

THY KINGDOM COME

5. The Other Teachings of Jesus

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**A Teaching Commentary
of the New Testament**

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1. Other Teachings Regarding Salvation, Judgment, and the Kingdom of God

Thus far we have considered Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God strictly through the window of the parables. Jesus did a great deal of other teaching on the Kingdom. In fact, just about everything he did or said was related to the Kingdom message.

That is an important point – DID or said. When Jesus told people about the Kingdom of God, it was not some theological hypothesis. It was a demonstrable reality in his life. He told people about the power of God and then he showed them the power of God. He told people that God could heal the sick and then he showed them God healing the sick. He told them that God had defeated the powers of darkness and then he showed them this by casting out demons. He told them that God could work miracles and then he showed them God working miracles. And then he told us to go and do likewise.

Probably the biggest reason that the Kingdom message today does not impact people like it did in the first century is because we have turned it into a theological hypothesis. Most churches today talk about what God probably could do if he really wanted to do but there is no demonstration of the power to accompany the watered-down message. The miracle is that in spite of the way we have crippled the message, people still respond!

The point of this is that when Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, multiplied the loaves, walked on the water, raised the dead, etc., he was teaching on the Kingdom of God. He was showing the citizens of the Kingdom what they had the authority and the power to do – now! So if you want a complete view of the Kingdom teachings that Jesus gave while on earth, read the four gospels. If you want God's complete teachings on the Kingdom, read the whole Bible.

The gospels do record some other important verbal teachings of Jesus on the Kingdom. We will consider some of those now.

Matthew 10:17-23 says:

Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

The Kingdom of God will advance, but it will not happen in a peaceful manner. The enemy does not want it to happen. He will stir up whomever he can to oppose those who are leading the Kingdom charge. The faithful will find themselves in times and places of distress. God will protect, defend and shield them, however. This may mean protecting their souls through the death of their flesh.

When you sign up for citizenship in the Kingdom, do not necessarily expect your life to get easy. But expect your life to have the peace and power of God.

The Kingdom of God advances and it advances violently.

Matthew 18:1-4 says:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Greatness in the Kingdom of God is achieved through humility and submission. God is to be approached in childlike innocence.

John 3:3-8 says:

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"Born again" is a term that gets tossed about quite a bit in Christian circles, but what does it mean? First of all, when Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again, he was informing him that his physical birth and his heritage as a Jew were not sufficient to warrant Kingdom citizenship. There are many people today who believe that since they were baptized as infants and raised in a "Christian" home then they are right with God. The fact is that a person's spiritual welfare is not a function of his parent's relationship with God.

Being reborn implies a birth of the spirit which occurs subsequent to physical birth. In the fall, man lost the ability to commune with God face-to-face. It takes a quickening of the spirit to restore the ability to enjoy that sort of communion. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit of God is the agent who can give this birth to our spirits.

Citizens of the Kingdom gain admission through spiritual rebirth.

John 3:16-21 says:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be

exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

John 3:16 is one of the best-known verses in the Bible, but John 3:17-18 are probably more profound.

Often I hear people say “Surely God would not send good Jews or Muslims or whatever to hell just because they were not Christians.” That is a correct statement. It also shows a total misunderstanding of the human condition.

Romans 3:10 says “There is no one righteous, not even one.” Romans 3:23 says “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” God does not judge anyone for being a Jew or a Muslim or whatever. He judges because of sin. ALL have sinned. Everyone stands condemned.

Jesus did not come to condemn; we already brought that on ourselves. He came to rescue from condemnation. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.

God did not send Mohammed as a sacrifice for sin. God did not send Buddha as a sacrifice for sin. For God so loved the world that he gave his ONE AND ONLY Son. He did not send a team.

Accepting Jesus can be a bit scary, because it means walking into the light. All of your dirt is plainly visible before God. And it has to be that way, because the whole point of coming to Jesus is to let him clean all of that dirt and grime off of you. Many will shy away from that, however, because they do not want to be exposed. He gives us a choice. Your choice has eternal consequences.

John 14:1-6 says:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is coming back for those who are his own.

Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father. As pointed out above, Jesus is not one of a team of ascended masters. He is not one of the great prophets. He was not simply a powerful teacher. John 14:6 does not give us the option to define Jesus in any of these ways. He is either who he said he was or he is a liar. You are either for him or you are against him. You choose. Your choice has eternal consequences.

2. A Summary of The Teachings of Jesus on Salvation, Judgment, and the Kingdom of God

As stated before, Jesus' entire life was an object lesson on the Kingdom of God. We have only hit the high points. We have seen:

- “Good soil” is the one who hears the message, receives it, and lets it bring benefit in his life. The evidence of the good soil was the fruit.
- There are impostors in the Kingdom of God. Those who are legitimate sons of the Kingdom produce fruit. They bow before the King. Those who are sons of darkness do not produce fruit and their spirits do not bow before the King. Before harvest time approaches, however, it is difficult to tell them apart.
- From a small beginning, the Kingdom of God would fill the earth. Satan would try to disrupt it and distract the citizens of the Kingdom.
- Jesus is calling upon the citizens of the Kingdom of God to pay attention to the sin – the yeast – in their midst and to deal with it before it permeates the entire lump.
- The Kingdom of God is a treasure that overshadows anything else the world can offer.
- Citizenship in the Kingdom is purchased at the expense of all other treasures.
- A judgment day is coming. God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous will dwell with him. The unrighteous will be cast into eternal punishment, a place described as a fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It will not be pleasant.
- God grows his Kingdom as he will.
- Citizens in the Kingdom will be rewarded at the discretion of the King.
- Citizenship in the Kingdom of God is not obtained by hollow promises, but by a lifestyle of obedience.
- God sent his Son to beckon the Jews to become citizens of the Kingdom. The Jews killed the Son. Thus the invitation has been extended to the Gentiles to become Kingdom citizens.
- Whether or not you love the King determines whether or not you become a Kingdom citizen. How you administer Kingdom resources determines what sort of Kingdom resources you will be given to administer.
- Kingdom of God was not an extension of the traditions of men. It supplants traditions of men.
- Leaders in the Kingdom must be submitted to the authority of the King. All citizens in the Kingdom should have lives built on the sure foundation of his truth.
- Citizens of the Kingdom should be submitted in service both to God and to neighbor.
- Citizens of the Kingdom should be humbled servants.
- Kingdom citizens should weigh the cost. There is a price to be paid for citizenship.
- The Kingdom is built of those who were lost. There is joy in heaven over every new citizen.
- Kingdom citizens make choices that have eternal significance rather than seeking gratification now.
- Citizens of the Kingdom approach the King on bended knee. It is the grace of the King that lifts them up.
- God sees our actions, but he knows our hearts. He is not impressed with a phony show of humility. Salvation is for those who are genuinely repentant. Judgment is for those who harbor sin.
- God beckons everyone to the feast. The only ones who get to participate, however, are those who come on his terms.
- For each of us, that day is coming when we receive judgment. What God judges is the heart, but that means that indirectly he is judging where our treasures have been.
- The day is coming when the vineyard will be cleaned and the fruitless vines purged. You get to choose whether or not you will be fruitful. Your choice has eternal consequences.

