

The Life of Christ

*Sponsored by:
The Christadelphians*

*Learn to Read the Bible Effectively
Life of Christ Seminar
Week 5
The Teaching of the Messiah*

SECTION 14

Nazareth and Galilee

Having left Jerusalem, following the cleansing of the Temple, and the discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus went with His disciples into Judea. They initially went into the same area where the Baptist and his remaining disciples were baptizing (John 4:22-36). John continues the record from this point, indicating that Jesus and His disciples left Judea to return into Galilee.

It was probably just prior to Jesus' departure, that John the Baptist was thrown into prison (Matt. 4:12). The preaching of Jesus in Judea appeared to be bringing about a speedy reaction from the authorities in Jerusalem. It would appear that they were having Him watched. (John 3:25; John 4:1) Conversions and baptisms were increasing beyond even the efforts of the Baptist. John notes, however, that Jesus Himself, baptized no one.

(John 4:2) It might be inferred that this was specifically noted by John because this was intentional on the part of Jesus, in order that no one could later take pride in the fact that the Lord had baptized them. Paul, in his preaching, followed this pattern for the same reason. (1 Cor. 1: 11-15)

When word of the Pharisees' interest in His preaching and in His success reached Jesus (John 4:1), it apparently brought work in this area to a halt for the moment. Jesus knew how the wiles of the rulers had been tried out against the Baptist (Matt. 3:7) and would have also heard about the attempt that had been made to unsettle John's disciples (John 3:25). This seems to have been followed by the news that John had been taken prisoner.

During his ministry, John the Baptist had rebuked Herod the King, who had disowned his wife, the daughter of Aretas, King of Petra, in order to acquire another wife. This new wife was the notorious Herodias, whom Herod stole from his brother Philip.

It is probable that, in spite of the directness of John's reproof, Herod would have hesitated to do anything against him, but for encouragement given by the Pharisees, and the poisonous bitterness of Herodias. As it later turned out, she was not even content to have John flung into a prison, but tricked Herod into having the Baptist beheaded. (Matt. 14:6-13) (Josephus, Antiquities, 18.5.2)

With the danger of similar actions against Jesus, coming from the Pharisees of Judea, at this early stage in His ministry, Jesus would have been unwilling to put His fledgling disciples under such strain. So being warned about this, it would appear that He sent His Judean disciples back to their homes for the moment. With His handful of Galilean

disciples, he left for Galilee. (Matt. 4:12; John 4:1-3; Luke 4:14; Mark 1:14) John is the only writer who gives any detail about the journey to Galilee.

He states that Jesus, with His disciples, had to pass through Samaria. In so doing they came to Sychar, a city of Samaria, (John 4:4,5) near the piece of land that Jacob (Israel) gave to His son Joseph. (Gen. 33:18-20) The city of Sychar is mentioned only in this Gospel record in John. This could have been a Jewish name for the city of Shechem, or a smaller town nearby. The majority of modern-day scholars identify this reference as Askar, a town near the location of Jacob's well.

A great deal of hostility existed between the Samaritans and the Jews. In traveling from Judea to Galilee most Jews took a route through Perea, to avoid contact with the Samaritans. According to Josephus, however, Galileans normally took the shorter route through Samaria when going to and from Jerusalem. (Compare Luke 9:51-52) On the surface, Jesus took this route in order to perhaps avoid encountering Pharisees or Herod's men, but he had a much more significant reason for going through Samaria!

Many of the events unique to John's Gospel, are included because of Spiritual significance. We might consider seeking a deeper meaning behind Jesus' choice of routes. Considering the hostile Jewish attitude in Jerusalem, and His rejection by them, because of His appearance in the Temple, His departure through a Gentile area provides a symbolic foreshadowing. A parallel can be seen between this and Jesus' final rejection and crucifixion in Jerusalem. The Good News of God's Word, and the opportunity for salvation through His Son, was now clearly open to the Gentile world.

The Samaritans

The origin of the people living in this area at the time of Jesus is provided in 2nd Kings chapter 17, verses 24-41. They were a mixed people from Babylon, Aba, Cuthah, Hamath and Sephareaim, brought into the territory of the Northern Kingdom of Israel following the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes (Ezra 4:2,10). They sought to embrace the religion of the land, but continued to worship idols. When Judah returned from a subsequent captivity in Babylon, these Samaritans endeavored to identify with them. During the 70 years in that captivity, the Samaritans had inter-married with some of the poor remnant of Judah left behind by Nebuchadnezzar. They wanted to share in the work of rebuilding the Temple and the benefit of its religious privileges. This was refused.

About B.C. 409, Manasseh, the Priest, who had been expelled by Nehemiah because of an alien marriage with the daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite (Neh. 13:28), obtained permission from the King of Persia to erect a Temple on Mt. Gerizim. This represented the establishment of a rival religion, and great antagonism resulted. They perpetuated various outrages against the Jews. On one occasion they managed to enter into the Temple, profaning it by scattering dead men's bones on the sacred pavement. (Josephus)

Outrageous acts like this, remained as bitter memories in Jewish history, and the Jews had no dealings with them. (John 4: 9)

The Samaritans claimed observance of the law, and boasted that they possessed the authentic copy of it. Among other things, they substituted Gerizim for Ebal in Deut. 27:4, to support Gerizim's claim to sanctity. They claimed that it, not Jerusalem, was God's chosen sanctuary.

The Gerizim Temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus, about 129 B. C., (Josephus), but it remained a Holy place of the Samaritans. Its ruins were still visible in Christ's time. The Samaritans, too, were looking for Messiah, who would come as a Prophet and tell them all things (John 4:25). Although they had perverted the Jewish religion, they claimed that they were descended from Joseph, the son of Jacob, through Ephraim and Manasseh.

Bible Accuracy

A present day contribution by Samaria comes to Bible students. Records regarding this area provide another verification of faith in God's Word. History confirms that Shalmaneser V, King of Assyria, assaulted Samaria around 727 B.C. The city held out for 3 years, during which time the Assyrian King died. One of his generals took over the throne and took on the name of Sargon 2. This name was unknown except in Bible text (Isaiah 20:1), and so his existence was at one time looked upon as a Bible myth.

In 1843 a French scholar, Paul Botta, discovered his palace at Khorsabad. Highlights of his reign are inscribed on the palace walls. One of these inscriptions provides us with a wonderful proof of Bible authenticity:

“At the beginning of my rule, ...I set siege to and conquered Samaria...I carried away into captivity 27,290 persons...”

Other records found there, state that deported people from other lands were then brought in and settled in Samaria, so that the population might be strongly mixed. These and other facts found in his palace, closely parallel the Bible record of 2 Kings 17:3-6.

It was at that time that God's Word declares:

“...The Lord removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants, the Prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria, until this day.” 2 Kings 17:23

The land was then re-settled with Gentiles described in verses 24-41. The mixture of people in and about Samaria came to be known as the Samaritans.

Jacob's Well

It is important to remember that Jesus' departure from Judea was caused by animosity from the Jews. Now He was moving into the area of Gentile hatred. Jesus, footsore and weary, came to Jacob's well - located between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, the mounts of cursing and blessing (Deut. 27:12, 13). He rested there.

It was a highly significant place where He sat, awaiting the return of His disciples, who had gone into the village to obtain provisions.

It was near the place that Abraham built an altar to God and received the promise, “unto thy seed will I give this land.” (Gen. 12: 6,7) Here, also, Jacob built his altar, not far from the well he dug (Gen. 33:18-20), later bequeathing the area to Joseph (Gen. 48:22). Joseph was buried there (Joshua 24:32).

Jesus, at this point also provided a lesson for not only His disciples when they returned, but for all of us who today wish to follow Jesus Christ. Although He was tired, sharing the frailty of other men, uppermost in His mind was His Father’s purpose with Him.

The Meeting at the Well - (John 4:7-26)

It was natural for a weary and thirsty traveler, who had “nothing to draw with,” to say “give Me a drink” to this Samaritan woman who came to the well as Jesus sat alone.

We must remember the history that would have been in the woman’s mind as she faced a Jew. The bad blood between the two communities had existed unabated since the time of return from the captivity in Babylon. The semi-Gentile origins of the Samaritans were despised. The rejection of the Psalms and Prophets from the Scriptures was resented. The choice of Mount Gerizim as a Holy site in place of Mount Zion was condemned. Their easy-going standards of religion were scorned. In the woman’s mind, all of this attitude of animosity from the Jews would be represented in the man before her.

It is not surprising that the woman would respond by asking why a Jew would request a drink of water from her – a Samaritan. (Verse 9)

Jesus’ response to her is typical of the way, in which, throughout His preaching, He responded to people’s questions in a manner that would illustrate that He knew what was in their heart, and which would demonstrate His dedication to pursuing His Father’s purposes. It was His custom to break through traditions, which were merely senseless and meaningless, especially when they had their source in passion and hatred.

