread and distributed it among them. As soon as their eyes were opened to recognise Him, He vanished from there.

Returning to Jerusalem

Luke records their immediate response when they recognised Him. Luke says, *"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?' So, they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread'"* (vv. 32-35). They remembered how they felt within them when they heard the exposition of the scripture while coming to the village. Their hearts were burning within. This was the effect of the living word. This, they might have said with a regret that they should have recognised Him when He was expounding the word of God. They returned to Jerusalem immediately, the same night. There, they met the Eleven, and others gathered. And they knew that Jesus had also appeared to Peter. They also shared their experiences. These appearances confirmed the followers of Jesus that He was risen and alive. But it took time for them to accept confirmations from these appearances. Mark says, "*And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either*" (Mark 16:13).

Mary recognised Jesus when she heard how Jesus addressed her. It was in the familiar way He used to call her, when He was

with them. The two disciples who went to Emmaus recognised Him in His action, in the breaking of bread. In the ordinary, common chores in the life of His children, He comes and makes His presence known and strengthens them. It must be their desire and prayers always that He would open their eyes that they may see Him in their daily lives.

47

Jesus Appears to the Ten

The appearance of Jesus to the ten disciples was the fifth recorded post-resurrection appearance. The interesting fact is that almost half of the post-resurrection appearances happened on the day of His resurrection, the first day of the week. Also, the fifth appearance was the first appearance of Jesus to the company of His apostles. This is recorded in Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-49, and John 20:19-23. Mark records briefly the appearance of Jesus to the Eleven. *"Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen"* (Mark 16:14). In the list of witnesses to the resurrection, which Paul presents, He mentions about Jesus' appearance to the Twelve. He says, *"He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve"* (1 Corinthians 15:5). These appearances, appearance to the Eleven recorded by Mark and to the Twelve recorded by Paul, are appearances to the company of Apostles, on the day of resurrection and the Lord's Day, in the following week.

Comes Through the Door

When the disciples from Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, after recognising Jesus who appeared to them, they found the Eleven and certain others gathered in Jerusalem. It seems that they were about to have their dinner (Mark 16:14). It was the same evening of the day of resurrection (John 20:19). They had shut the doors of the room for the fear of the Jews (John 20:19). The disciples who had come back to Jerusalem from Emmaus were sharing

their experience (Luke 24:36). Jesus now entered through the closed doors and appeared to them to remove all doubts and unbelief they had about His resurrection.

When the Eleven with others, including the disciples who returned from Emmaus, were gathered in the room, probably the upper room which belonged to Mark's mother, Jesus stood in the midst and said, *"Peace to you"* (Luke 24:36). In John's record this is repeated twice (John 20:19,21). The following week, on the next Lord's Day, when He appeared to them with Thomas also, He said the same words, *"Peace to you"* (John 20:26). The repetition of the promise of peace to these disciples shows their condition. Of course, it was a Jewish way of greeting each other. But here, it also points to the condition of the disciples. They were restless. They were filled with fear. They did not know how they would react to the news that was spreading about the resurrection. They were, without their Master, and were vulnerable to any attack. They might be doubtful about their future. They did not know how things would turn out. But Jesus offers them peace in that time of necessity.

Paul says, *"For He Himself is our peace"* (Ephesians 2:14). When Paul writes to these believers, he mentions that Jesus made peace through the cross, and says that this peace was preached to all, and found in Jesus Christ. However, when Paul says that Jesus is our peace, it indicates that His very Person and presence itself are a matter of peace to all who would trust in Him. If a person is alone, in danger, in a strange place, and he sees somebody unexpectedly, who can help him in the situation and who cares to help, how much peace the sight of that person would bring. Even before he does anything, his presence itself would be a matter of much rest and peace. This is the idea about Jesus here. He is our peace.

'Peace' is not just the lack of troubles and problems. In the Hebraic idea, peace means living in right relationships with God and man, and being fruitful in such relationships. This is what Jesus offers. There are five kinds of peace in the New Testament. Firstly, the peace that the world offers. Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give*

to you" (John 14:27). This indicates that the world also gives us peace. But the peace the world gives the world takes it back also. Secondly, the peace that Jesus gives to the individual believers. He said, *"My peace I give unto you."* This is that peace that passes all understanding. This is the peace that must rule our hearts. Thirdly, the peace between God and man. Paul says, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1). Fourthly, the peace between Jews and Gentiles. Paul says, "*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation*" (Ephesians 2:14). Fifthly, peace among the believers. "*Be at peace among yourselves."* (1 Thessalonians 5:13). The peace that Jesus offered to the ten disciples was the peace one receives in one's heart. This was what the disciples needed most, and Jesus offered that to them in saying, *"Peace to you."*

"It is I Myself"

When Jesus appeared to them in the closed room, the first problem was the problem of identity. They could not recognise that it was Jesus. They thought that some spirit-being had entered the room. They were terrified. Jesus had to correct them about this matter and give them courage. Luke records, *"But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have"* (Luke 24:37-39). By claiming that He had 'flesh and bones,' He proved that He was not a spirit being. He was a real being with a body, unlike spirit beings.

Now, He also should prove that He is their Lord Jesus. Luke says, *"When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet"* (24:40). This was to show them the marks of the nails on His hands and feet. John adds, *"When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord"* (John 20:20). John also says that He showed His hands. Apart from that, according to John, he

also showed His side. This was to show the mark of the piercing with the spear left on His body (John 19:34). They were evidence to show that Jesus had risen again and that He lives.

Enduring Words, an online resource, says,

> "It is remarkable to consider that the resurrection body of Jesus retains the wounds He received in His sufferings and crucifixion. There are many possible reasons for this. To exhibit the wounds to the disciples, so that they would know that it was the very same Jesus. To be the object of eternal amazement to the angels. To be His ornaments, trophies of His great work for us. To memorialize the weapons with which He defeated death. To serve as advocates in His perpetual intercession for us. To preserve the evidence of humanity's crime against Him."[1]

In the Glorious Appearance, when Israel shall see Him whom they pierced, these marks shall be evidence for the fact that He was their Messiah (Zachariah 12:10).

Luke says that they were still in unbelief. He says, "*But while they still did not believe for joy, and marvelled"* (24:41). Here, marvel, joy, and unbelief come together. Such instances are seen in the Scripture elsewhere. Jacob could not believe that Joseph was alive, because the news seemed too good to trust (Genesis 45:25,26). Israel could not believe the deliverance God granted them (Psalm 126:1). When Peter was delivered from prison, the church could not believe that Peter had come from prison (Acts 12:13-14). The joy of the disciples was so high that it was difficult for them to accept that their experience and joy were true. The Lord should give them more confirmation of the reality of the resurrection and that He was not a phantom, but in a real body.

Now, Jesus eats before them. Luke says, *"He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So, they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence"* (24:41-43). Jesus asked them for food and ate it in their sight. They might have watched Him eat the food and noticed how He ate, in the same manner as He used to eat before. John says that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord (John 20:20).

The Resurrection Bodies

The movements of Jesus in this fifth appearance teach us certain facts about resurrection bodies. Firstly, it was the same body that was buried in the tomb. It was a physical resurrection. The empty tomb is also proof of this. The body that was laid there was missing. But that does not mean the condition of the body was the same as it was before death. The state of the natural bodies and the resurrection bodies may be explained by the difference between the seed and the plant that grows from it. They would be on two different levels. Though the plants are from the seeds, there is no comparison at all between them. So shall the resurrection bodies be superior to the natural bodies. Secondly, they shall be bloodless. Normally, we call physical bodies *'flesh and blood.'* But Jesus referred to His body, *'flesh and bones.'* This shows that it did not have blood. Blood shall not be the foundation for the resurrection bodies. Thirdly, it can pass through material things. Jesus passed through the closed door without anybody opening for Him. Matter cannot obstruct its movement. Fourthly, resurrection bodies can eat food if they want to. They shall not thirst or become hungry, but if they want to eat, they could eat. Fifthly, it shall have similarities and dissimilarities with the natural body in various ways. For example, in habits, voice, memory, manners, and behaviour. As Jesus is the pattern for our resurrection, the truths we saw about the Lord's body must also be true of believers' bodies.

Opened Their Understanding

Understanding of the Scripture gives us peace. These disciples were in distress because they lacked sufficient perception of the Word of God. Thus, Jesus opened their understanding. Luke records, *"Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures"* (24:44,45). Many are confused and in disarray because they do not study the Word of God and gain understanding of it. But the fact is, the truths in the Bible must be understood, so that they

may transform us. This understanding can only come with God's help. This is why the psalmist prays that God would open his eyes that he may see the wonderful things of the Scripture (Psalm 119:18). Jesus did this to the disciples. He opened their spiritual eyes to see the truths of the Scripture as they should, and understand that all that happened to Jesus on those days was according to the prophetic word. Jesus had told these truths when He was with them. They missed the significance of those things. But now Jesus brought those truths back to their memories. Nothing had happened accidentally. All that happened to Him was according to the Word of God He had taught them, and all those events ought to have occurred. The new understanding might have given them confidence and peace.