- You cannot serve both God and money. You submit to one or the other, but you cannot submit to both. Your choice has eternal consequences.
- The Kingdom of God advances and it advances violently.
- Greatness in the Kingdom of God is achieved through humility and submission. God is to be approached in childlike innocence.
- Citizens of the Kingdom gain admission through spiritual rebirth.
- Jesus did not come to condemn; we already brought that on ourselves. He came to rescue from condemnation. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.
- Jesus is coming back for those who are his own.

The Kingdom of God is not a theological hypothesis. It is a now reality. Citizenship is available to those who will count the cost, but the day will come for each of us when the choice has already been made. The choice has eternal significance. We will end up in a place of comfort or a place of torment.

Until the end, the Kingdom will advance. It will advance violently. The enemy and those he is able to influence will give opposition. Those who seek to advance the Kingdom will meet resistance and persecution. But the Kingdom will advance. It will advance most effectively when there is proclamation accompanied by demonstration. People need to hear the word and then see that it is not a theological hypothesis, rather the power of God active in the world today.

When Jesus said “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” he meant it.

3. Teachings Regarding the Father

Jesus came to invade the present kingdom with the Kingdom of God. He also came to reveal to us the nature and character of the Father.

Before the fall of man, God walked with his creation in the garden. He interacted freely with these whom he loved. The rebellion interrupted all of that. We tend to think of the effect of the fall on the state of man, but it had a terrible effect on God as well. It separated God from the object of his affection. God created us to have fellowship with him and that fellowship was disrupted by the fall. A holy God cannot dwell in the presence of sin. Ever since the fall, God had been calling out to man and trying to reconcile him to his creator.

For centuries, God had attempted to reveal himself to man. This was done in various ways. Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Romans 1:20 picks up on that theme.

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

The creation itself reveals the nature of the creator. At times, such as in the case of Abraham or Moses, God actually appeared to man to communicate with him or to give him a message for the people. God also revealed himself through his prophets. The Old Testament is a panorama of God’s revelation of himself to man and man’s refusal to respond to the revelation.

So ultimately God sent his Son to take on flesh and bones, to walk among us and to teach us about the Father. The Son, although distinct from the Father, was the perfect image of the

Father. They were united in purpose and character. Jesus, the Son, was perfectly submitted to the Father and he only did and said what the Father told him to do or say.

If you look at everything he did or said, you find that Jesus was teaching us about the Kingdom of God and about the God of the Kingdom. Although the two cannot be separated, some of the teachings seem to be more focused on the Father than on the Kingdom. We shall consider those now.

3.1 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

This is one of the better-known parables, perhaps because it paints such a poignant picture of the relationships between the father and his sons. Many sermons have been preached on this parable and it has many facets which can be explored.

The younger son asked his father to go ahead and give him his inheritance. This was not a common practice. It was an extremely rude and rebellious thing to do. The father had every right to simply disown the son and send him on his way. In the parable, however, the father, in brokenhearted pain, granted the son's request and let his son go. He knew that this was not good for his son, but he would not hold his son against his will. He did not want his son's forced companionship. He wanted his son's love. And so it is with the Father. When we rebel, he brokenheartedly lets us choose to rebel. Even though he knows that these choices are not in our best interest, he lets us choose. He does not want our forced companionship. He wants our love.

So the son left. He went off to a foreign land and engaged in wild living. He probably had a good time for a while. Soon, however, he was out of money, out of food, out of friends, out of luck, and out of hope. He took a job tending pigs, which was an unthinkable profession for a Jew. He was truly hungry and began to imagine what it would be like to be back in his father's house, where there was always plenty to eat.

He had a problem, however. He no longer had any right to be in that house. He had rejected his father relationally. He had consumed his inheritance so he had no right as a son to be there. He was humbled and aware of his unworthiness to return home. But he also knew his father's character. He knew that his father would not want to watch him starve. He thought that he might be able to return home as a servant. He could not see how things could ever be the same as before, but at least as a servant he would have enough to eat.

This is like the experience of most of us. We have left the Father's home in rebellion. We have enjoyed our sin for a season. Eventually, however, we realize how impoverished it leaves us. We hunger and thirst for cleanliness but we have cut ourselves off from the source of cleansing. We realize that we have affronted the Father and that we are unworthy to return. But we know the Father's character and we know that he does not desire for us to starve spiritually. And so we plan to return in humble submission.

And so the son returned home. The parable says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." His father would not have seen him from a long way off if he had not been looking for him. From the day that his son left, the father had longed for his return. We get the impression that he waited expectantly for the day when he would see his son cross the horizon. When he saw him, he did not get indignant and say "Well, I told you so." He did not wait for an apology. He ran. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.

The son did not know quite what to say. More than likely as he walked home, he rehearsed some sort of "I am not worthy..." speech. When his father came to him, he began to deliver that speech. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." His father interrupted him. He was not interested. He told the servants to bring a fine robe for his son. He told them to put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. This was significant. The ring on the finger was probably a symbol of sonship. He was restoring his son as his son. The son was only prepared to ask for a place as a servant.