In approaching this woman, Jesus was more interested in giving than in receiving, just as when God asks something of us, it is really because He wants to share. If she knew the “gift of God,” and who it was who asked her for a drink, she would ask of Him, and would receive “living water.” (John 4:10)

Anyone coming to the well would be able to draw natural water, but Jesus was offering water which would come from an inexhaustible spring fountain - living water, that is his teaching, which would lead a person to eternal life. He was making her aware that even as she stood at the natural well, she was standing face to face with a richer, more enlivening well, - a well of truth which only He could dispense to her. The water she could drink from this spiritual well would be in her as a fountain of living and life-giving water. Far superior from the water she had come to draw from the well!

Later, at the Feast of Booths in Jerusalem, Jesus would echo these same words when speaking to the Jews:

“...If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” John 7:37, 38

The woman was unable to grasp the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words, but her tone became more respectful, calling Him “Sir.” (Verse 11)

As she went on to Him she was obviously recalling the heritage that the Samaritans’ felt that they had in Jacob. She saw the well by which they were standing, bequeathed to all later generations by Jacob, as a symbol of the divine promise inherited from Him by His descendants. It was a promise of a center of worship, with an altar, and a place of ready access to God, a promise of a multitudinous seed, and of an anointed Messiah, fallen and raised up again. (Genesis 28:12-19)

Was Jesus offering something better? Jacobs well had not only refreshed himself and his sons, but had also saved the lives of his flocks and herds, remembering that when Jacob came to Shechem where he dug the well, he was blessed with numerous cattle. (Gen. 33:17) Was this man before her greater than Jacob? (Verse 12)

Jesus now explained that it was water of a different sort He had in mind. Ordinary water could only allay thirst temporarily. The water He offered would give permanent relief, and eternal life. (John 4:12,13)

Now she was really interested. Coming to the well regularly was a burden, as also was the thirst which made the drawing of the water necessary. So, she asks: “Sir, give me this water...” (verse 15) She acknowledged a need, and asked for help, just as we acknowledge a need and look for salvation in Jesus.

Jesus’ response, “Go call your husband, and come here,” appears irrelevant, until we realize that it represents two aspects of a true response to Jesus’ call.

First, there has to be a realization of our sinfulness, and acknowledgment of it, coupled with a desire to repent, or change, from the way of sinfulness.

Second, there should be an inherent desire to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

She responded that she had no husband. This total stranger astounded her by revealing that He knew that not only was this true, but that she had 5 previous husbands and the man with whom she was now living was not her husband.

The woman then acknowledged Jesus as a Prophet, something remarkable for a Samaritan. They accepted only the authority of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

On the basis of Deut. 18:18,19, they looked for a Prophet to come. In the meantime, however, they rejected the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament. While recognizing Jesus as a Prophet, the woman shrank from accepting Him as “the greater than Moses” of Deuteronomy 18. She put to Him the age long conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans, as to whether Jerusalem or Gerizim was to be the correct place of worship.

The Lord’s answer was clear. Both Jerusalem and Gerizim were destined to fall. The Romans fulfilled Jesus’ words in A.D. 70.

Salvation was to come through the Jews, (John 4:22), not the Samaritans, but God did not exclude any. He wanted worshippers, both Jews and Samaritans, who would earnestly seek to identify themselves with Him in Spirit and in Truth. (John 4:24) That is, in mind and in deeds. (Compare Acts 15:14; Ephesians 2:11-14)

The woman, who had been brought this far, was now consciously seeking for the truth:

“...I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” John 4:25

Jesus’ simple response is one that we should all remember when thinking of Him and studying His life in the Gospel:

“I that speak to thee am He.” John 4:26

Step by step, Jesus had brought her to the point where she was now face to face with the only one who could bring salvation. This is the lesson that we each must take from this simple meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well:

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

The Gospel in Samaria - (John 4:27-42)

The woman was still there when the disciples returned from their search for provisions. They were obviously eager to satisfy their curiosity regarding why Jesus was talking with her, or what she wanted, but not one of them commented. (verse 27) Then the woman left, leaving her water pot behind. She went to the city and told the men the Messiah had come, so that they came unto Him.

In the meantime, the disciples desired Jesus to take some food, but He showed little interest in it. They were confused by His response that He had meat to eat that they knew nothing of. To Him, it was food, indeed, to dispense the true knowledge of God’s Word, and He invited them to behold the approaching Samaritans as fields ready and “white for harvest.” He instructed them to keep in mind their own part in the harvest process.

In what followed, many of the Samaritans believed because of the woman’s testimony. In contrast to the action of the Jews, whose rejection of Jesus had led to His departure from

Judea, they asked Jesus to remain. He stayed there two more days. Many others believed because of their direct contact with Jesus, whom they recognized as the Messiah, “the Saviour of the world.” In this way, the first Gentile converts came to the Gospel. The way was made clear for a much fuller and wider harvest of true and honest men and women. (Compare Acts 1:8; 8:5; 10:28)

Galilee

Having come to Galilee, after spending the two days in Samaria, Jesus was received enthusiastically. Many of the Galileans had been in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and had witnessed the signs that He had performed following the cleansing of the Temple. (John 4:45)

Up until now, Jesus had made no demands on the Galilean disciples that were traveling with Him. He had been quietly preparing them, and now the last stage of that preparation was at hand. For the moment, however, it would appear that He departed from them, for as much as several months, leaving them alone with their families, their nets and their thoughts. In the meantime, He continued traveling through the Galilean region.

So, He once again went to Cana, where John recorded that He had performed His first miracle. It is here, that He performed another miracle. John notes that this is the second sign that Jesus performed in Galilee. Miracles performed between these two visits to Cana were done so following His cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem. (John 4:54)

While in Cana, Jesus received a visit from a high official of Capernaum, who was in great personal distress. His son lay at the point of death. Hearing that Jesus had returned from Judea, he traveled the 25 miles that separated Capernaum from Cana, and finding Jesus, pleaded with Him to return with Him to heal his son. (John 4:46,47)

In view of the man’s obvious faith shown in making this journey, the reply of Jesus must have sounded strange:

“...Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.” John 4:48

This is the only time in the Gospels that the word “wonders” is used with reference to the miracles of Jesus. It serves to emphasize the contrast that Jesus had very recently experienced between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews demanded miraculous marvels. The Samaritans responded with a spontaneous belief as soon as they were told about Jesus by one of their least reputable citizens. (John 4:39)

But Jesus’ words did not imply that He was going to disappoint this desperate man. He was going to use the occasion to bring greater blessings than even the restoration of a dying boy. He was about to show the Nobleman that the power of God vested in Him did not need His actual presence at the scene of its ministry. This man, along with the countless number who have followed Christ, had to understand that the power of Christ

does not depend upon His physical presence. This Royal Official had shown a strong but imperfect faith in coming to Cana. Jesus sought to perfect it.

In desperation, he swept aside the Lord's seeming reluctance, pressing his request in a cry of anxiety and misery: "Sir, come down before my child dies." (4:49) Then Jesus made His meaning clear by relating it to the man's personal trouble, "go your way; your son lives." There could be no doubt in Jesus' meaning now, and the man believed His word. His faith was to be tried yet further for he would not arrive back home until the next day.

He was met on the road by joyous members of his household staff, who announced that his son lived. Not only that, his recovery had occurred at the exact hour that Jesus told him that his son lived. (4:51-53)

The Divine purpose was accomplished. The man believed, along with his whole house. With a word, Jesus had saved more than the single life that was ebbing away in the quiet house in Capernaum, and Jesus' fame went further abroad in Galilee.

At this point, John ends his Gospel record regarding Jesus until He returns to Jerusalem for the second Passover. The other Gospel writers fill in the detail during this period.

We turn to Luke, chapter 4. His record has been silent on everything that transpired from the time of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, until this point of Jesus' return to Galilee.

He describes the general conditions prevailing during and following Jesus' second sign in Cana: (Luke 4:14-15)

"And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all."

He then provides an echo attesting to the truth of Jesus' words which were recorded by John following the departure from Samaria:

"For Jesus Himself testified that a Prophet has no honour in His own country." John 4: 44

Jesus wanted to return to Nazareth, His hometown, and preach the Gospel there. It was, on His part, an act of grace to a place filled with many childhood memories. But to the people of His hometown, He was just a carpenter's son.

Nazareth - Luke 4: 16-30

Nazareth lies on the most southern of the ranges of lower Galilee, just above the plain of Esdraelon. You cannot see the surrounding country, because Nazareth rests in a basin. But the moment you climb to the edge of this basin, you see 30 miles in three directions. It is a map of Old Testament history.

Esdraelon lies before you, with its 20 battlefields - - - the scenes of Barak's and of Gideon's victories, of Saul's and Josiah's defeats, of the struggles for freedom in the days of the Maccabees. There is Naboth's vineyard and the place of Jehu's revenge upon Jezebel. There is Shunem and the house of Elijah, and Carmel, the place of Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal.