The Lord's Unchanging Plan

Jesus told them, *"Peace to you"* again, the second time (John 20:21). Now, He would assure them that the plans which He shared with them in the past had not changed at all. Though in different terms, the divine plan, His mission, is recorded by both Luke and John. Jesus reassured them of His plan and told them what they should do to fulfill them.

Luke says, *"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high'"* (24:46-49).

John says, *"So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'"* (20:21-23).

Jesus had told His disciples that the Father had sent Him to earth with a mission. Similarly, He had shared with them that just as Father sent Him, He was also sending them to the world.

Even when He prayed to the Father, a few hours before He went to the cross, He told the Father about sending them to the world. *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world"* (John 17:18). In John's Gospel, except in a few chapters, in most of the chapters the sending of the Lord to this world is mentioned. Just as He was sent, they were also sent to the world with a mission. Now, He told His disciples that the plan He had for them had not changed at all. They might have thought that all things were coming to an end and everything about them was changing. But through these words, Jesus assured that nothing about Him or His plans had changed. What peace and confidence this might have given them!

When Jesus said, *"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,"* the words He used for His Father sending Him and Jesus sending the disciples are different. The word used for sending the Son means sending with delegated authority. The word used for sending the disciples means sending under authority, like heralds or like men with an errand.

He Breathed on Them

While Jesus told them about His unchanging plan, He breathed on them. He told them to receive the Spirit. This does not mean that Jesus was granting the Spirit then and there by breathing on them. It was only symbolic. They received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. God made Adam and breathed into his nostrils, and he became a living being (Genesis 2:7). The Word of God is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). Now, Jesus breathed on them and they received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. These disciples, who were just like dead men after the death of Jesus, who were huddled in a closed room for fear of the Jews, became active and alive and turned the world upside down. This was because of the power they received from the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told them, *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* As some misunderstand, with these words the Lord Jesus was not giving authority to the disciples to forgive sins. No man can forgive

sins. Only God can forgive sins (Mark 2:7,10). The Lord was giving them the authority to proclaim the message of forgiveness of sins. Similar language is seen in the Word of the Lord to the prophets. To Jeremiah the Lord said, *"See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant"* (Jeremiah 1:10). Ezekiel said about the vision he saw, *"It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw—like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city"* (Ezekiel 43:3). These men never uprooted any cities or destroyed any nations. But they proclaimed the message of destruction and about uprooting cities. Similarly, when the Lord said that the disciples would forgive or retain sins, it only meant they would proclaim the gospel, the message of forgiveness and judgment. In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, it is recorded directly. Jesus said, *"That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* The power necessary to fulfill this mission was given to them by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The fifth appearance of the Lord, which was to the ten disciples, was full of lessons. Jesus gave peace to the disciples who were dejected and depressed at the turn of events by the death of their Lord. But Jesus revived them by showing that He was risen, and He assured them that He was the same Person who was with them for three and a half years, and that nothing could alter the divine plan and mission He had. He also told them the great part they have in the accomplishment of the divine plan. All the believers of the New Testament time are part of this great mission.

48

Restoration of Thomas

All the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus had clear purposes. For example, the two disciples walking to their village, Emmaus, were disillusioned and were departing from the community of disciples to chart their way for the future. Jesus appeared to them and they returned to the disciples the same night. Jesus met Peter (1 Corinthians 15:5) after the resurrection. This first meeting with Him is not recorded in the Gospels, except in passing (Luke 24:34). However, the subsequent meeting to restore him, John shall detail (John 21). In the present passage (John 20:24-29), where the appearance to the Eleven disciples is recorded, the purpose of the appearance was the restoration of Thomas.

God of the Bible is a God of restoration. As the psalmist says, *"He restores my soul."* These restorations of His own through these appearances also remind us of the future restoration of the Israelites at the Glorious Appearance of the Lord (Zechariah 12:10).

'Thomas,' one among the Twelve, appears twelve times in the New Testament (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24; 20:26; 20:27, 28, 29; 21:2; Acts 1:13). This name is derived from the Aramaic name, *'Thoma.'* His other name, Didymus, is its Greek equivalent. It is mentioned only three times, and all three references are in John (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). Herbert Lockyer says that Thomas or Didymus was not a name at all but only an epithet or adjective.[1] The

meaning of this name is 'twin.' A reliable tradition says that his name was Judas. As there were two other disciples with the same name, the Lord called him with the epithet 'twin' to distinguish him from other Judases. Probably, he was born as a twin. If so, we do not know whose twin brother he was, or who or where his twin was. But the interesting thing is that out of the twins, the Lord chose him to be His disciple.

The word 'twins' comes for the first time in Genesis 25:24, in connection with the birth of Esau and Jacob. Among these, God chose the younger, Jacob. Malachi says about this choice of God, *"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved"* (Malachi 1:2). We may say that God chose Thomas and hated his twin brother or sister, though the other twin is unknown. Some think that Cain and Abel were also twins.[2] They consider it so because the births of Cain and Abel look like happening in the same conception (Genesis 4:1,2). God's choice of His people is also like this. Paul says, "*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). When many who are prudent, worldly-wise are not among the chosen, the Lord has taken the unworthy from the world.

'Doubting' Thomas

Very often, Thomas is also referred to as 'Doubting Thomas.' This name is given, not only because of the instances of doubting he had, recorded in the Gospels, but also from the meaning of the name. The word 'twin' may also indicate his double-mindedness. This derived idea is so popular that anybody with a habit of doubting others is called 'Doubting Thomas.'

Thomas doubted the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus appeared to His disciples, he was not present. Probably, on that day, he joined the other disciples late. By the time he came, Jesus had left. When he came, the other disciples were discussing the appearance of Jesus. But Thomas was not taking the story seriously. He wanted evidence for the resurrection. He said that he would believe it only if he handled the body of Jesus and felt His wounds. Jesus, condescending to His demands, appeared to the disciples again, now when Thomas was also present.

John narrates this appearance. He says, "*Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples, therefore, said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:24-29).

"I Will Not Believe"

Thomas was not ready to accept the resurrection that readily. When Jesus appeared to the ten disciples, Thomas was absent. This may indicate his disappointment at the turn of events and his plan to leave the other disciples. He even doubted the claims of others that they had seen Jesus. It looked irrational to him. When we are away from the Lord mentally, there is a tendency to keep a distance from those who follow Him also. Alexander Maclaren says,

> "Thomas did the very worst thing that a melancholy man can do, went away to brood in a corner by himself, and so to exaggerate all his idiosyncrasies, to distort the proportion of the truth, and

> hug his despair by separating himself from his fellows. Therefore, he lost what they got, the sight of the Lord."[3]

However, it seems Thomas came later, though somewhat delayed. When he came, the ten disciples tried to persuade him to believe. But he would not budge.

It seems they kept saying that they saw Jesus. John says, "*The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord'"* (v. 25). The word *'said'* in the imperfect tense should be rendered as 'kept saying.' This indicates that even though Thomas was not ready to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples persuaded him. They kept saying that Jesus is risen and that they met Him. The care the ten disciples had to gain this doubting disciple back into their company is evident in their attempt. This was a commendable attempt they were making. They did not write off the doubting disciple. They were trying to get him back on faith. They were trying to practice what Paul would later teach. He said, *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:1-3). But the attempt was difficult. Thomas was adamant. He said, "*Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."* This is the only place in the New Testament where the nails that pierced Jesus' hands and feet are mentioned. In the Old Testament, it is indicated by the psalmist. He says, "*They pierced My hands and My feet"* (Psalms 22:16). Thomas said that he could believe only if it is proven with empirical evidence. Another version renders it, "I will never believe it" (NET). "It" is not in the Greek, but it is implied.[4]

Albert Barnes explains what made Thomas come to this stage of double-mindedness.

> "It is not known what was the ground of the incredulity of Thomas. It is probable, however, that it was, in part, at least, the effect of deep grief, and of that despondency which fills the mind when a long-cherished hope is taken away. In such a case, it requires proof of uncommon clearness and strength to overcome the

despondency, and to convince us that we may obtain the object of our desires."[5]

The doubting nature of Thomas is also seen elsewhere in the Gospels. When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, He called people to believe in Him (John 10:39). But they wanted to kill Him (v.40). He escaped out of their hands and went beyond Jordan. There, He received the message about the illness and death of Lazarus. When Jesus with His disciples were about to travel to Bethany, where Lazarus died, the disciples said, "*Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"* (John 11:8). Then, when Jesus insisted on going to Bethany, Thomas said, "*Let us also go, that we may die with Him"* (John 11:16). The statement clearly shows that he loved Jesus and was ready to even give his life for Him. At the same time, He also thought that Jesus would die there at Bethany at the hands of the Jews. It seems he did not have confidence in Jesus' ability. Here, his double-mindedness is evident. John carefully mentions his other name, which indicates this dual nature. He says, "*Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples"* (John 11:16). He had a twin nature.