This was wisdom on the father's part. If the son had been given a place as a servant, he would have been safe and well fed, but the day would have come when he would have resented being a servant. He was born to be a son. Even though he was unworthy to be that son any longer, it was his innate purpose. If the father had brought him back in as a servant, it would not have

mended the relationship and it would not have been a permanent arrangement. Ultimately the son would have left again. The father wanted him back. He wanted him back permanently. He wanted the relationship restored. And he wanted him back as a son. He held a feast and celebrated his son's return.

This is a beautiful image of the Father. When we are in rebellion, God waits expectantly for us to return. When we turn back to him in humble submission, he runs to us, throws his arms around us and kisses us. He does not wait for a long explanation of why we did what we did. The fact that we have admitted to ourselves that we are wrong and have turned back towards him (repented) is enough. He restores us to the position we were created to have – sons and daughters. And there is a celebration in heaven at our return.

Unfortunately the father had a problem with his other son as well. When he heard that his brother had come back home and that his father had celebrated the return, he was angry. He was still ready to judge and condemn his brother. Furthermore, his remarks reveal that he had hostility towards his father. He said, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." His service was not motivated out of devotion or love. Ironically, once this was all over, the son who ran away probably had a much better relationship with the father than the one who stayed behind.

The two sons seem to represent the Old Covenant and the New. In the Old Covenant, people stayed and served God out of some legalistic reverence. They failed to move beyond fearful service to meaningful relationship. Furthermore, they were quite quick to condemn anyone who did not follow their ways. Then there are those who have found themselves in rebellion and have humbled themselves and returned to the Father. Upon admitting their need and repenting, they find a Father who runs to them and hugs and kisses them. They find a Father who wants a relationship. The father in the parable told his older son, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Likewise the Father has never nullified his covenant with the Jews. He is still working with them. But he longs for a relationship with them just as the father in the parable now had with his younger son.

Jesus tells us of the Father who celebrates the return home of the repentant sinner and who longs for relationship with all men.

3.2 Other Teachings Regarding the Father

John 14:6-11 says:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

This passage contains some of the most important teachings about the Father in all of Scripture. First of all, it teaches us that Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father. Many people view Christianity as an arrogant attitude. How dare we assume to have the only true religion? The reason for this belief is very simple. John 14:6 says that Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father. Does that mean that Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus cannot be saved? Of course not! They can turn from their sin and come to Jesus like everyone else. Jesus beckoned everyone. But it does mean that they cannot be saved through Buddha or Mohammed or one of the Hindu gods. Jesus cannot be grouped with others and labeled "one of the great prophets" or "one of the roads to God." If he is right then they are wrong. If they are right then he is wrong. He put himself in direct opposition to any other religious system. If his word is true, then it is not a matter of arrogance. It is a life and death message that must be expressed – even at the expense of being labeled a religious bigot.

The other important thing that Jesus revealed in this passage is the image of the Father. Philip wanted Jesus to show him the Father. Jesus replied that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. If you want to know what the Father would do or say, examine the things that Jesus did and said. He is united in purpose and nature with the Father. He was the perfect image of the Father. He only did what the Father told him to do and he only said what the Father told him to say. The miracles were given as a testimony to the truth of who he was and what he said. This idea of Jesus only doing what the Father told him to do is echoed in John 5:19-23:

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Jesus lived in such perfect communion with the Father that he could see all that the Father did. The Father controls life and death and has granted this same sort of control to the Son. The Father has turned the job of judgment over to the Son. The Father wants to see the Son glorified.

John 6:37-40 gives us a glimpse of the Father's heart for the lost:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away... For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

The Father gives to Jesus those who will be saved. Salvation through Jesus is the Father's will.

John 14:28 says:

You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

There is a "pecking order" in the Trinity with the Father at the head. Jesus freely submitted to that order.

John 15:1-2 says:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The Father cleans house in the body. He is concerned about its health and will seek to prune out that which is detrimental.

3.3 A Summary of the Teachings of Jesus Regarding the Father

Somehow or other people tend to think of “The God of the Old Testament” as an angry Lord, ready to pour out judgment for any misdeed. And it is true that God in the Old Testament does pour out judgment many times. People tend to miss the compassion, however. They miss the God of Hosea, who humbled himself and bought back out of slavery a wife who was already rightfully his, and then restored her to her former position. They miss the Lord who is our shepherd, making us lie down in green pastures, leading us beside still waters, restoring our souls, and protecting us through the valley of the shadow of death. They miss the God whose heart was broken at the fall of man because relationship was disrupted. They miss the God who has spent the rest of eternity trying to reconcile man until himself.

The judgment of God that is present in the Old Testament is motivated out of his compassion and his passion for his fallen creation. Judgment is just that – God says that this is right and that is wrong and he purges the wrong. He purifies, trying to remove stumbling blocks that keep his people from having a relationship with him. His judgment is motivated out of his desire to restore.

But throughout the majority of the history of the Jews, they perceived a distant God who was to be feared but not understood or loved. The manifold revelation of God through the prophets and other means had not set the record straight. So he sent his Son as a perfect image of who he was. If people could see the heart of Jesus they would understand the heart of the Father. Even knowing that Jesus would be crucified, it was worth the price.

As Jesus walked the earth he showed us the Father. As he spoke we heard the words of the Father. As he loved we felt the Father’s love. Just as everything he did taught us about the Kingdom of God, everything he did also taught us about the Father.

4. Teachings Regarding the Holy Spirit

Just as Jesus came to teach us about the Father, he also came to teach us about the workings of the Holy Spirit. His life demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. We already discussed this in the section entitled The Miracles of the Synoptic Gospels.

Besides the demonstration of the Holy Spirit in his life, Jesus did teach a fair amount on the Holy Spirit, particularly in the Gospel of John.

In John 3:5-6, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit is the agent of spiritual rebirth. This is not something that man can bring about. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of man that brings about his salvation.

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to the Spirit."

When Jesus was on the earth in bodily form, the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on the world. He was present and active throughout history. We see him working in the Old Testament. For instance, 1 Samuel 16:14 says, "Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." The Holy Spirit was upon Saul but then left him and rested upon David. The Holy Spirit was upon the prophets. He was there, but in a selective way. His ministry was restricted. In John 7:37-39, we see that it was the Father's intent to wait until after the resurrection to pour out his Spirit upon believers in a widespread fashion.