To the east is the valley of Jordan with the range of Gilead. To the west is the Great Sea. The mountains of Tabor, Carmel, and Hermon can be seen rising in the distance. But all these historic places filled with memories of a triumphant faith were not enough to stir the spiritually dead inhabitants of Nazareth.

Luke states that Jesus came to His hometown, and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue service usually consisted of two opening benedictions, a reading from the law, a prayer, a reading from the Prophets, an address based on the reading and then the final benediction, as recorded in Numbers 6:24-26.

The words of this benediction are echoed in hymns utilized in Christian Churches today, and are particularly suitable as requests for a blessing upon one who is newly baptized:

“The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

Scrolls of the Scriptures were kept near the speaker's rostrum, and not far from the “chief seats” which the Scribes and Pharisees loved to occupy. (Matthew 23:6)

The man referred to in Luke 4:20, as “the attendant,” was called in Hebrew “Chazzan.” He had several duties. One was to take out and put back the sacred rolls of Scripture. He had to keep the synagogue clean. He announced the coming of the Sabbath from the roof of the synagogue with three blasts from a silver trumpet, and he was the teacher in the village school.

Another thing to note in the same verse is that, when a Jewish Rabbi spoke, he “sat down.” (Compare Matt. 5:1; Matt. 23:2; Acts 13:14, 15)

Having read from the scroll, Jesus was announcing that He had something to say about it when He sat down. In these circumstances, it was usual to be asked to speak. And so we see in verse 20, “...the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him.” (Luke 4:20)

He probably spoke many words to them, but the focus of His discourse was that he was the fulfillment of the passage in Isaiah from which we had read. That is, he was telling them all that he, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they knew so well, was the promised Messiah!

They quickly grasped the meaning of His words, and while they marveled at the eloquence of His speech, they could not see Him as anything but Joseph's son. Jesus knew that, because they lacked faith, they wanted more from Him than He was prepared to give at that moment. They would want signs and wonders, as He had performed in

Capernaum, causing Him to reaffirm the thought that He had expressed as He left Samaria regarding acceptance and honour. (Luke 4:22-24)

Because He wanted to impress upon them the seriousness of their position, He then drew to their attention the examples of Elijah and Elisha, two of Israel's greatest prophets. (Luke 4:25-27) He reminded them that although there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's day, he was sent to a Gentile during the 3-and-a-half-year drought, and that God blessed her house. Similarly, although there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time, the Gentile, Naaman, was the one who was cleansed in the Jordan waters.

The lesson provided by Jesus in the synagogue, taken from these two echoes out of Israel's past, instantly enraged these men of Nazareth. The fact that each of the individuals saved in Jesus' examples was a Gentile would annoy them. But the real anger would come with the realization that Jesus was suggesting that they, themselves, were no more faithful than their ancestors were when Elijah and Elisha ministered to them.

This rage turned to blind unreasoning fury. They took hold of Jesus and dragged Him from the synagogue to the brow of the hill above the city, intending to cast Him down headlong. Once again Jesus would have been confronted with one of the temptations in the wilderness. He could have let them throw Him off the hill, and He would have landed safely, for His hour was not yet come. Their rage would have turned to wonder and acceptance for the wrong reasons. Instead, in the noisy confusion, Jesus simply passed through their midst, and quietly went on His way. (Luke 4:28-30)

The Teaching from Isaiah

Luke quotes the words that Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah when He stood up to read in the synagogue: (Luke 4:18-19)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are down-trodden, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

He then proclaimed that this wonderful prophecy was being fulfilled in and through Him at that very time. And, indeed, this is what Jesus was doing and continues to do.

A Bible reference takes us back to Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 and 2, which were the source of Jesus' words. An examination of that reference shows that Jesus did not complete the second verse in this prophecy:

“To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Isaiah 61:2

If He had said this, He could not then have added that the Scripture was being fulfilled that day in His listeners' ears. The completion of this prophecy did not happen during Jesus' lifetime, nor has it happened yet.

“The day of vengeance” belongs to the second advent of Christ, not the first. The prophecy therefore speaks of the two advents of Christ. His first was intended to preach the acceptable year of God and to call upon men everywhere to repent and seek salvation through Him. His second advent will be as a judge to manifest God’s vengeance upon a lawless and sinful world, which has rejected Him, just like the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and the days of Noah.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, speaks of the time yet to come when the words that Jesus did not speak in the synagogue that day will be fulfilled:

“...To give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty Angels in flaming fire, Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” 2 Thess. 1:7-9

Christ’s Warning

Apart from indicating that their rejection of Him would cause Him to turn to the Gentiles, Jesus provided a stern warning in the lessons He selected from the history of the Jews.

When Elijah proclaimed drought on the land, (1 Kings 17), it lasted for 3 ½ years. (Bible echo - the period of Christ’s ministry)

Throughout this period of their thirst, a Gentile woman was sustained because she had faith in God’s Word. Faithless Israel represented the real widows, suffering the absence of God to sustain them.

Similarly, when Naaman was cured, (2 Kings 5), he alone was cured, although there were many lepers in Israel. Remembering that, in the Bible, leprosy is representative of a sinful condition, the lesson was clear. Uncleansed by God’s healing word, the faithless, sinful, children of Israel were the real lepers, and they would continue in their condition unless faith brought them to Christ.

Each one of us should consider personally the lesson that Jesus delivered in Nazareth that day. The widow was saved because she believed and obeyed God’s Word, and was sustained through the life-giving food which He provided in endless quantity.

Naaman, the Syrian, was cleansed from leprosy (typical of sin) because he believed and obeyed God’s Word and washed in the water, as he was commanded. (A symbol of baptism).

Through the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah, salvation came to those who are Gentiles by natural birth. His lesson that day teaches us that if we seek salvation we must listen to His Word, and show our desire to please God through repentance, baptism, and leading a life acceptable to God.

Capernaum

Jesus walked through the midst of the enraged townspeople in Nazareth and made His lonely way over the mountains towards Capernaum. Nazareth, like Jerusalem, had not known the day of her visitation, and she was to suffer the condemnation of Christ's neglect. He had come to His own, and His own had not received Him. (Bible echo)

No longer was Nazareth to be called His city. This honour would be reserved for the hometown of His disciples, James and John, Peter and Andrew. It is true that Capernaum was not worthy of Him, and would yet be the subject of His condemnation. But no city or place will be worthy of the coming of the Son of Man until the day when He comes to fill the earth with God's glory and bring in everlasting righteousness and peace.

Capernaum was about 20 miles away from Nazareth, to the north east, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He immediately found shelter and an enthusiastic response to His message, so much so, that the city has been called "His own city" (Matt. 9:1; Mark 2:1)

Matthew's Gospel, which has been silent on detail regarding Jesus' life since the temptation in the wilderness, now picks up the record. It begins by referring to the fact that Jesus came into Galilee following the imprisonment of the Baptist. (4:12) Matthew then states that Jesus left Nazareth, and came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

He then shows us that this was no random move on Jesus' part, by providing a Bible echo verifying that this was a fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah:

"This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the Prophet saying, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and the shadow of death, upon them a light dawned." Matthew 4:14-16; (Compare Isaiah 9:1, 2)

He then goes on to say that from that time Jesus began to preach and say, "repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)

It was at this point, that Jesus reunited with Andrew, James, John and Peter, who lived at Bethsaida, the fishing quarter of Capernaum. They rededicated themselves to following Him from that point forward, after the demonstration of His power in the miraculous catch of fish. The details of this event are recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and were covered in Section 12 of these seminar lessons under the heading "The Final Selection of the Twelve."

These four then remained with Him as He spent some time in Capernaum preaching and performing mighty works among the people.

The Sabbath which followed the calling of the four disciples from their lake-side tasks was a memorable one. Both Mark (1:21-28), and Luke (4:31-37), record the events of that day, but it is Mark who establishes the chronological order, saying that they went into the Synagogue to preach on the Sabbath immediately following the miraculous catch of fish. This appears to have been the only synagogue in Capernaum.

His open-air teaching and His miracles in recent days, had obviously made the people eager to hear more. Synagogue preaching throughout Galilee then became the Lord's policy for a while to come. (Luke 4:44)

As these eager Galileans listened to Jesus in the more formal style of the Synagogue, it became obvious that His manner of teaching was drastically different than the Scribes. Rather than quote the opinions and pronouncements of celebrated teachers of former days, He spoke with authority and delivered His own message. (Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32)

There was in the assembly, gathered before Him, a man who had been afflicted with a recurring mental illness. He must have been normal enough as Jesus began to speak, otherwise, of course, care would have been taken to exclude him from the Synagogue.