This twin nature is also seen on another occasion. This was when the disciples were with the Lord in the Upper Room. Jesus told them that He was leaving them and going to the Father. He said, *"And where I go you know, and the way you know*" (John 14:4). It was Thomas who responded to this. He said, *"Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5). His doubt is seen here doubly. He said, *"We do not know."* And then he said, *"How can we?"* Jesus takes his attention to Himself as a remedy for this confusion. He said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). Thomas should have had his focus on Jesus.

"Peace be unto You"

The Lord never writes off people who have difficulty believing. He comes to them and helps them out of their despondency. Now Jesus reaches out to Thomas. John says, *"And after eight*

days, His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" (v. 26). It seems the labour of the disciples to convince Thomas about the resurrection of the Lord worked to an extent with Thomas. He was there with the other disciples. He has rejoined the company. Now the Lord also comes and meets him to remove any iota of doubt, if any, remaining in him.

John says that it happened eight days after the previous appearances, which was on the resurrection day, the Lord's Day. Eight days from then takes us to the next Lord's Day. Thomas was there with them. The doors were shut, and the disciples were gathered. Jesus came through the closed doors and stood among them. The resurrection bodies can pass through closed doors or walls. The material things cannot hinder their movement. Jesus stood amid them. Just imagine the state of mind of these eleven people. Through that week, ten of them had confidence in the resurrection of Jesus. But Thomas might have had a difficult time because he was not yet convinced about this matter. He was still in doubt. He was waiting for empirical evidence. Jesus condescends to his need and confirms the truth of resurrection. Jesus said, "*Peace to you."*

This is the third time the statement, *'Peace to you'* has been uttered in the chapter. When the Lord appeared to the disciples on the day of resurrection, He stood amid them and said, *"Peace be with you."* Then He showed His hands and His side. These made the disciples glad. Their grief gave place to joy and comfort (20:19,20). This peace is the peace that comes from *comfort.* Jesus said further, *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you"* (John 20:21). This is the peace that comes from the *commission.* The death and resurrection did not alter any of His plans for them or the world. He says about 'going into the world' here. This understanding should give them peace of heart. Now Jesus offers them peace the third time. This time, it is in the context of giving Thomas the assurance and confidence that He is risen. This is the peace that comes from the confidence or *confirmation* of resurrection. This is the 'My peace' Jesus had proffered to His own.

"My Lord and my God"

Jesus now deals with the unbelief of Thomas. He said, *"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing"* (John 20:27). The Omniscience of Jesus is evident here. Jesus knew what Thomas told the ten disciples privately. He had said that he would believe only after feeling the pierced sides and the hands. Jesus allows him to feel His wounds to allay the doubt of His doubting disciple. He condescends to His level to gain him. So kind is the Lord to His people in their confusion and infirmities. His compassion has no limits.

When Jesus stood before Thomas, He offered what He wanted to believe in the reality of resurrection. However, instead of reaching forward and feeling the marks on Jesus' body, he responded marvellously in faith. John says, *"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28). In the Gospels, this is the first place where anybody addressed Jesus as *'God.'* Of course, there are many proofs for the deity of Jesus in the Gospels. His words and actions prove this loudly, for anyone who cares to listen. But a direct statement claiming that Jesus is God is absent from Jesus or anybody else in the Gospels. Such a statement is provided here by Thomas, even the 'doubting Thomas.' He not only believed that Jesus is risen, but he went further and believed that Jesus is God. This was an understanding the disciples gained about the Lord Jesus, being with Him and moving around with Him for more than three years. Now, above all that they had seen and heard from Him, the reality of resurrection has given the ultimate proof that He is God. Paul also says, *"And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"* (Romans 1:4). By this appearance of Jesus, Thomas's doubts are cleared and he owned Him as his Lord and God.

The important matter to notice here is that the Lord did not reject or deny the address Thomas made. If He were only a mere man, He would not have accepted the address. But He accepted it. Not only that, Jesus commends him for believing in Him. This

commendation is for his faith in Him that He is God. The narrative makes it clear that Thomas was addressing Jesus and not God the Father, nor was it a meaningless exclamation, as some assume.

Adam Clarke comments,

> "Those who deny the Godhead of Christ would have us to believe that these words are an exclamation of Thomas, made through surprise, and that they were addressed to the Father and not to Christ. Theodore of Mopsuestia was the first, I believe, who gave the words this turn; and the fifth oecumenic council, held at Constantinople, anathematized him for it. This was not according to the spirit of the Gospel of God. However, a man must do violence to every rule of construction who can apply the address here to any but Christ."[6]

The Final Beatitude

Jesus responds to Thomas with a mild rebuke accompanied with a beatitude. *"Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (John 20:29). Jesus gently rebukes him for not believing the resurrection at first, without seeing. This is followed by the beatitude for those who would believe in Him throughout the church age. This is the last beatitude in the Gospels. The first one was in Matthew 5:3. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3).

Campbell Morgan comments on the objects of this final beatitude and says,

> "The eyes of the risen Christ were turned from Thomas and the group, and looking down the running ages, He saw the great hosts who should believe on Him, never having seen Him, and His last beatitude came down the ages for all the sacramental host that makes up the church of God."[7]

Later, Peter would write, "*Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*" (1 Peter 1:8).

All the disciples, first the eleven and then Thomas, had difficulty believing that Jesus rose from the dead; later they all trusted that

He is risen, including Thomas, and the Spirit strengthened their faith in Him. The increase of faith in Thomas is evident in the Gospel records. In the list of the apostles, we see them in pairs (Matthew 10:2-4). They are divided into pairs with "and" between two names (KJV). These divisions may indicate the division of the apostles when Jesus sent them in pairs to the Galilean cities. Mark records, *"And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits"* (Mark 6:7). If this assumption is correct, Thomas was sent along with Matthew. He is seen with Matthew, and especially after Matthew. When Matthew himself makes the list, he puts Thomas before him (Matthew 10:3). But it seems that after the Lord corrected him and restored him with the post-resurrection appearance, he never turned back. He went forward with leaps and bounds in faith-strides. In John 21:2, we see him in the second place in the list, along with Peter. In the last list, in Acts 1:13, we see him ahead, early in the list. According to reliable traditions, by the time John wrote his Gospel which happened around AD 90, Thomas had travelled with the gospel to South India, at first to Kerala and then to Tamil Nadu and was martyred at Mylapore, and attested his faith in his Lord and God, Jesus Christ, with his blood.

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Jesus Appears to the Seven

If all the post-resurrection appearances are arranged chronologically, the one we consider now is the seventh appearance (John 21:1-14). In this seventh appearance, Jesus appears to the seven disciples.

John 21 is taken as a postscript to this Gospel. Thus, the end of chapter 20, verses 30, 31, concludes the Gospel. John says, *"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"* (John 20:30-31). John calls the miracles recorded in his Gospel 'signs.' They are pieces of evidence about the person of Jesus Christ. There were many more miracles that Jesus did that are not recorded here. As he would say later, if all that were written, the world would not suffice to store all such writings. These were signs of the deity of the Lord Jesus. Of course, not all His miraculous works were evidence of His deity. There were works He did with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, *"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you"* (Matthew 12:28). These He had done in the power of the Holy Spirit, as the Son of Man, in His perfect humanity. They were done with the power of the age to come. However, there were miracles which were evidence of His deity, which John calls 'signs.'

John desires that his readers would, by reading these signs, know that Jesus is the Son of God, and by believing in Him,

receive eternal life. The title Son of God does not mean that at some point, Jesus was created or begotten by God. It should not be understood as in a parent-child relationship. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. The title shows the equality of the Son with the Father, in essence and attributes. Anybody who receives Jesus as anything less than God cannot be saved. This understanding is crucial for receiving eternal life. John desired that the readers would gain this understanding about Jesus and become possessors of eternal life.

Seven Disciples Gathered

The seventh appearance was to seven disciples. When we say that this was the seventh appearance, there is a need for clarification on verse 14. It says, *"This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead"* (John 21:14). John records that it was the third appearance. But there is no contradiction. This was the third appearance to the disciples alone. However, if all appearances are taken, counting His appearances to the women, this becomes the seventh.

T.V. Moore states the importance of this appearance in the following words.

> "This was to a collective body of the disciples, and was of a formal and official character than the four personal interviews, and hence was literally, as John states, the third meeting with the disciples. The meeting was a very remarkable one, so much so as to require its record in a kind of postscript to the Gospel of John, and is worthy of our careful study."[1]

In verses 1 to 3, John gives the occasion of the appearance. *"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."*

They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught

nothing" (John 21:1-3). Here we have the people to whom the appearance occurred and the place of its occurrence.