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Once the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers, Jesus taught that they would be able to do even greater works than they had seen Jesus do. Believers are to operate in this same power that equipped Jesus himself for ministry. Just as the signs and wonders confirmed the truth of the message of Jesus, they should accompany and confirm the proclamation of the Gospel today. This is taught in John 14:12:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:16-17 teaches us that the Holy Spirit becomes a personal presence, indwelling the lives of believers. He is sent to us to be our counselor, which implies that he will give us direction and guidance. We should listen to him or else his counsel is of no value to us.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

John 14:26 teaches that one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to teach us. He will affirm the teachings of Christ. His story will be consistent with the teachings of Christ. The implication is that if you hear from a Spirit who is teaching things inconsistent with the message of Christ, then it is not the Holy Spirit.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus. John 15:26 says:

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

Again, in John 16:7 we see that it was the Father's plan to hold back the Holy Spirit from the masses until after the resurrection and ascension.

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

In John 16:8-11 we see that the Holy Spirit convicts men of sin. The worst sinner in the world can sit and listen to the most powerful preacher in the world and he will not feel a thing unless

the Holy Spirit quickens the conviction in him. The Holy Spirit teaches men about righteousness and he testifies to the coming judgment.

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

John 16:13 teaches that just as Jesus did and said only the things that the Father did and said, the Holy Spirit says only the things that the Father tells him to say.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

The Holy Spirit is a dynamic and living bridge. On one side is the Father and the resurrected Christ and on the other is fallen man. The Holy Spirit is the agent through which teaching, counsel, comfort, conviction, and power flow. He lives in believers and makes available to them all of the resources of the Kingdom of God. John 16:14-15 says:

He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

5. Teachings Regarding Prayer

Jesus had a life that was punctuated by generous portions of prayer. Luke 5:16 says, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke 6:12 says, "Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." The Gospels often portray Jesus withdrawing for the purpose of prayer. We see him praying before making important decisions, such as the selection of his disciples. We see him retreating for prayer in times of severe distress, such as the night of his betrayal.

To Jesus, prayer was like breathing. It was necessary for life. It was a source of encouragement, guidance, and power. He anticipated that it would be the same for his followers.

5.1 *The Nature of Prayer*

Most believers accept that prayer is a necessary and helpful part of life, but the nature of prayer itself remains a bit of a mystery. What can we as finite beings tell an infinite God that he does not already know? Because of that fact, many feel unworthy to pray to God or that doing so is a meaningless ritual or an exercise in futility. The Bible tells us that God knows our needs before we even ask, so what is the point in asking? Will we ever be able to come before God with a convincing enough argument to make him change his mind on any issue? What exactly is our role in prayer and why do we do it?

Some people also worry considerably about how we should pray. Years ago, I was taught the "ACTS" model for praying. "ACTS" stands for "Adoration," "Confession," "Thanksgiving," and "Supplication." The model says that any good prayer should have all four components. We should begin by telling God that we adore him – give him worship. Next we should confess our sins. Third we should give him thanks for the things he has done for us. Then we should make requests known to him. The model attempts to address the fact that many people never pray

anything but the “Supplication” part. And it is true that our communication with God should be much more than a “gimme” relationship.

Yet when we look in Scripture, particularly at the teachings of Jesus on prayer, they seem to be directed almost entirely at “Supplication.” Jesus never taught an “ACTS” model. He taught us how to ask the Father for things. And the fact is that the “ACTS” model may be better than what most of us do, but it is inappropriate in the life of a believer.

The problem is that the model assumes that your life is compartmentalized into your prayer time and your non-prayer time. You have a time when you communicate with God and a time when you do not (the assumption is that the majority of your time you do not). But the New Testament model says that the Holy Spirit indwells believers and that we communicate with God all of the time. Why would we compartmentalize the time when we will talk to him if he is here all of the time?

Suppose that I come home from work one night. My wife is there. She has spent the afternoon in the beauty parlor and her hair looks fabulous. She has on a new dress. She is wearing my favorite perfume. I am really impressed with how beautiful she looks. But I do not say anything to her. She has made my favorite meal. We do not have it very often because it takes so very long to prepare, but she wanted to make me feel special that night so she took the time to make it. It is delicious. I know what she went through to make it and I am truly blessed by it. But I do not say anything to her. She serves me coffee after dinner. Just to make me feel extra special, she gets out her favorite china coffee cup. It belonged to her grandmother and her great-grandmother before that. It is very delicate and very ornate. She only uses it on really special occasions. I feel special because she wants me to use it. Unfortunately I drop the cup and break it. I feel really bad because I know this cup was special to her. I know that I have caused some grief in her. But I do not say anything to her.

We go through the evening. I read the newspaper. I watch television a bit. I do this and that. We are in the same room together all evening. But I do not say anything to her.

Then it is time to go to bed. I turn out the light. My head hits the pillow. Then in the dark, I turn to her. “Boy, you really looked pretty when I came home. Sorry about the cup. By the way, thanks for the great meal. I really enjoyed it. Oh, could you pick up the laundry tomorrow? Also I need for you to take my car to the shop. Goodnight.”

Well, this is not a pretty picture. This is not a great model for communication. But I just followed the “ACTS” model with my wife.

It would be disastrous to the marital relationship to compartmentalize communication. When I came home and was impressed with her beauty, that was the time to tell her. When I felt great appreciation for the dinner, that was the time to tell her. When I felt regret over breaking the cup, that was the time to tell her. And so it is with God.

Adoration – praise and worship – should be an everyday part of life for a believer. Anytime you are impressed with the majesty, the glory, the provision, the love of God, that is the time to tell him. Confession should be an everyday and every hour part of life for a believer as well. Whenever the Holy Spirit convicts you of a sin, that is the time to confess it. You should not “batch” these things together and deal with them as a bundle. Thanksgiving should be a continuous phenomenon as well. Whenever you realize something that God has done for you, thank him. Do it when it occurs to you.