Even as the people were marveling at what they heard from Jesus and how it was said, the man's lunacy suddenly asserted itself once again. The words of grace had been too much for his tortured spirit. His voice rang through the building:

“What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - - - the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:24

Many of the Old Testament prophecies spoke of the coming of the Messiah from God. In addition to the blessings of the Messiah, these prophecies spoke of judgement. Malachi refers to the “great and terrible day of the Lord.” This man referred to Nazareth. It was in Nazareth that Jesus enraged the men of the Synagogue when He spoke to them of their faithlessness. The fame of Jesus had spread throughout the whole area. Knowledge of that confrontation would have reached Capernaum. The Scripture from Isaiah that Jesus had chosen to read in Nazareth was the one that referred to “the day of vengeance of our God.” (Isaiah 61:2)

Realizing that Jesus was, indeed, the promised One, his sick mind could not contain the confused jumble of fact and rumour. To him, this Holy One of God was there to devastate Galilee.

As everyone watched, no doubt in anxious embarrassment, Jesus silenced the insane shouts with a word:

“...Be quiet, and come out of him!” Mark 1:25; Luke 4:35

The command penetrated into the confused brain. It produced a terrible conflict, the effects of which the horrified watchers beheld in the writhing form at their feet. Then with a final cry, it was over. The man lay still. The demoniac strength had evaporated. The power of Christ prevailed.

If the teaching of Jesus had amazed the people, this supreme mastery over evil spirits awoke in them something that was entirely new. Influenced by the mythology of Greek Culture, which in some cases bore a close relationship to Roman pagan beliefs, the Jews had long been exposed to the concept of malignant spirits. Out of this came a common belief that disease was the result of indwelling demons, and in the case of mental disorders, epileptic fits, and other similar derangements, one can sympathize with the bewilderment which occasioned such a belief.

A person so afflicted was accepted philosophically, and few entertained a hope of cure, in spite of the spectacular efforts of people at that time.

Jesus had just stirred the people to their depths with words which both amazed and charmed them. That He should follow this by bringing sanity and peace to this madman brought forth indescribable emotions. Mark records, "and immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee." (Mark 1:28)

Demons

There is no reference to supernatural, malignant spirits or powers taking over peoples' minds or bodies in the Old Testament. In the King James' version of the New Testament, the Greek word, "daimonion," has been incorrectly translated as "devils". This has been corrected in most later versions to read "demons."

But what are the "demons" as used in the New Testament? We find from history and Greek mythology, that the pagans believed them to be human departed spirits raised to the rank of gods, and supposedly entering living people causing certain brain disorders, such as madness, hearing and speech impairment, etc.

Medical knowledge had not progressed then as it has today, to explain many of the reasons for these ailments. We have an illustration of this in our word "lunatic" which originated in the idea that madness was the result of the moon's influence, but which is now known not to be the case, although the word 'lunatic' is still commonly used.

The descriptions given of the healings performed in the New Testament are complete and final.

*"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. - - - and Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once."
Matthew 17: 15-18*

*"Then there was brought to Him a demon possessed man, who was blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw."
Matthew 12:22*

Regardless of the form in which these ailments are expressed, which was in keeping with the medical understanding of the people of the day, the supremacy of Christ over all

kinds of afflictions and infirmities is the message that is being taught. It was the message being provided to those who witnessed these miracles, in order to authenticate Jesus' position as the Son of God, and that He was vested with His Father's power.

Christ does not say anything after the healing to warn people how to avoid being "possessed" again. He was simply showing that God was far more powerful than anything that man can dream up.

Peter's Mother-In-Law

The sensational story of what had happened in the Synagogue erupted through the town and into all the surrounding countryside. Everybody was talking about Jesus of Nazareth. The "year of popularity" had begun.

Jesus left the Synagogue with His four disciples and went to Peter's house. This is recorded in all the Gospels but John. (Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38, 39) Peter was a married man, and lived in a house with his wife and mother-in-law, and shared with his brother Andrew. But Jesus could not be welcomed by the usual hospitality on that Sabbath. Peter's mother-in-law was prostrated with "a great fever," and they requested Jesus' help on her behalf.

According to one historical authority, this expression was used by contemporaries to describe what was, judging from the symptoms, typhoid fever. The fever was most acute, and (Luke's Greek seemed to imply), was continuing, without showing any sign of abating. In a moment, the whole scene was transformed. Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand and the fever left her. Within minutes, the bed lay empty, and the stricken woman was busily preparing a meal for them.

It is interesting to note that Matthew and Mark simply say that the fever left her - she was cured. Luke, who was a physician, in describing this cure, says that Jesus "rebuked the fever." This is the same word that Mark used to describe Jesus' cure of the deaf and dumb man, in front of a crowd:

"...He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, you deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him..." Mark 9:25

Further Miracles

The Lord's reputation as a miracle worker and a healer spread rapidly throughout Galilee. Crowds flocked to Capernaum and came to the door of Peter's house with their ailing relatives and friends. We can picture the scene as they converged upon the fisherman's house, the cries of pain mingled with the shouts of madmen and the appeals of their guardians. Mark describes it as if "the whole city had gathered at the door." (Mark 1:33)

We are told that Jesus merely laid His hands on each of them and they were healed. (Luke 4:40)

Matthew's description of that day provides us with a prophetic echo and a symbolic foreshadowing:

“And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the Prophet might be fulfilled saying, He Himself took away our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.” Matthew 8:16,17

In this brief description we are provided with a foreshadowing of Jesus' final work in healing our spirits of the evil that is in them and the curing of our sinful human nature, as represented in the sickness and infirmities of those who came to Him.

The Old Testament reference takes us to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4, which speaks of Jesus' crucifixion resulting in the ultimate curing of our sinful natures:

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.”

Refreshment in His Father

All this placed tremendous strain upon the Lord, and it was late when He eventually sank into an exhausted sleep. But very early next morning, long before daylight, He went out to seek solitude, so vital for His daily meditation and communion with His Father in prayer. (Mark 1:35)

Christ's habit of frequently seeking quiet communion with God is a habit we should cultivate. If He found it so necessary, how much more necessary it is for those who would follow Him. He knew that strength gained from prayer to the Father, long before the day commenced, was a continuing strength throughout that whole day.

When they awoke, and found Jesus missing, Simon and his companions hunted for Him. When they found Him, they told Him that everyone was still looking for Him. But the time had come in the Master's plans to move on:

“...Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for.” Mark 1:38

Refreshed in spirit, and assured of God's continued blessing, He preached in all the Synagogues in Galilee, using these official places of worship to reach the people. He taught and healed all who came to Him, even the leper, who, at the Lord's touch, was cleansed. (Mark 1:40-45; compare Lev. 14)

Enthusiastic Reception in Galilee

While the crowds flocked in excitement to hear Jesus and to witness the miracles performed, it is doubtful if many of them heeded His message. They sought Him eagerly for the eloquence of His words, and the power of His touch, but as to the effect of His message upon them personally, He later said: "...if the mighty works which had been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."

He was not deluded by the enthusiasm of the crowds, for He knew what was in the hearts of men.

LESSON FOR US

It is easy to be excited by the Word of God. Many things in it, when presented eloquently with authority, are able to stir us up to a real enthusiasm, and we may eagerly return to hear more.

But it is essential that we take the word personally into our daily lives, and allow it to motivate us and govern our every action. Otherwise:

it may be "more tolerable" in the day of judgment for Sodom than for us! Matthew 11:24

SECTION 15

The Beatitudes

Following His departure from Peter's house, with the four disciples, Jesus continued to travel throughout the area. Matthew, Mark and Luke provide many details regarding this period, which are too extensive for us to consider in an 8-week course. Jesus continued to gather disciples, and His fame spread throughout the region.

Matthew's fourth chapter provides a general description of this preaching through which His teaching and miracles of healing attracted great multitudes from areas in the north of Galilee and Decapolis, and from as far away as Jerusalem, Judea and beyond Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25)

In our lessons for the moment, we are going to jump forward in time to a period at the height of this activity, following the selection of Jesus' 12 Apostles from among the disciples. (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16)

Both Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' teaching immediately following this selection. Luke does so in chapter 6 beginning at verse 17, but it is Matthew who provides the most complete detail. Referring to his description regarding the crowds who now followed Christ, Matthew says:

“And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying,” Matthew 5:1,2

He then proceeds to deliver to them what are generally known as the eight Beatitudes, which provide the portrait of a saint. He outlined the moral qualities of those He would approve as worthy of His Father's kingdom. In this we see an echo of another servant of God, Moses, who was a type of Christ.