John says that the appearance occurred at the Sea of Tiberias. Tiberias was a city built on the banks of the Sea by Herod Antipas in honour of the emperor Tiberius. Associated with this city, the Sea got this name, the Sea of Tiberias. This is also known as the Sea of Galilee, being situated in Galilee. Elsewhere, John says, "*After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias*" (John 6:1). In this verse, both names come together. It was, in fact, not a sea at all. It was only a lake. Luke calls it the Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1). It was twelve and a half miles long and six and three-quarters miles broad. It was 655 feet below sea level. The River Jordan passed through this lake, which was called a sea. Thus, water in this 'Sea' was not salty but fresh. But people used to call it a sea because of its topographical peculiarities. Near the shores, there were steep mountains. Wind used to come from these mountains and hit the face of the water, suddenly. Thus, sudden storms were common. There were also waves on the lake. It looked very much like the sea. For this reason, people used to refer to it as a sea.

In this place, Jesus had promised to meet them. He had told them that He would go before them into Galilee (Mark 14:28; 16:7; Matthew 26:32; 28:10). All the other appearances were sudden, unexpected occurrences. This is the only appearance according to prior appointment. This appearance and conversation of Jesus with the disciples were also mentioned by Matthew (28:16), and are omitted by both Mark and Luke. This may be the reason why John narrates in detail what occurred there. Galilee was a relatively safe place where they would be free from danger, and it was a convenient situation for Jesus to meet them and give them his final instructions. Some think that the appearance to the five hundred at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6) is the same occasion. As this was by prior appointment, the disciples might have shared the matter with others. They might have told that they are going to meet Jesus in Galilee. The people who heard it might also go to meet Him. Matthew says what happened when Jesus appeared. "*When they saw Him, they*

worshiped Him; but some doubted" (Matthew 28:17). The people who doubted must have been some from the crowd. This explanation, inconclusive though, indicates that the total number of people was not just seven or eleven disciples, but more in number.

John gives the list of seven disciples. *"Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together"* (John 21:2). These seven disciples had come there early. Just as in any other list of disciples, here also Simon Peter is seen at the head of the list. Thomas is in second place. We do not normally see Thomas in this position with Peter. Maybe the reason for this was his experience in the earlier appearances of Jesus. The name Nathanael of Cana is seen only in John's Gospel. He is the same person mentioned as Bartholomew in other Gospels. The sons of Zebedee are James and John. "*Two others of His disciples"* are not named. But the assumption is that they are Philip and Andrew. The reason for this assumption is that, where Peter is present, Andrew is also normally there. Where Andrew is present, Philip is also usually there. Thus, these are, most probably, Philip and Andrew (John 1:45; 12:22; Mark 3:18).

The seven disciples were waiting for the others to come and join, and the Lord to appear according to the appointment. To make the waiting time more profitable, Peter said that he was going fishing. John says, *"Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.'"* They said to him, *"'We are going with you also.' They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing"* (John 21:3). There is no need for us to accuse Peter and others of going fishing. They were only making the waiting time more refreshing and productive. They were doing the only thing for which they were skilled. Jesus also, when He came, did not rebuke them for going fishing. The Lord prepared the occasion for revealing Himself to them. Their labour that night was futile. It is better to say that the Lord made it fruitless. That was to prepare a backdrop for manifesting Himself before them.

Albert Barnes has an important comment on this matter. He says,

> "It is to be remarked, also, that they had no other means of support. While with Jesus, they were commonly supplied by the kindness of the people, but now, when the Saviour had died, they were cut off from this means of support and returned to the honest labour of their early lives. Moreover, they had been directed by the Saviour to repair to a mountain in Galilee, where he would meet them, Mt 28:10. This was probably not far from the Sea of Galilee, so that, until he came to them, they would naturally be engaged in their old employment."[2]

Manner of Appearance

Verse 4 says, *"But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus"* (John 21:4). After the futile labour in the night, the disciples came to the shore. Jesus was waiting there, like any stranger would come to buy fresh fish. The resurrection bodies could appear in any form. The disciples did not recognise Him. But see verse 12. *"Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—knowing that it was the Lord"* (John 21:12). John says that they came to know that it was Jesus. In between these verses, the manifestation of Jesus is seen. Another matter to notice is that in the passage (vv.1-14), the phrase *"showed Himself"* is seen three times (vv. 1,14). It is interesting to notice that, in the passage, there is a threefold manifestation of Jesus in this appearance. And, these threefold manifestations of Jesus were according to the necessities of the disciples that early morning.

When the disciples came to the shore, Jesus asked, *"Then Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you any food?'"* (v.5). He was behaving like a stranger. The address *"children"* need not identify Him as Jesus. Jameison Fausset Brown Commentary says,

> "This term would not necessarily identify Him, being not unusual from any superior; but when they did recognise Him, they would feel it sweetly like Himself."[3]

Another version renders it, "Men, Jesus called to them, 'You don't have any fish, do you?" (HCSB). Another puts it, "Lads,

have ye any meat?" (YLT). It was just like a senior person asking his juniors. The answer they gave was also abrupt and brief. *"They answered Him, "No."* (John 21:5). They were like answering a stranger. They could not have made the answer smaller. It was just in one word, *'No.'* They might have expressed their frustration in that single-syllable reply.

Jesus was behaving with them like any stranger. At the seashore where fishermen come with their catch of fish, people who want to buy fish might come. They will get fresh fish at a reasonable price. Jesus came like one such customer. He asked them whether they had any fish. They answered in the negative. Now the Stranger becomes the expert adviser. He said, *"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some"* (John 21:6). For any fisherman, this was unwise advice. They had laboured all night with no result. The daytime was not ideal for fishing. They were nearer to the shore. This was also not good for fishing. But the Stranger was asking them to cast the net to their right side. We do not know the significance of the right side. Probably, it was toward the side of the shore. Jesus asked them to cast the net there because the fish were gathered there. Jesus knew and saw what those fishermen did not know. The advice was apparently not acceptable. But, it seems, there was power in those words. They could not ignore the instruction. The result was amazing. John says, *"So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish"* (v.6). Here, the Lord was showing Himself as the *all-knowing God*. He knew where the fish were. The knowledge of those expert fishermen failed. However, the Lord could direct them and tell them where they could find fish.

The disciples were not very far away in the sea. They were only three hundred feet away from the shore. When they came to the shore with the fish, Jesus was waiting there with breakfast ready. John says, *"Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!" Now, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had*

come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus told them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught" (John 21:7-10). Further, the Lord said, *"Come and eat breakfast"* (John 21:12). John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, identified Jesus first. When he told Peter that it was the Lord, Peter put on his garment and jumped into the water. It may be to go to the Lord first. Others came after him with the net full of fish. When they reached the shore, they saw Jesus waiting with breakfast ready for them. After that night's toil, they needed strength very badly. Jesus provided them with food and strengthened them. Jesus was showing Himself as the *All-caring One*. He cared for their physical need.

When the disciples came to the shore, they saw coals of fire and fish, and bread laid on them. Where did the Lord get these items? Did He go to a house or shop to get them? Did He go fishing before they came? Though some do not see anything miraculous in this, it seems that Jesus created these there miraculously. Adam Clarke concurs,

> "This appears to have been a new miracle. It could not have been a fire which the disciples had there, for it is remarked as something new; besides, they had caught no fish, John 21:5, and here was a small fish upon the coals, and a loaf of bread provided to eat with it. The whole appears to have been miraculously prepared by Christ."[4]

This means that the Lord created them there miraculously. His creative power is seen in this.

Another piece of information the passage gives is, *"Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken"* (John 21:11). In the beginning of the public ministry, something similar had happened. But at that time, when there was a big catch of fish, the net tore (Luke 5:6). But now the net did not break. The reason for this is the keeping power of God. The Lord kept the strings of the net without breaking. Here, the sustaining power of the Lord is seen. The Lord not only creates but also sustains the creation. In these, the Lord was showing Himself as *the Almighty God.*

The above explanations show how Jesus manifested Himself in three ways: as the all-knowing God, the all-caring God, and the almighty God.

John gives the number of the fish. *"Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken"* (John 21:11). The significance of the number of fish given is not clear. And all the fish were of the same variety, or different varieties are also not known. But the number has given opportunities to various fanciful interpretations. After writing on the fanciful explanations of Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine, Barclay says,

> "The simplest of the explanations is that given by Jerome. He said that in the sea there are 153 different kinds of fish; and that catch is one which includes every kind of fish; and that therefore the number symbolises the fact that someday all men of all nations will be gathered together to Jesus Christ."[5]

William MacDonald, in summarising the various views, says,

> "Many interesting explanations have been offered as to the meaning of this number. (1) The number of languages in the world at that time. (2) The number of races or tribes in the world, toward which the gospel net would be spread out. (3) The number of different kinds of fish in the Sea of Galilee, or in the world. There is no doubt that it speaks of the variety of those who would be saved through the preaching of the gospel – some from every tribe, and nation."[6]

This three-fold manifestation of the Lord was according to the need of the disciples on that day. It was the time when their knowledge and skill failed them. They were highly skilled in fishing. All their lives, before coming to the Lord, they were in this occupation. But their knowledge failed them that night. They needed somebody for care. For three and a half years, Jesus was everything for them. But now He is dead. Though it was clear to them by then that Jesus was risen, they did not know what would happen to their future. They wanted somebody who would care for them. This longing is evident from the fact that all disciples followed Peter when he went fishing. For the toil in the night,

they were also exhausted. They wanted strength also. Jesus showed Himself to them in all these areas. He was to them all-knowing, almighty, and all-caring. These are the needs of all believers, anywhere. If so, Jesus is all these to those who would care.