When Jesus taught on prayer, he assumed that all of this would be part of a believer's life. That is why his teaching is focused on supplication. But it does seem to be true that the "ACT" must be in line before the "S" will be truly effective.

The supplication aspect of prayer is perhaps the hardest to understand. Janis Joplin once had a song that said "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?" This may seem irreverent, but there are those who teach that if you pray such a prayer with sufficient faith God will indeed buy you a Mercedes Benz. Is that accurate?

Consider a more down-to-basics prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus never said anything about praying for a luxury automobile, but he told us to pray for daily sustenance. He also told us that God already knows that we need this sustenance. We know that God wants to provide for us. Why would we pray for something that God already wants and intends to give us anyway?

What about something a little more uncertain? What about "Lord, please help me to get that promotion." I do not know whether or not God really intends for me to have the promotion, but I ask for it anyway. The fact is that God already knew about the promotion opportunity before I told him. Does he wait until I pray to decide whether or not he wants me to have it? It seems unlikely that God would wait for me to weigh the pros and cons and report to him my findings before he decides. He is God and he knows what is best. He already has a will one way or the other regarding the opportunity. So if he wants me to have the promotion, won't his will be done whether or not I pray? And if he does not want me to have it, what difference would my praying make?

The theme of all of these questions is "Through prayer, can I change God?" Is God sitting in heaven waiting for our recommendations before he makes up his mind on issues?

Such questions reflect a limited understanding of the nature of God and of the function of prayer. We often assume that the will of God is black and white. We assume that his will is always "yes" or "no." In fact, the Bible shows that his will is quite often "if ... then."

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" is a "yes" part of his will. Yes, he does want that – no if's, and's, or but's. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is a "no" part of his will. No, he does not want that – no if's, and's, or but's. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" is also part of God's will. It is an "if ... then." We have a role to play in bringing about the conclusion. If we will do our part then he will do his part.

So back to the prayer, "Lord, please help me to get that promotion." God's will may be "If you will come and ask me then I will guide you into that position." It is possible that God wants to give me the job, but there are certain issues in my life with which I must first deal. Suppose I am seeking a management position for which I am technically qualified, but I have a terrible problem with impatience. For the sake of the people who would be working for me, God may want me to deal with the impatience before putting me in the position. The time that I spend praying about the job is an opportunity that I give God to speak to me about the issues. If I listen and respond then he will give me the job. If not, then he might be unwilling to let me have it at this time. It is not a "yes" or a "no" issue. It is "if ... then."

So what about "Give us this day our daily bread?" There is nothing really "if ... then" about that. Why did Jesus tell us to pray for that? The purpose of such a prayer is to remind us that God is indeed the supplier of our needs. As a parent, I have every intention of supplying the needs of my children, but how nice it is when they acknowledge the supply and do not take it for granted.

God wants us to acknowledge our need for him. One of the purposes of prayer is to realign ourselves into submission to his sovereignty.

With this basis of understanding, let us consider the teachings of Jesus on prayer.

5.2 The Parable of the Judge and the Persistent Widow

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

It is important to understand the context of this parable. Jesus gave this in the midst of his explanation of end-time events. He was telling his disciples how to pray for his return. They were to do it persistently. Jesus knew what was going to happen in the end, but he told his disciples that he did not know when it was going to happen (Matthew 24:36). It is a future hope, the time of which will not be revealed prior to its occurrence. In the mean time, we are to faithfully endure this life. Furthermore we are to pray for the return of our Lord.

The point of the parable is that even an unjust ruler will eventually respond to persistent "nagging." Because of the persistence of the widow, the judge finally gave her justice. How much more then will a righteous God answer prayers for justice?

This parable raises some interesting questions about prayer, however. Some of them we have already discussed. If God has already fixed the hour of the return, then what difference does it make if I pray for it to come quickly? If this event is already fixed in future time, then what difference does it make if I pray persistently? And why should I ever have to pray for anything more than once? Does God only listen some of the time? Do I have to catch him in a good mood before I get my answer? These questions may seem a bit irreverent, but unfortunately they lie at the heart of most of our misunderstanding about the nature of prayer.

We live in a world of unrighteousness. Daily we are pressured to conform to its ways. To those who are faithful, there is constant persecution – sometimes subtle and sometimes to the point of martyrdom. Anyone who is truly in the world but not of the world will surely long to be taken out of the world. There are times when it is discouraging. We are invited to come to the throne room on a regular basis to be reassured that we are not forgotten. We have an avenue to be reminded on a daily or hourly basis that he will return for those who are his own. We have an opportunity to receive instruction about how to cope with our circumstances.

Is God going to send Jesus back any quicker if I pray persistently for his return? No. But God will better prepare me for the event if I pray persistently for it. I will endure the wait much better. The last line of the parable is the question, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find

faith on the earth?" If we pray persistently for his return, then the answer to this question will be "yes."

The answers to the questions above revolve around the fact that prayer is not a mechanism through which I change God, but an avenue through which he changes me. If I am brought into line with his will every day and if I have my mind conformed to his every hour then I will be able to cope, regardless of the circumstances. The imminence of his return becomes less of an issue. Furthermore, God can minister justice to me in my circumstances, but often my eyes have to be opened to see it happening.

5.3 The Lord's Prayer

Luke 11:1-13, Cross-reference Matthew 6:9-13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation."

Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The Matthew version of the Lord's Prayer is delivered in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The wording has some differences. Matthew 6:9-13 says:

This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

The Matthew version is closer to what we normally recite as the Lord's Prayer. The extra verbiage in Matthew gives some good illumination on the meaning of the prayer. Note that neither version includes “For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.” That appears in some later manuscripts of Matthew but does not seem to have been a part of the original document.

Jesus gave us the prayer as a model. It is how we are supposed to pray; it is not what we are supposed to pray. There is nothing wrong with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and it is often repeated in churches or other settings. It is important to understand, however, that Jesus never meant to give us a memorized prayer to use as a primary means of communicating with the Father.