Both Jesus and Moses ascended mountains and delivered God's law to His people. Both delivered what we could call “a Sermon on the Mount.” Moses stood as Israel's representative to receive instruction:

“...stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe them in the land which I give them to possess.” Deut. 5: 31

The ultimate aim and intention, on both occasions was the same:

“So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.” Deut. 5:32

Moses was a mediator, who “received the law by the dispensation of Angels.” (Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38, 53)

God’s communication through Jesus was direct. Jesus “opened His mouth” and God’s words came forth. (Hebrews 1:1-4; Acts 3:22, 23)

This fulfilled a prophecy provided through Moses regarding the Messiah who would be eventually provided by God, and who would be a greater Prophet than Moses himself:

“I will raise up a Prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in My name, I myself will require it of him.” Deut. 18:18, 19

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, echoed the sermon of Moses, while fulfilling the prophecy of the Greater Prophet. Moses’ law listed blessings for the obedient, and curses upon the disobedient. (Deut. 28)

Although this teaching was intended primarily for His close disciples, it is evident that a considerable number of others were also present:

“... When Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching;” Matthew 7:28

Although John does not record this early presentation to the disciples in public, he records, in detail, the long private talk of Jesus with the 12 Apostles at the end of His ministry. (John chapters 13-16)

Jesus provides these 8 introductory Beatitudes in a very positive manner. He subsequently provides a grim counterpart in the 8 woes which He finally pronounced upon the “Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” (Matthew 23: 13-29)

The opposition of these evil men was already evident, so that it became necessary eventually for Jesus to include in His teaching explicit warnings against their corrupted philosophy and practices, which had strayed far from God’s word.

The list of blessings provided in the sermon on the Mount presents a picture of the type of character that should be developed in those who follow Christ.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus used examples of this blessing, such as: “blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear;” “blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me;” “blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He comes, shall find so doing” etc.

If we watch for them in our reading of the Gospel, we will find many lessons that we should be applying to ourselves in our life before Christ, if we are to be “happy in Him” and included with those whom He welcomes into His Father’s kingdom.

The Beatitudes

“Beatitude,” is not a word found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word for “blessed.” It is applied to this sermon because it refers to the blessings of those who endeavour to develop the character described by Christ. The word which begins each of the 8 statements in the original Greek means blessed in the sense of being happy. Jesus is describing a heavenly happiness, the happiness of being in favour with God, or “walking with God,” a happiness of the highest kind. (Compare Psalm 1:1,2; Deut. 33:29)

The personality that Jesus describes is essentially His own. He anticipates that His followers will try to follow His character and dedication.

There are 8 Beatitudes, and in the Scriptures, the number 8 is associated with a new beginning, and with circumcision, symbolic of the cutting off of the fleshly instincts. (Genesis 17:9-14; Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; Luke 2:21)

In each one of the 8 Beatitudes, the person of whom Jesus speaks is pronounced “blessed,” or happy, not only because of the prospect set before him regarding the Kingdom of God, noted in the first and last, but also because of the continuing tranquility of mind of those who know and do their Lord’s will.

1. Poor in Spirit - (Matthew 5:3)

We compare this with:

“...But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word.” Isaiah 66:2

Such a mind has chosen the way of God over being consumed with the attractions in the nature of the flesh. One cannot begin to accept the gifts of God while absorbed with achieving the prizes of the world. Human wisdom gives way to “trembling at the Word of God.” At the end of such “poverty,” there is great riches - - - an eternal abiding place in God’s Kingdom.

2. They that Mourn- Matthew 5:4

Such people are linked with the truth of God’s Word. They view the world from God’s position, and they lament a society that either has no interest in, or actively opposes, the things of God. Jesus’ words are an echo of Isaiah 61, where, in verse 3, there is a reference to “mourn in Zion.” They mourn the absence of their Lord, (Matthew 9:15), and they await “the times of refreshing,” referred to in Acts 3:19-21, when Jesus will be once again sent to this earth.

3. The Meek - Matthew 5:5

Such individuals are teachable. Jesus provides us with two very significant Bible echoes here. The first can be found in Psalm 25: 9-14. Quoting only from verse 9:

“The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will He teach His way.”

He ties this in with a similar promise made in another Psalm:

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Psalm 37:11

Meekness and gentleness are quite often looked upon as weakness in our world. But in fact, the true meaning of this quality is to be found only in the strongest of characters.

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Numbers 12:3

This is a quality which requires courage and self-control, not putting our confidence in the way of the flesh, but rejoicing in God’s words and trying to follow its way.

4. Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness - Matthew 5:6

Once again, Jesus provides us with an echo from Isaiah:

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1

A person who is satisfied by the world has no interest in spiritual food. But those Jesus is describing here, have an ongoing longing for righteousness. This longing can only be satisfied in God, in His Word, and in Jesus. Peter came to understand this longing:

“Like new born babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,” 1 Peter 2:2

5. The Merciful - Matthew 5:7

Self-discipline, if we are not careful, can produce a harsh attitude toward the failing of others. We must balance this with “goodness” or “kindness or mercy” as it is shown in God Himself:

“Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.” Romans 11:22

The motive for our mercy comes from the love of God. Once we come to know and realize His loving grace and generosity, and the way in which His mercy flows to us through His Son, it creates within us a responsive love. Love of God finds expression in love of others. We can and must learn to forgive like Him and be merciful. 1 John 4:20

“If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar...”

Someone asked Jesus, “which is the great commandment in the law?” He basically said “Love God and Love People!” Matthew 22:37, 38.

6. Pure in Heart - Matthew 5:8

A reference providing an echo back to Psalm 24 gives us a further insight into the nature of those who will see God:

“...Who may stand in His Holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Thy face...” Psalm 24:3-6

Unless our hearts are pure, our lives cannot be, no matter how much our actions and our words might seem to suggest that it is: Titus 1:15-16

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They confess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.”

Pure means “unmixed.” Gold is only pure when there are no alloys present. In order to purify our hearts, our efforts should be directed towards seeking God’s way rather than pursuing the inclination toward sin in the nature of man. The intention is that we endeavour to reject all forms of evil in our lives, not just some.

Our Heavenly Father knows that this is difficult. If we are to follow Jesus’ instruction, we should be searching our own hearts for evils that we might be harboring, just as God searches them:

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man always according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:9,10,

We can best work toward this by a prayerful and sincere concentration on Jesus who is pure and holy, remembering the love that both Jesus and His Father have extended towards us. Even as we try to make ourselves morally and spiritually like Jesus, we do so with hope in the knowledge that when He returns, we can be perfected in Him and made like Him:

“...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him ...And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2,3

7. Peacemakers - Matthew 5:9

A study of God’s Word on the subject of peace, quickly reveals that peacemakers in God’s sight are not simply those who run around trying to make truces providing peace among other parties. The wisdom book in God’s word gives us an insight into this direction that Jesus is providing:

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” Proverbs 16:32

“Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.” Proverbs 25:28

Before the follower of Christ can make peace within and among others, he must quiet his own restless spirit. Peace is a fruit of the spirit provided to those who truly follow Jesus:

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; ...those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24

James, in his Epistle, says *“wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits.” (James 3:17)*

The opposite is true of those who are controlled by natural fleshly wisdom, who have *“jealousy and selfish ambition in their hearts.” (James 3:14)*

Peace is difficult to maintain and must be pursued or diligently preserved:

“Being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3

“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” Psalm 34:14

8. Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake - Matthew 5:10-12

Jesus has been describing the characteristics of a saint, a “called out one” or “separated one” who endeavors to follow Him as much as possible. The character of such individuals is not attractive to the world in general. Those who reject a true understanding of God and His Son will sometimes reject those who reflect the characteristics of Jesus, just as the world in Israel rejected Jesus Himself. This has been true throughout history, and many examples are found in God’s own word. At times of persecution for faith in God and His word, His hope shines through as a beacon and an ultimate haven of safety:

“Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at His word; your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name’s sake, ...will be put to shame.” Isaiah 66:5

Jesus’ disciples would fellowship His sufferings, and share the impact of hatred and cruelty with Him. The measure of their faith would be the measure of their persecution. Suffering would develop trust and strength of character. They, too, would be made “perfect through suffering.” (Compare Hebrews 2:10; 5:8,9)

We who live in North America have been blessed with the freedom to worship God and follow Jesus without fear of persecution. This has not always been true, nor is it true today, in some areas of the world. We must anticipate the possibility that it may not always be true here.

Jesus knew that such persecution would take place throughout the ages until He once again returned. His true disciples, who endured such persecution, would be rewarded with their position in the Kingdom to be set up at that time.

He, therefore, provides further words of encouragement to be remembered during such times. Matthew records these words in verses 10 and 11 following the declaration of the Beatitudes.

Their persecutions would align them with Jesus and the prophets. This would give them incentive for they would be assured of reward in the Kingdom. Rather than be sad, they had cause to leap for joy. (Compare Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:13, 14; 1 Peter 3:14; Philippians 1:29)

LESSON FOR US

The picture that has been presented to us should not be intimidating, causing us to give up, feeling that it is beyond our feeble efforts to achieve. God knows and understands and forgives this. He is looking for our desire to strive for these characteristics and implant them in our daily lives. Our efforts are the seeds from which He will provide the growth, and which will be ultimately perfected at the time of Jesus’ return.

We are blessed, if, in a time of weakness or temptation, we surrender our hearts to His refining discipline. These are moments when all thoughts of self are gone and we are conscious only of the nearness of the Father. To Jesus this must have been an abiding possession.