Comparisons and Contrasts

A comparison between this miracle and the first miracle of the Lord, the changing of water to wine, is interesting. Both these happened in Galilee (John 2:1; 21:1). Both follow confessions of His followers (1:49; 20:28). The first one was on the 'third day' and the last one was the 'third time' (2:1; 21:14). The first had no wine and the last, no fish (2:3; 21:3,5). In both events, Jesus gave His commands. In the first, He said, *"Fill the waterpots."* And in the last, He said, *"Cast the net to the right side of the boat."* (2:7; 21:6). In both events, the Lord supplied bountifully (2:7; 21:11). In both, a number is mentioned. In the first six water pots and the last 153 fish (2:6; 21:11). In both, Jesus Christ manifested His glory (2:11; 21:12,14).

There was a miracle like the present one, which occurred at the beginning of His public ministry, recorded in Luke 5:1-11. The contrasts between these two are the following.

> "In the first miracle, Christ was in the ship, in the second on the shore. In the first, fish were caught and placed in the ship, and in the second, on the shore. In the first, the nets broke, and many escaped to the sea again; in the second, although there were so many, it is distinctly recorded that the nets did not break. In the first, the ship was ready to sink because of the great weight; in the second, there was no danger or alarm of any kind, all was secure. These differences describe the precise difference between the church militant and the church triumphant."[7]

John's Favourite Terms

In the writings of Apostle John, there are three words that he uses often. They are love, light, and life. When he presents Jesus as the all-knowing, almighty, and all-caring One, it seems he is presenting Him with these favourite words. Knowledge is

compared to light. Thus, when Jesus is all-knowing, He is *light*. Might is where there is life. Thus, Jesus is *life* when He is presented as almighty. In the all-caring, we see love. Without love, there can be no care. Here, Jesus is *love*. These show that in the last chapter of his Gospel, John was portraying Jesus with his favourite terms: love, light, and life.

These three-fold manifestations is also seen in the items of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle had a court. And the Tabernacle was divided into two parts, the holy place and the holiest of all. In the court, there are three matters to notice: the wide gate of the court, the brazen altar, and the laver with water for washing. The wide, open gate inviting all to the court reminds us of God's love. Life is offered on the altar, and the laver for washing, a picture of the word of God, represents light. There were three pieces of furniture in the holy place: the candlestick, the table of shewbread, and the incense altar. The candlestick gives light, the shewbread sustains life, and the incense altar, representing the intercessory work of the Lord, reminds us of love. In the holiest of all, there is only the Ark of the Covenant. But inside it, there were three items: Aaron's budded rod, the golden pot of manna, and the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. The rod that budded had life, the Ten Commandments are light to us, and the manna is God's provision in love. Thus, in the court or the holy place, or the holiest of all, we envision light, life, and love. Jesus Christ is light, life, and love to all. The court, where the light is natural light, represents our life now in the natural world. In the holy place, where the light was the ordered light from the candlestick, represents our spiritual life in this world. And the holiest of all, where the light is the shekinah glory, represents our life with the Lord in heaven. Whether in the natural world, the spiritual realm, or in the presence of the Lord in heaven, Jesus Christ is life, light, and love to us. These show the glorious way in which Jesus is presented by Jesus' beloved disciple in the last chapter, the epilogue, of his Gospel.

50

Peter - Restored, Instructed

The disciples finished their breakfast, and they were refreshed. It was time to deal with the senior-most among them, Peter. Jesus met their physical and mental needs. Now, He should meet their spiritual needs. Jesus deals with Peter. He restores him and gives him instructions for service (John 21:15-23). The passage is very touching as the Lord was dealing with His senior-most disciple. In the passage before us, there are three movements. Firstly, Jesus restores Peter to His service (vv. 15-17). It was a recommissioning for Peter. Secondly, Jesus speaks of his death (vv. 18, 19). Thirdly, Jesus corrects him for distractions in following Him (vv. 20-23).

Restoration of Peter

The Lord had taught Peter the importance of daily cleansing and the keeping of fellowship with Him when they were together in the upper room. Jesus was about to wash the feet of Peter. He resisted and said that he would not allow the Master to do that to him. Jesus replied, *"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me"* (John 13:8). *"Part with"* Jesus indicates fellowship. To keep fellowship with the Lord, it is necessary to have daily washing. It reminds us of the daily cleansing that is essential in everybody's life. Peter did not understand it properly at that time. Jesus told him that he would understand its meaning later (John 13:7). Now, the Lord is giving him a practical experience of cleansing. The Lord had told that he would know that later. Now that was becoming experiential.

The Lord is a God of restoration (Psalm 23:3). As humans are prone to err, restoration is also necessary. The Lord might have dealt with all the disciples, because all had left Him alone and fled from Him. The Lord might have brought to their notice their failure and restored them, individually. But Peter needed more detailed restoration. The Lord's dealings with him are given here.

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

The time elapsed between John chapter 20 and chapter 21 is not known. In chapter 20, the post-resurrection appearances recorded are of the day of resurrection and the next Lord's Day. The events in chapter 21 might also have occurred during the same period. Before the Lord went to the cross, He had told them that He would meet them in Galilee. After the resurrection, the angels and the Lord informed the women that Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee. This meeting in Galilee, as seen before, occurred on one of those early days.

The Lord manifested Himself to them in the three-fold way. He showed them that He is sufficient for all their needs. They finished their breakfast, which the Lord had prepared for them. Now, it was the right time to deal with Peter. The Lord did not rush to do the restoration. He gave him time to settle. Similar dealings are also seen elsewhere. Before the Lord corrected the seven churches, He commended them for any good that He saw in them (Revelation 2,3). Paul in dealing with the Corinthians, took this same method. He commends before correcting (1

Corinthians 11:2,16). Another interesting thing to notice is that the Lord dealt with Peter publicly. He was the senior-most disciple. His denials were known to all. They were done publicly. Thus, restoration also must happen publicly. Later, Paul would say, *"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear"* (1 Timothy 5:19-20). This principle is seen here practiced by Jesus.

Attempts to Gain Peter

The Lord's attempts to gain and keep Peter within the fold were many. Satan wanted to sift like grain is sifted. Jesus said, "*Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*" (Luke 22:31-32). In these words of Jesus, all that shall befall Peter was intimated. Foreseeing all the things that should happen, Jesus had asked Peter and others to pray lest they fall into temptation (Luke 22:40, 46). But they failed miserably in obeying this instruction. When Peter denied Jesus the third time, Jesus turned and looked at him. Luke says, *"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So, Peter went out and wept bitterly*" (Luke 22:61-62). Even at the time of His trial, Jesus' concern was about His 'erring sheep.' The look of Jesus broke his heart. After the Lord was raised, the angel sent the women to Peter with the message of resurrection. Mark says, *"But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you"* (Mark 16:6, 7). Peter's name was highlighted here. After this, Jesus Himself met Peter personally (1 Corinthians 15:5; Luke 24:34). Among the witnesses to the resurrection, Paul puts Peter's name first. The coals of fire on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, probably, were intended to remind Peter about his denials and failure to stand for Jesus in the time of need.

Steps in Restoration

Jesus calls him '*Simon, son of Jonah.*' In John's Gospel, this address is used only twice, here and in 1:42. Outside this Gospel, it is also used in Matthew 16:17. When Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus in that first encounter, Jesus addressed him with this name. John records about that encounter, "*And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone)"* (John 1:42). Now, Jesus addressed him with the same name. This may be intended to remind him of his beginnings. The day he met Jesus was the highlight of his life. He met Jesus, and that brought a turnaround in his life. Jesus had told him that his name shall be Cephas, that is Peter. Another time, He said, *"And I also say to you that you are Peter"* (Matthew 16:18). Peter means 'a stone.' But Simon means 'a hearkener.' This indicates a wavery, unsteady nature. In the denials, Peter was showing this unsteady nature. To remind him about this, the Lord is using his old name, *'Simon, son of Jonah.'* Peter might have understood this and would have groaned inside when Jesus called him thus.

Jesus allows him to introspect. Jesus did not directly question him or accuse him of the denials. He deals with him patiently. He gives him time to examine himself. Jesus asked, *"Do you love Me more than these?"* We may take this in two ways. Firstly, it may mean whether he loved Jesus more than all the other disciples. Peter once claimed that he loved Him more than all other disciples. When Jesus told them that all the disciples shall stumble at Him and flee from Him, Peter said, "*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble"* (Matthew 26:33). That was his claim. Now, Jesus is asking whether it was true or not, in practice. The second meaning with which we may take this question is whether Peter loves Jesus more than loving any other people or things. That is, "Do you love Me more than loving other disciples, net, boat, and fish?"