The prayer has five sections. The first is:

Our Father in heaven,

The opening of the prayer identifies God and it identifies our relationship to him. God is the Father in heaven. Furthermore he is OUR Father in heaven. He rules the very universe that he created, yet he has chosen to have a direct, intimate parental relationship with each of us. That relationship gives us a standing before him which allows us to approach him in prayer. We are invited into the throne room because we are children of the king.

The second section of the prayer is:

hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

These are three different ways of expressing the same idea.

The Father's name is hallowed on earth as it is in heaven
when his kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven
because his will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Greek word for “hallowed” has the same root as the word “holy.” We also get the word “saint” from the same root. A saint is one who has been set apart by God and made righteous (by the way, in the Bible, all believers are saints, not just the people canonized by any particular denomination). The word “holy” means “set apart by righteousness.” The name of God is to be set apart by righteousness on earth, just as it is in heaven. This begins to set the tone for the

prayer. Everything that follows in the prayer should have that goal – to cause the name of the Father to be hallowed.

Our prayers should be kingdom prayers. Our desire should be to see his kingdom reign on earth, just as it does in heaven. In this age, we live in a kingdom of unrighteousness. As believers, we should be instruments through which God will invade the earth with his kingdom. The things that we pray should be in line with bringing God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

How is the Father's name hallowed? How does his kingdom come? It happens when his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom of God exists where people are submitted to his will. The Greek uses a very interesting word for "be done." The verb is "gennao," when is typically used to describe a father begetting children. It means "to give birth," but is typically applied to the father rather than the mother. This is an extremely illuminating word picture, particularly in light of the ancient understanding of reproduction. Women were commonly believed to serve as incubators for the father's seed. The father's seed was deposited in the woman. Over time it developed, grew, and matured and eventually emerged as a baby. The woman's role was to give the seed a home, a place to develop. She would nourish it and care for it. She had nothing to do with originating it, however.

We now know that this understanding was wrong, but illustrates the point nicely. The Father's will originates with him. It is given birth through us. We are incubators for the Father's will, but we do not initiate.

This is important. Our role is to wait on God. We do not go about doing good and hope that he will bless it. We do what he tells us to do. If he tells you to go to the hospital and pray for the sick, then that is what you should do. If he tells you to go bowling then that is what you should do. Either way, if you are faithful to follow his will, he is pleased. If his will is being done, then his kingdom is coming and his name is being hallowed.

This section of the prayer is critical. If we do not understand what Jesus is saying here, then the rest of the prayer will not make sense. The fact is that when we pray, we should pray things that are consistent with the Father's will. We should pray things that will cause his kingdom to come. We should pray things that will cause his name to be hallowed. Jesus prayed these kinds of prayers. That is why his prayers were so effective.

The third section of the prayer is:

Give us today our daily bread.

God is the provider of all of our needs. The sooner we recognize that the less stressful our lives will be. Unfortunately many of us are "control freaks." We want to be in charge. We want to know and plan everything in advance. Allowing God to be our source is contrary to that notion. Still, strive as we may, there is no way to circumvent the fact that everything we have comes from God. How much easier it is to simply give him credit for that fact and let him do what he wants to do – provide.

The words "daily bread" harken back to the image of manna in the wilderness. When the Jews were wandering in the desert, manna fell daily. The people were told to go out and gather just enough manna for that day (with the exception of the Sabbath – the day before the Sabbath they were to gather a two-day supply). If they gathered more than a day's supply, they would discover that the excess had rotted by the next day. If, however, they gathered less than they really needed, somehow it lasted all day.

There was a reason for all of this. God wants us to look to him one day at a time for our supply. If our employers gave us a check on January 1 for all that we would earn during the coming year, two things would happen to most of us. First of all, the money would run out sometime midyear – because we do not know how to pace ourselves. Second, we would cease to look to our employer as the supplier of the money. Sometime around February or March, we would begin feeling like it was an imposition on our time to have to go to work every day. How would we be any different with God?

If he sent us a truckload of groceries on January 1, enough to last the year, most of us would be out of food by summer. Furthermore, by February we would have forgotten who supplied it and to whom we should be thankful.

Why is this so important to God? To understand that, I look at my own relationship with my children. I love them. It is my desire to provide for them. I will ensure that they have food, clothes, and shelter just because they are mine and I care about their needs. How much more satisfying it is, however, when they occasionally express a heartfelt “thanks” for what I have given them. It is great for our relationship. I want that from my children. God wants it from his.

The prayer continues:

Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

This is an interesting passage because of the words that are used. When we think of the word “debt” in a secular sense, most of think of what we owe on credit cards, mortgages, etc. When we drop the same word into a religious context, we think that the word means “sin.” The fact is that Greek has several words that mean “sin.” The word used here (opheiletēs) is not one of them. The word means “debt,” like what we owe on our credit cards and mortgages.

If that is the case, what does it mean in the context of this prayer? Are we supposed to release everyone from any financial obligations that they have to us and at the same time quit paying our bills? Not really.

The prayer is talking about spiritual debts. It is using figurative language to talk about sin. The words that are used give us a picture of how God feels about sin.

Sin is an affront to God. According to the law that he established, sin exacts a price – a penalty. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” After sinning, one carries an unpaid penalty of death. That unpaid penalty is a debt that we owe God. Our prayer is that God will forgive rather than collect that debt.

Jesus recognized that spiritual debts can be owed from man-to-man, just as they are from man-to-God. If Bob tells a lie about Joe, then Bob injures Joe. Their relationship is injured. A spiritual debt is created; Bob really owes Joe something in order to make things right. Unfortunately, these sorts of spiritual debts often cannot be repaid, no matter how bad the debtor wants to make things right. How does Bob take back the lie? How does he restore the trust? It is really beyond his ability. The injury has already been done. The only way that the debt will be resolved and the relationship restored is for Joe to forgive the debt.

One thing that we often do not realize is that forgiveness is as important to the one giving it as it is to the one who receives it – maybe even more. Unforgiveness does more damage to people’s lives than most of us will ever realize. It disrupts relationship with the one who is unforgiven, which deprives the one who is unforgiving of needed peace. It disrupts relationship with God as well, because unwillingness to forgive is rebellion. Unforgiveness turns to anger and bitterness.