Like His disciples that day on the Mount, through God’s word, we have the privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn the manner of person that He would have us become.

SECTION 16

Practical Issues

Having just described the characteristics of the true disciple, Jesus proceeds to outline the practical aspects of the behavior and the morality which spring from such a character. His teaching on this occasion is recorded in both Matthew and Luke. Continuing in his record of the Beatitudes, Luke covers it in chapter 6, verses 24-49. Once again, however, it is Matthew who provides the greatest amount of detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Jesus begins this teaching by using three striking metaphors to demonstrate that those who follow Him have a responsibility to convey His message to others in addition to living a life in Him.

The Metaphors - Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world; ...a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” Matthew 5:13,14

Salt gives flavor to food and, far more important, it saves it from corruption. Such is the vocation of a true disciple. But this is possible only of a disciple who shows evidence of a true calling in Jesus. A call to repentance on the behalf of Jesus must show evidence of change within the person presenting that call. If we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but deny this in our conduct, our presentation of God’s word will not guide others away from corruption. We will only bring shame upon the name of Jesus. Our power for harm will be greater than our power for good.

But while mingling with the world and saving it from corruption, they must also live above it. They are as lamps shining from a height spreading radiance far and wide. As a lamp illuminates the blackness, so they must seek out the dark environment where the Gospel of love can be preached.

These metaphors complement the Beatitudes. Salt that is good inevitably produces a wholesome and saving influence. Light which is not hidden cannot do anything but dispel darkness. So disciples who show the qualities that Jesus has described become worthy of Jesus who sent them.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. It may be welcomed as a haven of rest by a weary traveler. A person who claims to be a follower of Christ cannot be ignored. He or she stands exposed to the public gaze for good or ill. In all ages, people will assess Christ, not so much by His precepts, but by the lives of men and women they see and know, who profess to be His followers.

Christ and the Law of Moses - Matthew 5:17-20

Moses' law judged outward acts, but Christ's law judged the thoughts from which the acts sprang. The moral and spiritual standard of life was set out in the law. Many of those who heard Jesus thought that He spoke with an authority which set aside the law. But Jesus now reassured them in the clearest terms:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” Matthew 5:17

Moses' law called for punishment upon the sinner. It is in the mind that the seeds of sin are sown and developed. If they are rooted out, acts of sin do not find expression. It is to illustrate this principle that Jesus frequently contrasts His law with the law of Moses. But the principles of behavior involved in the law of Moses remained intact.

The Scribes and Pharisees kept the law by formal observance for their own glorification. But in so doing they lacked any concept of righteousness and completely disregarded the condition of the heart. This would exclude them from the Kingdom despite all their formal observation and their declarations of belief in God. Jesus then went on to provide examples that would illustrate the spirit of the law in Moses which was to be applied to daily conduct.

Anger Forbidden - Matthew 5:21-24

Moses' law judged the murderer. Jesus condemned anger which He saw as the cause of murder. If we are to be reconciled to God, we must have a desire to be reconciled with others.

The Nursing of Wrath Forbidden - Matthew 5:25, 26

Jesus exhorts humility and submission where a fault is found in others. Pride and stubbornness could lead to more serious consequences and bring shame. (See also Proverbs 6:1-5; 25:8)

Adultery - Matthew 5:27-32

The very contemplation of adultery potentially leads to the act. To look is to lust, and to lust was to commit adultery in the heart. It is far better not to look. If lust persists, the only barrier to the desire to act is lack of opportunity, but in God's eyes, the desire amounts to the same thing. This principle applies to any act in which our faith and service before God are undermined. Eyes and hands combine to convert desires into deeds. Jesus' lesson is that sin can be avoided by a short sharp battle in the heart. A determined “**not wanted**” to evil thoughts wins the warfare against sin.

The Swearing of Oaths - Matthew 5:33-37

If only those words spoken by oath were considered binding upon a person, what about words without an oath? Was a person in that event freed from his commitment? Of course not! To suggest that words with oaths are more binding than words without oaths is to set a double standard. It is far better for all of our words to be meaningful and binding.

Oaths had come to be considered very lightly, and, therefore, God's very existence was held in question when undertakings were preceded by such oaths as, "as God liveth," were not performed. This was serious:

"But let your statement be, yes, yes, or no, no; and anything beyond these is of evil." Matthew 5:37

Non-Resistance - Matthew 5:38-42

In Christ, the accent is upon the individual, not the nation or the state. The individual is a pilgrim and a traveler until Christ reappears to establish the Kingdom. In the meantime, He commands His followers' conduct toward others.

Jesus counsels non-resistance. His follower is to be generous of heart to all who might ask, not necessarily giving exactly what is asked, but certainly giving what is needed.

The object of non-resistance is to purge one's own bitterness, to take the initiative from the offender and win him to the higher principles of salvation.

The Law of Love - Matthew 5: 43-48

Far from hating enemies, Jesus commands an opposite, positive action:

"To love...bless...do good...pray..."

This is action. This is the way in which right triumphs over evil.

In so acting, Jesus' follower manifests the Father, who causes the sun to rise and sends His rain on the just and unjust. In this way God shows love for all "His" enemies, and desires their salvation. In so doing, He sets a pattern of conduct for His children. (See also Romans 5:8-10; John 3:16)

If love is confined to the family circle, and those who love us, we are no different from unscrupulous Publicans or self-righteous Pharisees! We then reflect no particular likeness to the Father. If we would be like Him, our love must be extended to all.

Hypocrisy - Matthew 6:1-18

The word “alms” in verse 1 of the King James Version is more correctly rendered as “righteousness” in the modern translations. Our righteousness is not to be practiced as a show before others simply to gain honour and respect for ourselves.

The Pharisees were very guilty of this. The examples which Jesus provides were common practices among them, as we learn from other references throughout the Gospels.

He presents examples for His followers which were typical of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy:

- **Public display in alms giving**
- **Praying in conspicuous places**
- **Counterfeit fasting**

In each case He denounces such religion, which is motivated by self-interest and self-acclaim, as being of no avail in attaining a reward of the Father. Such alms, prayers and fasts, were not expressions born of love for God, but for the good opinion of men.

They would receive the applause of those around them, but that is all they would get as a reward for their hypocrisy. It is impossible to serve God, if we are wholly preoccupied with gaining the esteem of others. (Compare Luke 16:15; Jude 16)

In the examples given, Jesus is obviously concerned about the place of prayer in the hearts of all who would follow Him. Already Jesus had taught His disciples this by example. It would be impossible for them to be unaware of His relationship with His Father. They saw clearly an awareness of God and a dependence upon. They had seen Jesus return to them from His sleepless nights on the distant hills, having spent a quiet solitude in communion with His Father. He was thus prepared for the tasks of yet another day.

Faith and the True Riches - Matthew 6:19-31

True worship has been contrasted with hypocrisy, and now true treasure is contrasted with greed. Hypocrisy and greed are twin perils opposing the pursuit of righteousness.

The righteousness of hypocrites is hollow, and so are their riches. Such riches are symbols of this world which will perish with those who set their heart in it. The heart will turn as surely as the needle of a compass to what we truly value.

Jesus sums up His instructions against anxiety over riches by declaring that if God is master, He can be trusted to supply all needs. Live each day in Him without worry about the next. There are sufficient temptations to be overcome in any one day, that we do not have time to worry about the next day.

Judgment - Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus presents a vivid picture of a man, all but blinded by an obstruction in his eye. He is absorbed with the task of removing the smallest splinter from his brother's eye. Such a comparison becomes the key to understanding of Jesus' parable regarding the Pharisee and the Publican or Tax Gatherer. (Luke 18:9-14) The picture of this man with a log sticking out of his eye while complaining about a speck in another person's eye, might provoke a smile, but it is vivid enough that the lesson it provides should not be forgotten:

“For in the way you judge, you will be judged;...” Matthew 7:2

There can be no greater discouragement to the tendency to pass judgment upon others than this realization. Those who are too conscious of their own virtues, and too obsessed with the failings of others, tend to be fault finding and intolerant.

Rejection of Jesus - Matthew 7:6

Sadly, some individuals will never appreciate the salvation and hope that is offered to them through Jesus Christ. The disciples were, therefore, given advice that prevails unto this day. They were not to try to force salvation upon the unwilling and resentful.

The Heavenly Father's Gift - A Child's Response - Mat. 7:7-12

The disciple of Jesus, is encouraged to persist in approaching our Father in prayer, - - - to ask, to seek, and to knock. If persistence prevails even over evil men, says Jesus, then:

“...How much more shall your Father who is in Heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” Matthew 7:11

Human stubbornness can be worn down. How much more then is our gracious and loving Heavenly Father ready to respond to our pleas. Our response to our Father's gracious care and concern, should be the application of what we know as the “Golden Rule”:

*“Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them...”
Matthew 7:12*

This is the essential message of the law and the prophets. On this note Jesus completed the description of the principles of the Kingdom He had come to proclaim. He had shown the 12 (and all others who listened) the blessings that were associated with it both in this life and also in that which is to come. He had set forth the price that it demanded of them in self-control, humility, and self-sacrifice. For this very reason most people find it unattractive and would prefer selfish pleasures and temporary rewards. Only the few would walk the narrow path of life and accept the invitation to enter the Kingdom at the narrow gate.