Albert Barnes expresses this vagueness in these words,

> "There is a slight ambiguity here in the original, as there is in our translation. The word these may be in the neuter gender, and refer

> to these things—his boat, his fishing utensils, and his employments; or it may be in the masculine, and refer to the apostles. In the former sense, it would mean, "Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these objects? Art thou now willing, from love to me, to forsake all these, and go and preach my gospel to the nations of the earth?" In the other sense, which is probably the true sense, it would mean, "Lovest thou me more than these other apostles love me?" In this question, Jesus refers to the profession of superior attachment to him which Peter had made before his death (Mt 26:33)."[1]

Whatever meaning we take, the Lord was giving him a time for a close examination.

Pentecost, after stating that the meaning of Jesus' question was whether Peter loved Jesus more than the other disciples, says,

> "Peter did not compare his love with that of the others. He perhaps now had come to distrust himself because, having affirmed his loyalty previously, he had forsaken Christ and consequently was afraid to compare his love with that of others.[2]

A feeling of guilt and brokenness is seen in his response to Jesus' questions. He avoids a comparison with anybody.

Jesus demands his supreme love. In verse 15, when the Lord asked Peter whether he loved Him, the word for *'love'* the Lord used was *agape,* often used for the supreme, divine love. The second time, Jesus used the same word for love (v.17). This is the sacrificial love. To fulfil profitable service, this love is essential.

Jesus brought Peter to a full surrender. To the first question, where Jesus used the word *agapao* for love, the answer was that he had *phileo* for Him. The second time, Jesus used the same word, *agapao,* and Peter also used the same word he used at first, *Phileo,* in answer. While Jesus questioned the third time, He changed the word to *phileo* for love. Compared to *agape, phileo* is a lesser term. By using the same word Peter used, Jesus was asking whether he was sure enough he had at least *phileo* for Him. This broke down all defences and brought Peter to a surrender. He acknowledged Jesus' lordship over him and said,

"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You" (John 21:16). Without comparisons with other disciples and any high claims, he surrenders to His Lord and Master with these words.

Here, Peter was coming full circle. When Jesus told him that he would deny Him thrice, Peter denied it outright (Matthew 26:33). He was claiming more knowledge than Jesus. Now, he says, *"Lord, you know all things."* Here, he was fully surrendering himself to the Lord. He was now growing in the knowledge of the Lord. Later, he would instruct the believers, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18).

"Feed My Lambs"

When Peter claimed that he had love for the Lord, Jesus responded by giving him duties to do. Jesus said, *"Feed My lambs*" (v. 15). After the answer to the second question, Jesus said, "*Tend My sheep"* (v.16). And, after the answer to the third question, Jesus said, *"Feed My sheep"* (v. 17). The word *'feed'* in vv. 15 and 17 mean 'to give food.' But the word *'tend'* (v. 16) means 'to shepherd.' It includes all shepherding duties. The word '*lambs'* denotes little ones, and '*sheep'* is a general word. These include all care for all the flock in all necessities. Peter, who received this commission from the Lord, would later give similar instruction to other elders (1 Peter 5:1-3).

When Peter confessed his love to the Lord, Jesus commissioned him to the service. We express our love to the Lord by serving His people. William MacDonald says,

> "A very practical way of demonstrating love for Christ is by feeding the young ones in His flock."[3]

Looking after the '*lambs'* is demanding and difficult. Another important fact to take note of is that the service to the flock must be motivated by our love for the Lord. The Lord did not ask him about his love for the flock, but for Him. Our love for the flock may have ups and downs. Thus, service motivated by love to the flock alone may become unsteady. But His love never fails. This should be the motivation in service. Paul says, *"For the love of*

Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). This makes our service steady and consistent.

Peter's Death Foretold

The Lord foretold the manner of Peter's death. *"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me"* (John 21:18-19). Jesus and the disciples were walking from the seashore to some nearby destination. Most probably, they were going to a mountain in the vicinity. This is clear from verse 20. *"Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple."* This indicates that Jesus and Peter were walking, and others were following them. Now, Jesus told Peter how his death would be. Jesus foretold that Peter would die only when he was old. This is why Peter could sleep peacefully between the Roman soldiers while he was put in prison (Acts 12:6).

The words of the Lord show that human failures need not be final. If we come to the Lord in humility, He will bring a turnaround in our lives. The Lord's word about his death also indicated that his death would be a horrendous death, a martyrdom.

Pentecost summarises, by saying,

> "Christ's words indicated two things: first of all, Peter's ministry would extend over a considerable period of time. In spite of the antagonism of the Jews who would seek to kill the apostles, Peter would live to an old age in which he would have to depend on others to dress him and to provide an arm on which he would lean. Second, Christ's words signified that in Peter's advanced years, he would be crucified."[4]

Jesus asked Peter to follow Him. He followed Him in death also. Ancient writers state that, about thirty-four years after this, Peter was crucified. He did not want to be crucified head up, like his Lord. He deemed himself unworthy to die like Him. He

begged to be crucified with his head downwards, not considering himself worthy to die in the same posture in which his Lord died.

"You Follow Me"

As Jesus and the disciples were going to the place appointed for their time alone, another interesting conversation and correction of Peter happened. Peter turned and saw John following. The talk was centred on him (vv. 20-23). John was the most loved among the disciples, probably because of his age. It seems that he was the youngest among them. Thus, we see him sitting nearest to the Lord. Peter was inquisitive about his future. Others were nothing better (v.23). Jesus answered Peter, *"If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me"* (John 21:22). They missed the word "*If*" and thought that John would remain till the Lord comes. Jesus had to correct them on that wrong understanding. Jesus said, *"If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:23). This instruction given to the disciples indicates that in the pathway of Christian life and service, we must not get distracted by matters which does not concern us. Our focus should be to follow Christ and to serve Him.

51

The Great Commission

Jesus, while walking away from the seashore, dealt with Peter and provided the necessary corrections and instructions. Other disciples with them also might have heard the conversation and gained lessons from the Lord. There are no clues to understand the distance they walked. They were going to the mountain where Jesus had appointed for the meeting. Before He went to the cross, Jesus had told them about their meeting in Galilee. *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee"* (Matthew 26:32). After the Lord was raised, the angels also told this to the women who came to the sepulchre. *"And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you"* (Matthew 28:7). This was followed by Jesus' intimation to the women. *"Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me"* (Matthew 28:10). Then Matthew says, *"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them"* (Matthew 28:16). Probably, this meeting place, at the mountain was near to the seashore where Jesus appeared to the seven disciples. The other disciples, and probably a small crowd with them, hearing about the Lord's appointment to appear, might have come there. We are not told what distance Jesus walked with the seven disciples. Probably, Jesus disappeared after He finished with Peter. Then, the seven disciples went alone walking, and Jesus might have appeared to them again on the mountain at the place appointed.

Gathered in Galilee

The purpose of this gathering in Galilee was to give them the Great Commission. During the three and a half years of public ministry, the Lord visited many places in Palestine with His disciples and provided them with hands-on training. More than twice, He sent the twelve disciples and later the seventy into Galilean cities two by two. They were sent only to the cities in Galilee. Now that their training was complete, they were ready to be sent to the farthest parts of the world.

The giving of the Great Commission was an important event in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Apart from the death on the cross, this was one episode that was most significant for the Lord. Graduation and the passing out of students from an institution are important events. It is a time for joy for the students and the institution. The labour of the teachers is coming to an end, and the students go out to practice what they have learnt. Thus was this moment on the mountain, Jesus with the eleven disciples.

The choice of the place for this event was also important. It was a mountain in Galilee, not far from the Sea of Galilee. Jesus grew up there. Most of His ministry was done there. He chose His disciples from Galilee. The disciples also have many experiences and lingering memories about the area. Jesus always chose the insignificant things for His magnificent work. Thus, the choice of Galilee for his important event is not a surprise. This shows the path of the humble Jesus. Apart from these, the presence of a small crowd that loved Him and whom He loved might have been a matter of joy for the Lord.

When They Saw Him

Matthew says about Jesus' appearance. *"When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted"* (Matthew 28:17). This statement gives the impression that Jesus, after the restoration and instructions to Peter, disappeared and came to them again on the mountain, the meeting place. During their life with Jesus, they were convinced that He was the Son of God, the eternal God enfleshed, but the death and the uncertainty that ensued

had put them in disarray. But the previous appearances after resurrection assured them that He was God incarnate. Thomas had his doubts, which Jesus cleared. Being sure that He is God, they now worshiped Him. And as God, He received their worship.

Matthew says that *"some doubted."* Who these doubters were is not clear. However, as explained, if we assume that the gathering was not just the eleven disciples but many more, then we may say that the ones who doubted are the crowd that came there, hearing about the coming of the Lord. This must be the probable explanation, as all eleven disciples by then were convinced that He was risen.