Sooner or later, this bitterness will cause stress, depression, and even physical illnesses of various sorts. It is also an invitation to demonic oppression. Demons can attach themselves to this sin and wreak havoc in the life of the one who proudly hangs onto his unforgiveness.

There was a time recently when we had to have a considerable amount of work done on our house. We used a contractor to do the work for us. We had worked with this man for some time and had grown to trust him. At one point, I advanced him a large sum of money for the next task to be done. I never saw him again. Phone calls were not returned. The work was obviously not done. I had been taken.

For months I tried to get through to this man to get him to fulfill his obligation. Not only could I not afford to lose this money, there was a principle at stake. I had been wronged. This man showed no remorse – no repentance. There seemed to be no reason for me to let him off the hook.

Eventually, however, I realized that there was a very good reason to simply let it go. The indignation that I felt was consuming me. It was absolutely true that I could not afford to lose the money. It was absolutely true that he had done me wrong. It was absolutely true that he was unrepentant. But my own peace of mind was more important than any of this. Furthermore, God told me to let go of it. He provides my daily bread and thus the money was his issue – not mine.

When I finally spoke forgiveness for the man (not to him – he would not return my calls) I was flooded with a sense of peace that I had not felt for months. It was great. It felt so much better than the self-righteous indignation that had consumed me before.

When one is engaged in a ministry of praying for the sick, he quickly learns that unforgiveness is often one of the biggest barriers to healing. Often before healing can come, the issues that caused the problem must be addressed. At the heart of so many of these is unforgiveness. Anger and bitterness against parents or other authority figures, siblings, spouses, etc., has a power over us. It can manifest in a range of things including chronic headaches, depression, compulsive behaviors, heart disease, cancer, demonic oppression, an inability to communicate with God, suicidal tendencies, etc. Forgiving and releasing the anger and bitterness is often the key to triggering the healing.

At the core of the problem is dysfunction in our created purpose. We were created for relationship. Unforgiveness disrupts relationship. If we live in a state where we cannot experience the relationships that we were created to have, then our purpose for being is frustrated. That frustration results in self-destruction. All of the manifestations above destroy us in one way or another. Forgiveness is a much better option.

Forgiveness makes the world go 'round. We need to forgive. We need to be forgiven.

The last part of the prayer is:

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

People have a tendency to excuse their personal responsibility in making bad decisions by saying “the devil made me do it.” Note, however, that Jesus said that we should ask God not to lead us into temptation, not the devil. He goes on to say “deliver us from the evil one,” meaning the devil. Some more traditional translations say “deliver us from evil,” but the better rendering of the Greek is “the evil one,” signifying a being who is the personification of evil.

These two phrases together are important. They are a form of Hebrew poetry – a parallelism, stating one idea in two different ways. The implication is that temptation does come from the evil one, but it (temptation) and he (the evil one) are under the control of God. We must remember that the devil can only do what God permits him to do. It is true that his motives are contrary to the will of God. His purposes are evil, contrary to the purposes of God. His methods are contrary to the nature of God. But he, like everything else in creation, is subject to the authority of God.

Why, then, do temptation and our interaction with the evil one come to us with God's permission? Because even the ungodly schemes of Satan can be made to serve the purposes of God. God's desire was that we would have free wills. In the exercise of that will, we freely choose to love him or to reject him. God wants people who love him out of free choice. The only way he could give them that choice was to also give them the option to choose evil. Satan's activities serve God's purposes in the world by offering them that choice and by giving them a glimpse of the consequences of the wrong choice. Thus God allows Satan to roam the earth, testing and trying his children.

The day will come when we finally will have taken sides. The testing will cease and we will live in harmony with God. We should long for that day. That is why our prayer should be that we are kept from temptation and from the evil one. Resisting temptation is a tiring thing. We long for rest from that activity. Any believer should cry out to be delivered from the evil one, once and for all.

Everything in Jesus' prayer revolves around the theme, "Thy Kingdom Come." That will be a place where:

- The name of God is hallowed.
- His will is done.
- Our needs are met – our daily bread is supplied.
- We are free from temptation and the snares of the evil one.

If you want to pray godly prayers, then pray for things consistent with these themes.

Luke's narrative gives us further teaching, illuminating the Father's role in answering prayer.

Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The story of the neighbor asking for bread concludes with the statement “because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.” The word translated “boldness” has several possible meanings in Greek. One of those meanings is “shamelessness.” “Because of the man’s shamelessness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.” This may be a better translation to fit the context.

In the first century, travel was a very different thing than it is now. People would commonly house travelers in their homes, as hotels (inns) were scarce. There were no 24-hour restaurants. The responsibility for feeding a traveler fell on the host. It was a great social faux pas to fail to meet the needs of the guest.

In the story, a man had guests show up at his home. He had nothing to feed them. He went to his neighbor for help. If the neighbor had failed to assist, it would have reflected badly on the entire community. It would have brought shame. For the sake of shamelessness, the man would get up and help. He did it to preserve his own reputation. He got up not because of the “boldness” of the one knocking at the door, but because of the “shamelessness” of the one inside.

So it is with God. He has told us how to pray in a manner that will cause his name to be hallowed. When we pray such prayers, he will answer because of shamelessness. He cares about his reputation among men. He will answer prayers consistent with “thy kingdom come” because he is not willing to bring shame on his kingdom.

He continues the explanation. If a child asks his father for food – something that is consistent with the father’s will to provide – the human father will certainly honor that request. How much more will the Father honor kingdom prayers – requests that we make that are consistent with his will.

When we seek him we will find him. When we seek his will we will find it. When we pray kingdom prayers he will answer them.

The key to effective praying is developing the discipline to bathe in his presence often enough and long enough to be conformed to his mind and will. It worked for Jesus.

5.4 Other Teachings on Prayer

Matthew 6:5-8 says:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Prayer is for God and not for men. Does this mean that we should not pray in public? No. Corporate prayers, such as in a church setting, are appropriate as long as they lead the participants into the presence of the Father. They are not an opportunity for a show of eloquence on the part of the one praying. Lose the seminary voice and the Elizabethan language. God is not impressed.