In concluding His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds His listeners of the two alternatives that are open to all those who hear His words.

Two Ways - Matthew 7:13, 14

Like Moses, Jesus sets before His disciples two ways and the fact that they would have to make a choice. In this He provides an echo of the vivid description Moses provided regarding these choices. (Deut. 30:15-20) God's Word establishes that there is no middle path, and that the correct way has not been popular among mankind.

Two Trees - Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus then offered His disciples sound advice to guide them in discerning between true and false Religious Leaders. This guidance was valid in the first century and today.

He says that two classes of men would offer their services. To discern the true from the deceitful, the disciple would have to examine the fruit of both, for like a tree, the fruit is true to its kind. (Gen. 1:12) Fruit is seen in words and works. If the words were not in accordance with God's word, and their works were not modeled after the example of Christ, they could safely be rejected. (Compare Isaiah 8:20; 1 Peter 2:21)

Two Builders - Matthew 7:24-27

The word divides humanity into the wise and into the foolish. Those who absorb the word and act upon it are building on a solid foundation:

"For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" 1 Cor. 3:11

Anyone who hears Jesus' words and rejects them will fall in the time of storm and in the time of judgment. (Compare 2 Tim. 2:15)

LESSON FOR US

In outlining the morality of the Kingdom, Jesus specified the qualities that will characterize those who through grace are accepted into His Father's Kingdom. At the same time He makes it clear that He will be the judge of all who seek to enter the Kingdom.

As we become familiar with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and come to know and love its passages, it demands an answer to the question: Are we doers of the word?

If we apply the lessons of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to our lives, and follow His instructions regarding seeking salvation in Him, we can live in hope of hearing Him declare a further and final blessing upon us:

"...Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matthew 25:34

SECTION 17

Second Passover

In our lessons we will now go back in time a little and pick up the record from John's Gospel, which has been silent on the events in Jesus' life since the second miracle in Cana was performed. He had healed the son of the Royal Official who came from Capernaum to make his appeal to Jesus.

Beginning in chapter 5, he now describes the events of a visit to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast of the Jews. This was probably the Passover, and was, therefore, the second of the four Passovers at Jerusalem that Christ attended during His ministry. (Compare John 2:13; 6:4; 13:1) It is interesting to note that following this visit to Jerusalem and the Temple, John excludes all other events in Jesus' life until the third Passover.

On the occasion of His first Passover visit, Jesus had cleansed the Temple of its traders. The gap between Jesus and the Jews of Jerusalem widened as time passed. They viewed Him with growing hatred. The event that took place during this visit drove the wedge of division even more deeply between them. They sought His death even more. (John 5:18)

John is the only Gospel writer to record the details of this visit to Jerusalem, which occurred prior to the Sermon on the Mount near Capernaum. This selective recording of events by John relates to the fact that he is providing a sequence eight specific and special miracles. These miracles were far more important than mere displays of Divine power. They were incidents that taught profound Spiritual lessons. For this reason, John always used a Greek word meaning "sign" when referring to them. When studying any of these signs recorded by John, we should always be looking for a very deep meaning associated with them as they relate to salvation and the Word of Light which Jesus was declaring.

Jesus approached the Temple at the time of Passover. We might picture the Temple glittering in the sunshine, in which the Rabbis taught endless arguments or theories regarding God's Word, based on the Greek process of reasoning and philosophy. The Priests impersonally accepted the sacrifices. The Sadducees received one another with formal dignity. But God was not in their thoughts, and His Glory had departed from their midst, as was revealed in all their encounters with the Son of God.

Bethesda - John 5:2

John immediately begins to describe the event which served as the focal point of Jesus' activity at the Temple and His subsequent confrontation with the Jewish leaders.

Bethesda means “house of mercy.” It was near the Sheep Gate, through which animals for sacrifice were brought into the Temple area. It had 5 porches. In Scripture, the number 5 often represents grace or mercy. (Compare Genesis 43:34; 45:22) Every point associated with this incident at the Pool of Bethesda was designed to remind us of the love of God, His desire to extend mercy, and His desire to heal perishing mankind.

The Tradition - John 5:3, 4

Bethesda was truly a pathetic scene, its five porches containing a great multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame and withered. It is symbolic of the fact that in the house of mercy was found a true reflection of ailing mankind, all of whom come inevitably to the weakness of decay and death.

Some translations of the Bible insert “it was said” in verse 4, thus suggesting that what follows is a tradition which had grown up among the people. That the water in the pool was ‘troubled’ or ‘moved’ by supernatural power that caused ‘healing’. It is more likely that the pool had an intermittent spring containing medicinal properties which were most effective after a movement of the water.

Extensive debate over whether this was merely a tradition, or was, indeed, some form of miraculous activity in the part of an Angel of God, dilutes the significance of what John is endeavoring to present in recording this sign of Jesus. It is this sign to which our attention should be directed.

Healing the Impotent Man - John 5:5-9

In the presentation of these signs, which might almost be considered enacted parables, the various points that John mentions should be looked at for possible significance. Not only was the location significant, but the man to be healed was. He is described as “a certain man...who had been 38 years in his sickness.”

The reference to such a specific age as 38 immediately provides us with an echo from the Old Testament. In the second year of their exodus from Egypt, the nation of Israel was condemned to wander for a total of 40 years in the wilderness. (Numbers 14:33,34) This meant that they were to wander another 38 years. (Deut. 2:14)

The crippled man was therefore a clear symbol for the nation of Israel. Relying on superstition and tradition to ‘save’, when Jesus was the only real hope!

It was part of Israel’s history that Joshua, not Moses, led Israel into its inheritance in the land. Moses failed to honour God at one point before the people, and was condemned to die in sight of the land, but outside of it. (Deut. 32:48-52; 34:4, 5) Israel, having lost its leader, was unable to enter the land. God in His mercy, gave them another leader, Joshua, or as in Greek, “Jesus.” (Compare Acts 7:45; Hebrews 4:8)

Now the centuries had rolled by. A man lay helpless beside a pool which represented God’s desire to help him. Those claiming authority from Moses were more intent on

honoring themselves then Moses had ever been. They couldn't help him, and he could not help himself. If help was to come, it would have to come from a Joshua (Jesus).

The impotent man was the very embodiment of the nation of Israel in its present despair. He was not absolutely helpless. He was able to crawl slowly and painfully toward the pool when its waters bubbled, but he was always too late. Jesus came to him, and observing his condition, asked him: *"Do you wish to get well?" (John 5:6)*

In our Lord's view, there must be first a desire to be made whole before we can be healed. The cripple replied, saying in effect that he was unable to help himself. He acknowledged that if he was going to be healed, it would have to be as a result of the strength of another.

At once the command was given: *"...Arise, take up your pallet, and walk." John 5:8* Immediately the man became well and took up his pallet and began to walk.

It was an act of obedience performed in faith - - - the basic requirement for salvation following our own acknowledgment of sin and the realization that we cannot save ourselves from the results of our sin. We must be led out of this state through Jesus.

Israel, imprisoned for 38 years in the wilderness, had exchanged weariness for rest in the promised land. The impotent man, whose "bed" was toil for 38 years, now gained "rest" from his burden. Each was led to freedom by a Joshua or Jesus.

This act was performed in the house of mercy at the Temple. Under the Mosaic law animals were sacrificed as part of the ritual regarding forgiveness of sin. Jesus who was to be the ultimate sacrifice, performed this sign near the Sheep Gate, through which countless animals had been brought into the Temple area for sacrifice. The pool and its healing powers might well be a figure of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The five porches suggest immediately the five books of the Law.

The significance of this "sign" can be directly related to the only way in which God's children were going to escape the darkness of sin which had settled over their nation. It foreshadows the only way in which we can escape the darkness of our sin.

The Sabbath - John 5:10-16

The city was thronged with people at the time and Jesus slipped away into the multitude. (John 5:13)

The man went on his way carrying his bed. The Jews stopped him and charged him with violating the law of the Sabbath. He responded that he had been commanded to do so by the One who had cured him, whose identity was unknown to him.

Once again, we see a significance as the Jewish people did not know their Messiah when He came to them.

The cured man went his way to the Temple, where Jesus once again found him, and warned him against further sin:

“...Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may befall you.” John 5:14

Jesus was in effect reminding him that disease was in the world because of sin and warning him of the need to turn away from sin. This was the significance of a statement that might otherwise seem unreasonable. Jesus knows that we will sin following our acceptance of Him. We, therefore, must recognize the symbolic reference in His words.