Mathew Poole, in commenting on verses 16 and 17, expresses this difficulty. He says,

> "Some think (upon what grounds I know not, but because the evangelists mention no more) that this was the famous appearance mentioned by the apostles, when he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, 1Cointhians 15:6. The text speaks but of eleven that went into Galilee; it is possible more might meet him there, but we have no guidance of Scripture to conclude it. Some worshipped him; but some doubted: Thomas we know did so, so might others: but some think that it had been better translated, `some had doubted'; I understand no sufficient reason for it, for it is not certain that this was after his other appearances mentioned by the other evangelists."[1]

Adam Clarke suggests,

> "It is supposed by some that the reason why any doubted was that when they saw Jesus at first, he was at a distance; but when he came up, drew near to them, they were fully persuaded of the identity of his person."[2]

But JFB Commentary states, about the identity of those who doubted,

> "Certainly, none of the Eleven, after what took place at previous interviews in Jerusalem. But if the five hundred were now present, we may well believe this of some of them."[3]

This conjecture sounds more acceptable. The disciples might have shared the matter of the appointment with many people

they knew and who had partnered with the Lord in the past years. According to Eastern manners, those who heard also may have gone to meet Jesus.

Go, Make Disciples

Jesus gave them the commission. He said, *"'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20). This passage is called the Great Commission. All works of evangelism and edification are based on this commission. This commission cannot become an omission. It is interesting to notice that Mr. Willard has titled his book on discipleship and missions as 'The Great Omission.'

The authority in the commission. Jesus said, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."* This shows that Jesus was given a new authority. This is not about His authority as God, which He always had. This is about the authority He obtained after the death on the cross. This indicates His mediatorial authority. It is about the perfection He received to be the Saviour (Hebrews 2:10). This is the authority that came to Him to save and to judge. This is His authority as the Head of the new creation. This is not His power as the Son of God but as the Son of Man. This is the exaltation He received after His humiliation unto the death of the cross.

Jesus Himself said about this: *"As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man"* (John 5:26-27). *"Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him"* (John 6:27). *"No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father"* (John 10:18).

Peter says, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36).

Paul says, *"He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"* (Ephesians 1:20-23). *"Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:9-11).

Joseph's experience reminds of these facts. In Egypt, he suffered much. Then he was promoted to the position of the second in the kingdom. The psalmist says, *"He sent a man before them—*

Joseph, who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters. He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. The king sent and released him, the ruler of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house,

And ruler of all his possessions, To bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom" (Psalms 105:17-22). After the time of suffering, he was exalted.

It is this same authority that Jesus has given to the church. He has sent His people to all nations with this authority. This authority is indicated in the words of the Lord. *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:18-19). *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,*

and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"* (John 20:21-23). This authority given to the church is to announce the message of forgiveness and judgment. The early church exercised this authority in proclaiming the gospel. *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:20). Witnessing to the world in proclamation of the gospel, representing His authority, is the duty of all believers.

Content in the Commission.

The core of the commission is, *"Make disciples of all the nations"* or 'disciple all nations.' This was what Jesus did for three and a half years. He made disciples. Now, He has completed His task. The disciples should continue the work the Lord initiated. The ministry of Jesus was limited within the borders of Israel. When Jesus sent the Twelve and the Seventy, He had told them to go only to the cities in Galilee. Now, the Lord asked them to reach out to all the nations. Humanity is divided along various lines, based on caste, creed, and colour. But the only division of humanity seen in the Bible is according to their ethnicities. This division is seen in Genesis 10. The word used for 'nations' is ethnos, indicating this division. The meaning of the word used is "the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community."[4] In Genesis 10, humanity was divided by the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The gospel unites and gathers them in Christ by faith. It is interesting to notice that the descendants of these three are seen turning to Jesus in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 of Acts of the Apostles. Eunuch, Saul, and Cornelius, respectively. Eunuch, a descendant of Ham, Saul of Shem, and Cornelius of Japheth.

Ellicott gives the following explanation for "all nations."

> "The words rendered 'all nations' are the same as those in Matthew 25:32, and, as commonly used by the Jews, would point to the Gentile nations of the world, as distinguished from the people of Israel. They are therefore an emphatic expansion of the commission given in Matthew 10:5. And it is every way, interesting that this full declaration of the universality of the gospel should be specially recorded in the Gospel written, as we see throughout, especially for Jews."[5]

As Jesus broadened the scope of evangelization, they were expected to go to the whole world, the Israelites, and the Gentiles.

The essential step in fulfilling the Great Commission is to go and reach out to the people. The Lord asked them to *"go therefore and make disciples."* This is a command to reach out to the unreached people of the earth. Even after two millennia, most of humanity is still unreached with the gospel. They do not know who Jesus is. They do not know whether Jesus is a thing or a person. Some even take Him for a political party leader. About the meaning of sin, or Saviour, or salvation, people hold different ideas. Thus, the command to *'go'* is still relevant. God's people should go, and keep on going.

When Jesus taught the people, He spoke about a sower. He said, *"Behold, a sower went out to sow"* (Matthew 13:3). For sowing, one should go out to the field. Going out may take different forms in the present, with the progress in technology. Those with a net connection are reached with the internet. Ministries are happening these days in this means. Literature, radio, and TV are all technologies that can help to propagate the gospel. The desire of the church should be to 'somehow save some.' Only a going-church can become a gaining and growing church. The message of the gospel to convey to the people is the same. But the method of reaching out to the people may be adapted to the needs of the times. The fact is, this command of the Lord to go is taken seriously by myriads even now, and they are giving their lives to Jesus, for His cause. Finding life's fulfilment is by giving ourselves away. We must allow it to fall, so that it may bring many fruits (John 12:24).

When the gospel is preached, those who take an interest in the truth and are convinced should be discipled. This includes leading them to faith in the Lord Jesus and baptizing them. These are intended in the words *"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19). This is also indicated in the Markan version of the Commission. *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15-16). This should not give us the impression that baptism is essential for salvation. It is added to faith, as it is necessary for those who are saved. The baptism should be administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. *"Name"* is in the singular. There are no three names here, but only one name. *"The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* is one name.

Those who have believed in the Lord Jesus and publicly declared their allegiance to Him in baptism must continue to grow in their spiritual lives. For this, continuous instructions from the Word of God are necessary. The Lord said, *"Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:20). This observance includes the observance of the Lord's Supper also. They are commanded to observe all things He has commanded. Thus, disciples are expected to produce disciples. The life of the disciples is a life of obedience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives the promise of His presence with those who would fulfil the Great Commission. He said, *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen"* (Matthew 28:20). Commenting on the promise of the Lord, T.V. Moore says that there are two peculiarities to notice in this promise.

> "The first is the mode in which He spoke of His presence. He does not say, I will be with you always, but I am with you, developing the fact that He spoke as the Divine Redeemer, that eternal and self-existent Being, to whom there is neither future nor past, but one unchanging eternal now." He adds, "The second peculiarity of phrase here is the word rendered 'always,' which are literally, "all the days," not merely always, but all kinds of days, that were

> before them- days of light and of shadow, sunshine and storm, heat and cold, all the varying days of their destiny His presence should be with them."[6]

This might have given great courage to the disciples from whom the Lord was going to depart and go to the Father. This promise of His presence is to all His saints, which they shall experience especially as they go to fulfil the Great Commission.

Mark says the promise of the Lord's presence was experienced by the disciples when they went about preaching the Word of God. *"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen"* (Mark 16:19-20). The 'signs' with which the Lord confirmed the Word of God preached are recorded in Mark. Jesus says, "*And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover"* (Mark 16:17-18). All of these signs, except one, are fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles (8:7; 2:4; 28:3-6; 28:8). For the sign of '*drinking any deadly things'* unharmed, there is no example in the New Testament. However, tradition has it that Barnabas and John had this experience on their journeys. The Book of Hebrews says that the Word of God, *"which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit"* (Hebrews 2:3-4). Thus, we have received the word of God confirmed. God demands our faith and surrender to His precepts and promises.

52

The Ascension

From the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus looked forward to the ascension unto the right hand of the Father. He referred to the ascension in His talk to Nicodemus. He said, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven"* (John 3:13). Jesus anticipated this; Luke says, *"Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem"* (Luke 9:51). Jesus knew the time for going to the Father was near. John says, *"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end"* (John 13:1). The Lord even prayed to the Father that He would receive Him up into glory. He said, *"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was"* (John 17:5). Now the time has come to be received up into glory.

The record of the ascension is very brief in the Gospels. Matthew and John are silent about the matter. Mark records it in just one verse (16:19). Luke gives it in two verses (24:50,51). Its fullest account is given in Acts 1:4-12.

Forty Days with the Apostles

The last event considered from the life of Christ is the Great Commission. That happened in Galilee. But the present scene of ascension is in Judea. The post-resurrection appearances

recorded in Luke's Gospel occurred in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Among the appearances which Luke records, two appearances are already considered. (24:1-49). One was to the two disciples going from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and the second appearance was to the disciples back in Jerusalem. These happened on the day of resurrection. The appearance on the fortieth day, which Luke records, is what we are considering now, the appearance on the day of ascension (24:50-53).