The man then went joyfully to the Jewish rulers identifying the One who had performed this great wonder. He was probably shocked to see that they turned on Jesus, persecuting Him and seeking His death. (John 5:16-18)

Their initial complaint was that He had performed this work on the Sabbath day. Israel had been told to remember to keep the Sabbath day as Holy. (Exodus 20:10) On this day, they were to desist from pursuing selfish activities. (Exodus 35:2,3; Compare Jeremiah 17:21, 22)

Their view of Sabbath keeping had become distorted. It was hedged in by many traditions which Jesus Himself condemned as hypocritical. (Mark 7:8-13) In making this condemnation, Jesus drew upon an echo from the Prophet Isaiah. (29:13) Mark quoted this echo:

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” Mark 7:6, 7

Jesus' indictment was that they had so perverted the worship of His Father that they completely missed the idea that God wanted to teach. On that day at the Temple, therefore, all they could see on the Sabbath was a man carrying a bed. Their prejudice blinded them to the miracle of healing, and all that it meant in the coming of the Messiah.

If these Jewish leaders had reflected on the matter, they would have understood that the test and the spirit of the Sabbath law related to whether one's works were God-centered or self-centered. Its institution was not aimed at stopping all labor, only that which was designed for self-satisfaction. This pointed forward to a time when all men would find rest in God. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author elaborated on this meaning of the Sabbath rest and the foreshadow that had been provided in the law. (Hebrews 4:4-11)

He compared the 1,000-year reign of Christ to a Sabbath rest. He taught that the Sabbath law was not given to teach that we should be selfish 6 days, and selfless one day each week. It was given to teach us that we should continually turn away from what is selfish and seek our comfort in God. To all the laboring and heavy laden, Christ promised “rest” if they would but come to Him. To take up His yoke, as one does by baptism and by a consecrated life, is to find “rest unto our souls,” the significance which the Sabbath law was instituted to present. (Compare Matthew 11:28-30)

A Charge of Blasphemy - John 5:18-30

People blinded by self-interest, as these Jews were, are unable to accept instructions let alone reproof. Jesus' words stirred no spark of repentance in them, only a deep implacable hatred. In talking with them, Jesus had said that God was His Father. In their minds, this made Him equal with God and that was blasphemy. In their blindness the significance as such Scriptures as Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 9:6 probably never occurred to them.

Although He was the Son of God, and was endowed with all His Father's power, and, therefore, manifested His presence to the world, Jesus could not leave unchallenged the statement of these corrupt men that He was claiming to be equal with God. His respect for His Father's position and glory was too great to permit this. In the ensuing discourse with these men, He provided enough statements to make it clear that He made no claims to this position:

Verse 19: "...The Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; ..."

Verse 20: "...The Father...shows Him all things that He Himself is doing;"

Verse 22: "...The Father...has given all judgment to the Son"

Verse 23: "...The Father, who sent Him."

Verses 26, 27: "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; And He gave Him authority to execute judgment..."

Verse 30: "I can do nothing on my own initiative...I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

Verse 36: "...The Father has sent Me"

Verse 37: "...The Father who sent Me..."

All these expressions, either explicitly, or by clear implication, deny that the Son is co-equal with His Father. Instead, they assert His constant and complete dependence on the Father. And so it remained throughout the New Testament teaching.

Over 300 years later, in the fourth century, religious leaders once again claimed that Christ was co-equal with God, and was in fact God. Out of their reasoning came the concept that God was a trinity, a concept that has been proclaimed by millions throughout the centuries since that time.

And yet even the Church leaders who proclaim it, in tracing the history of the Holy Trinity acknowledge that it is not a Bible doctrine.

The Encyclopedia International states that the Trinity did not form part of the Apostles' preaching, as it was recorded in the New Testament. The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible. Mosheim, in "The History of the Church," and, Gibbon, in "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," both acknowledge this.

One edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica states: "The propositions constitutive of the dogma of the trinity were not drawn directly from the New Testament, and could not be expressed in New Testament terms. They were the products of reason, speculating on a revelation to faith...they were only formed through centuries of effort, only elaborated by the aid of the conceptions, and formulated in the terms of Greek and Roman Metaphysics."

The word was first used in a work by Bishop Theophilus of Syria, in the latter half of the second century. In coining the word, however, he did not relate it to a co-equality of Christ, but rather a theory regarding the attributes of God. To clarify this, he stated expressly, "the true God (that is the Father) is alone to be worshipped."

It was not until the fourth century, that the doctrine of the trinity as we know it today was introduced. It caused heated controversy at the time, for many still adhered to the teaching of the one God. Gradually the new doctrine prevailed, and ultimately became accepted as basic Christian teaching.

Throughout that period, and in subsequent years, many theologians were frank enough to admit that the doctrine is not taught in the Bible, and that it cannot be logically explained. They acknowledge that the teaching is incomprehensible, and that inherently it provides a contradiction in terms relative to God, His Spirit and Christ.

One theologian in defending the Holy Trinity, as a doctrine, and in tracing its roots, acknowledged that the faith and belief of Christians in the first century was summed up by Paul when he wrote "there is one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." (Ephesians 4:6)

This Professor of Theology, (F.J. Wilkin, M.A., D.D.,) further states that "gradually some addition or modification of this Creed was found necessary."

Through philosophy and reasoning some Church leaders had slowly developed the concept that Jesus Christ was God and, later, that the Holy Spirit was God. They were compelled to relate these convictions to their belief in the unity of God. He states that during many years, the problem was discussed and many explanations were attempted. One advanced by Sabellius, that became popular, was that Christ and the Holy Spirit were successive manifestations of the Supreme Being. Finally, however, the belief prevailed that the words Father, Son, Spirit, declared eternal distinctions of the God-Head - - - in other words, that Christ and the Holy Spirit were co-eternal and co-equal with the Father.

Thus, was born a new doctrine based on humanist concept and popular acceptance. While not found in the Bible, it is perhaps worth considering that the concept of the Trinity is found in the Pagan Mythology of Rome, Greece, Babylon and Egypt.

Even if one does not accept the concept of the “Holy Trinity,” feeling that it is unscriptural, we must never make the mistake of viewing Jesus as nothing more than a mere man. There must be something more than “mere man” in One who could, under such provocations as He endured, exhibit the wonderful restraint, the beautiful character and the sinless life that the Lord revealed. That “something more” is revealed in the manner of His birth, and in the way in which He was anointed with the Holy Spirit “without measure” at his baptism. (John 3:34)

Paul taught that “God was in Christ” reconciling the world unto Himself. (2 Cor. 5:19) Jesus was, indeed, the manifestation of God, His Father, as Jesus Himself testified. (John 7:16; 5:23) In His human nature He was the same as all mankind, but in the manner of His birth and character He was Divine. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus Christ is indeed, the Son of God, and anyone who denies His Divine origins and His position as the One in whom God has vested His own authority, power and judgment, does so at his own peril:

“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:40

Five Witnesses - John 5:30-47

To secure conviction against a man, as the Jews now desired to convict and kill Jesus, they required “two or three witnesses.” (Deut. 19:15)

Just as there were five porches at Bethesda (the house of mercy), so there were five witnesses testifying to the mercy that God was extending through His Son to all who would come. Jesus proceeds to outline the witnesses of His authority before His accusers in the Temple. They were:

- **John the Baptist, whom they had consulted, and who told them of Christ.**
- **The works, or the miracles, that Jesus was doing and would yet do - a man cannot do miracles except by the Father’s power.**
- **The Father Himself, whose voice from Heaven had testified of Him. (Compare Matthew 3:17)**
- **The Scriptures as a whole, which bore testimony concerning Him.**
- **Finally, Moses, on whom the Jews relied for authority, who had written concerning the Son. (Compare Deut. 18:18, 19)**

As Jesus explained it, He Himself, could do nothing on His own initiative. (Verse 30) One must abandon the quest for one’s own glory and seek for the glory of God. This requires a man to humble himself under God’s mighty hand. (Verse 41, 42)

There was on the part of the Jews, as Jesus explained it, a hard-hearted rejection of the humbling power of God's Word. Their sin was their love of the praise of men above the praise of God. Because of this, the Divine attitude, outgoing and selfless, was lost to them and the rejection of Jesus followed as a matter of course.

“Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; ...” John 5:45

He did not need to accuse them. Moses and the law had already done so.

LESSON FOR US

A powerful warning is found in the final words of this Passover visit recorded by John:

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me...” John 5:46

From this we learn that it is possible to study God's Word, but not be moved by it personally. In the world today, we see signs, such as Israel's revival, reminiscent in some ways of the healing of the impotent man. As we look to this and all the other signs prevalent in world conditions, there is a danger that we might harden our hearts, and be as unmoved as the Jews were at the hand of God in their midst.

Like the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, we must readily acknowledge that we can do nothing to heal ourselves, and we must turn in loving obedience to the mighty God of Israel, by whose power we will be delivered in due time through Jesus Christ our Lord:

*“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”
John 12:*