Moore notes the importance of the forty days as follows:

> "It was forty days after His birth that He was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the Lord by His parents; and during forty days He was tempted in the wilderness, before entering on His public ministry; and during forty days He was to remain on earth after resurrection, before entering into glory. It may be that these successive periods of forty days were designed to point backward to the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness before entering Canaan, and not only to link these histories together, but also present the same great lesson of a season of painful preparation before entering upon the fulfilment of the promise."[1]

These denote the oneness of God's plan of redemption, worked out in the shadows of the Old Testament and the reality of the New Testament.

Between verses 49 and 50, many things happened, and forty days had transpired. The Lord had appeared to them many times and taught them various things, preparing them for the future life and ministries. Probably, the Commission, as recorded by Luke (24:36-39), might be added here with His words to the disciples at the time of His ascension. Jesus said, *"Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:46-49). A short narrative on the ascension of the Lord follows.

Luke says, "*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now, it came to pass,*

while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen" (Luke 24:50-53).

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke gives more details of the ascension. *"And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Now, when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:4-11).

Steps Toward Ascension

For forty days, Jesus was with the disciples. In those days, in various ways, with infallible proofs, the Lord gave them evidence that He is risen. He taught them about the kingdom of God. It was then time to go to the Father. Jesus took them near to Bethany and from there went to the Father. The following are steps associated with the ascension.

Firstly, Jesus led them out of the city and went to Bethany.

Jesus asked them not to depart from Jerusalem. He wanted them to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. The church was supposed to start with the baptism of the Spirit. This happened on the Day of Pentecost. These talks have occurred in Jerusalem.

The questions and answers concerning the kingdom they might have asked on the way to or at Bethany. This town was on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives. The distance between Jerusalem and this place was *"a Sabbath day's journey"* (Acts 1:12). This is the distance a person was allowed to travel on a Sabbath day. It was 1.2 kilometres or 3/4th of a mile. This was the place Jesus often resorted to with His disciples when He came to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, some say that Bethany was double the distance of a Sabbath day's journey. Then, the ascension might have happened at the border of Bethany.

About the spot from where the Lord ascended, Moore says,

> "The Mount of Olives lies between Jerusalem and Bethany. On the one side is the Holy City, separated from it by the valley of Jehoshaphat; on the other is the village of Mary and Martha, separated from the mountain by a little ridge of hills. It was here, probably, in the recess furnished by these hills that project from the Mount of Olives and overhang Bethany, that this glorious event occurred."[2]

Secondly, He promised them the coming of the Spirit.

They asked Him about the time of the coming of the Kingdom. But Jesus told them that knowing the time should not be their concern. The Spirit shall come and empower them, and they should be witnesses to the cause of the Lord. The order in which they should reach out to the end of the world is also chalked out by the Lord: *"You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* The spread of the gospel, through the apostles and the early church, is seen in this same order in the Acts of the Apostles.

Thirdly, at Bethany, "*He lifted up His hands and blessed them."*

This reminds us of the blessings of the high priest. *"Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings"* (Leviticus 9:22). The priestly blessing was, *"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance*

upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26). This was also the way an elderly person in a home or a family head would bless the children or younger ones. Similarly, the Lord blessed the disciples.

Fourthly, *"While He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven"* (v.51).

Later, Luke would write, *"He was taken up"* (Acts 1:2, 9). Furthermore, he says, *"He went up"* (Acts 1:10). The two men who appeared to them there said, *"Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). All these phrases explain the departure of Jesus to heaven. The amazing thing is that the Lord was taken up while He was blessing them. His hands were outstretched over them as He departed. This points to the great work the Lord is doing for His people, interceding for God's people, ministering as an advocate, and continuing the high priestly work for His own, in the presence of the Father. Luke says that as Jesus parted from them and went up to heaven, *"They worshipped Him"* (v. 52). Then, Luke records, *"A cloud received Him out of their sight"* (Acts 1:9). Whether this was a literal cloud in the sky or a representation of the presence of God cannot be conclusive. As it says that the cloud *"received Him,"* it is probably the latter. It represents the shekinah glory of God. The Father received the Son into His very presence.

Fifthly, Mark records that Jesus "*sat down at the right hand of God"* (Mark 16:19).

'*Right hand'* is the most honourable place. This indicates the position Jesus assumed, having fulfilled the work He undertook to accomplish on the earth.

Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Majesty, was following the prophetic words about the Messiah. *"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"* (Psalms 110:1). The Book of Hebrews also emphasizes this fact (1:3; 1:13; 8:1,2; 10:12; 12:2; 4:14; 9:24). Jesus Christ is in the Highest Office, in Heaven itself, in the highest position, at the right hand of the Majesty!

Eric Sauer states,

> "Scripture distinguishes three 'thrones' corresponding symbolically to the three chief periods of His heavenly sovereignty." Firstly, the Father's throne. This is His present throne (Revelation 3:21; Hebrews 8:1; 10:12,13). Secondly, David's throne. This pertains to the Millennial kingdom (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30). Thirdly, the throne of God and the Lamb. This will be in eternity (Revelation 22:1,3).[3]

Now, seated in the Father's throne, He becomes the means of all blessings from the Father for His people. Jesus said, *"Because I live, you will live also"* (John 14:19).

Sixthly, the disciples were assured of the second coming.

Luke says, *"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'"* (Acts 1:10-11).

The disciples gazed into heaven as they saw Jesus ascending. The sight of the ascension generated a sense of awe and wonder in them. We do not know how long they stood looking up to heaven. Their gaze was then interrupted by the two men who stood by them in white apparel. They must have been the same angels who appeared to the women at the tomb (Luke 24:4). They called the disciples *"men of Galilee."* All the disciples, except Judas Iscariot, were from Galilee. Then, he was no more. They assured them that this same Jesus would come again to them, just as they saw Him go. This is not about the rapture but the glorious appearance, the coming of Jesus for setting up the kingdom. The reason for proclaiming about the Glorious Appearance, rather than the rapture, may be because the disciples were still on Jewish ground. The church had not yet begun, then. It would start only on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

William MacDonald gives five similarities between the Ascension and the Glorious Appearance of Jesus.

> "He ascended from the Mount of Olives (v.12). He will return to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). He ascended personally.

He will return personally (Malachi 3:1). He ascended visibly. He will return visibly (Matthew 24:30). He was received up in a cloud (v. 9). He will come on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 24:30). He ascended gloriously. He will return with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30)."[4]

Seventhly, they *"returned to Jerusalem with great joy."*

This was according to the command of the Lord Jesus. He had asked them to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they returned to Jerusalem. Luke says that they returned with *'great joy.'* This was not because they were free then, as Jesus left them. Their great joy was because they then knew the importance of ascension. They knew that He was departing to live in the presence of the Father for them. There was a time when they were ignorant about this and sorrowful at the thought of the Lord's departure.

In the Upper Room, Jesus said, *"You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I"* (John 14:28). They were sorrowful when they heard that the Lord was leaving them and going to the Father. He instructed them, saying that it is good for them, as He was going to the Father, who is greater than He. This greatness is not in position but in function. Father is the Source of all the blessings. As Jesus is going to that very Source, the Father, it will be for their good. Now they knew that it was for their good. This was the reason for the *'great joy.'*

After their return to Jerusalem, they *"were continually in the temple praising and blessing God"* (v.53). This was until the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. After this, Mark says, *"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs"* (Mark 16:20). Luke narrates this in the Acts of the Apostles.

Importance of the Ascension

Jesus told the disciples, *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away"* (John 16:7). The ascension was important to the disciples and the Lord for the following reasons.

It indicated the approval of the Father over the life and work of the Son on earth. Even at the baptism of Jesus, Matthew records, *"The heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:16-17). The opening of heaven and the utterance from heaven indicated the Father's approval of the thirty years of the life of Jesus in Nazareth. The ascension and reception in heaven indicated the Father's approval of His whole life and work on earth.

It was needed for the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; 8,13,14).

It made it possible for the present ministry of Jesus (John 14:19; Romans 5:10; Hebrews 9:24). Jesus intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). He is our Advocate (1 John 2:1). He is our High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 9:11). Having offered Himself as a priest, now risen and ascended, He is our Great High Priest, in heaven itself (Hebrews 4:14). These would have been impossible without the ascension.

He is preparing a place for His own (John 14:2). The ascension makes possible the preparation of a place for His people and for the second coming, to take His people to Himself that they may be where He is. Jesus is coming soon.

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JESUS
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The pursuit of the knowledge of the blessed life of Jesus Christ is the most noble occupation anybody can have in this life or beyond. This volume, entitled, 'Jesus, the Priest' is written with that need in view. This is the third volume in the series on the life of Jesus Christ. This covers the last one week of Jesus' earthly sojourn, often called as the Passion Week.

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THOMSON B THOMAS is an Evangelist and Bible teacher, based in Mumbai. He holds a Master's Degree in Religion and Philosophy. He contributes regularly to Christian periodicals and has authored books such as Growing in Christian Life, The Eternal Spirit of God, Jesus the Sovereign, Jesus the Prophet and many others.

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