Furthermore, God does not really need for you to explain things to him too much. Instead of opening a prayer (in a very deep voice with rounded tones) with

“Our Father and Our God, Creator of the Universe, Gardener of Eden, Slayer of Goliath, Who Was and Is and Is to Come, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Master of Masters, The Eye of Isaiah, Who Was in the Day of David, Who Separated Light from Darkness and Heaven from Earth, Author of Righteousness and Lord of Republicans, ...”

try “Daddy.” If you want to hear yourself deliver a soliloquy, go ahead, but the only benefit you will get out of it is the unbridled pleasure of hearing yourself talk. If you want to talk to God, quit babbling. Get to the point. Remember, he knows what you need before you ask. He wants you to ask, but he does not really need you to explain everything to him in detail. (When your child asks you for bread, does he really need to tell you how to grow wheat?)

Prayer is a time for intimate, humble submission to God (individually or corporately). It is not a time for showing off before men.

John 14:12-14 says:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

This was given to the disciples at the Last Supper. The message is consistent with the theme in the Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus was getting ready to go away. He had modeled the Kingdom life for his disciples. He had modeled Kingdom prayer for them as well. It was about time for them to take over.

He admonished them to ask for things “in my name.” This does not mean that whenever they pray “gimme” prayers and conclude it with “in Jesus’ name, amen” that they would get whatever they asked. That is often how the teaching is applied however. How many of us have been taught that our prayers must conclude with that magic formula – “in Jesus’ name, amen.”

To the Hebrew mind, name and reputation were synonymous. We have a bit of this understanding carried over into English. “To tarnish the good name of so-and-so” means to assault that person’s reputation. When Jesus said to pray for things in his name, he meant to pray prayers consistent with his reputation, with his character and his nature. He spent his ministry modeling for us how to live and how to pray. When we pray in his name, we pray kingdom prayers that are consistent with his model. And when we pray these things, we will see greater things happen than happened in his own ministry. It is God’s desire to unleash ministry through us when we pray in the name of Jesus.

Perhaps more than any place else in Scripture, John 5:19 explains why Jesus had such an effective prayer life.

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

Jesus was completely submitted to the Father. Jesus prayed for healing when it was the Father’s will to heal. Jesus cast out demons when it was the Father’s desire to cast out demons. Jesus raised the dead when it was the Father’s desire to raise the dead. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes when it was the Father’s desire to multiply them. Jesus knew the Father’s will and

prayed these prayers with such confidence because he learned to hear the Father's voice. He lived in total obedience and submission. He put that relationship above sin and compromise. He was an untarnished vessel through which the Father could give birth to his Kingdom.

And why did Jesus do all of this in our midst? To model the behavior for us. To show us that we can do it too. The same Holy Spirit that bridged the gap between the Father and the Son while Jesus was on earth has been poured out on believers. We can operate in that same power when we live in obedience and submission and learn to hear the Father's voice.

6. Teachings Regarding Last Things

Jesus also told his disciples about the events surrounding the end times. Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 all contain a description of a discourse between Jesus and his disciples that occurred during Passion Week. It contains a great deal of information about the end times. That is not the only place where he teaches on this subject, however. We shall look at these teachings now.

6.1 *The Parable of the Watchful Servant*

Luke 12:35-48, Cross-reference Matthew 24:42-51

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Jesus tells of a day that will come unexpectedly when men will be asked to account for their spiritual conditions and how they used the resources given to them. This is the time we normally call “judgment day.”

One of the key themes of this parable is that the day will come “like a thief in the night.” The fact is that nobody knows exactly when that day will be. That decision belongs to the Father and he does not plan to tell us ahead of time. It is for a very good reason.

I used to have two teenagers in my home. Suppose – strictly hypothetically speaking, you understand – that having a clean room was not their highest priority in life. It is Saturday morning and I have to leave the house and run some errands. I want them to clean their rooms while I am gone. I say “I am going to be home at exactly four o'clock this afternoon and I expect to find your rooms clean when I get back.” You could be fairly certain that they would wait until 3:55 to start cleaning.

Suppose instead that I say “I am going out. I am not sure how long I will be gone. I may be home in one hour or it may take me several hours. Whenever I do get home, I expect to find your rooms clean.” This really only leaves them one option. They need to clean up now and keep their rooms clean until I return.

It is really no different with the spiritual condition of men. If Jesus had told us that he would come for his church on December 31, 2029, then most people would start repenting around Christmas of 2029. That is not the way that he wants us to be. We are to live in a state of preparedness. We need to clean up now and stay clean until he returns for us. And as already stated, most of us will experience a private summons rather than participate in the massive recall. Even if I knew that the rapture would occur on December 31, 2029, there is still the possibility that I could die before that event.

People are to be ready. This is completely consistent with Jesus' other teachings on the Kingdom of God. Remember – “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The Kingdom does not start when we die. It is not ushered in by the rapture. It is a now reality. We are to start living Kingdom lives now. We do not clean up our spiritual conditions simply because of impending judgment – although that is not a bad reason. We strive for righteousness now because we are Kingdom citizens now. If our focus is on “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” then we will be living in a state of preparedness without really trying.

As Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

6.2 The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The point of this parable is like that of the last. When judgment day approaches, God is not going to set up a home page on the Internet and keep us posted on how far away it is. He is not going to buy time on television and have infomercials outlining out his plan. He is not going to set up a 900 number where we can call and get more information. He is simply going to come. It will happen suddenly and unexpectedly. It will happen faster than the destruction of the White House in the movie, “Independence Day.”

In the parable, the foolish virgins were “hanging out” with the wedding party. They even had lamps. They had failed, however, to bring oil for their lamps. Thus they could not make the journey to the banquet.

This seems to be a message to “peripheral Christians.” There are people who hang out today with the wedding party. These are people who hang out in church buildings with church people but who have never become part of the Church by trusting Jesus for salvation and submitting their lives to him. They probably even own shiny black Bibles with their names engraved on the front (with pages untarnished by wear and tear). They have lamps. Unfortunately they do not have the oil of the Holy Spirit equipping them for the journey to the banquet. They knew that they needed it. It was readily within their grasp. They just never appropriated it for their own use.

When Jesus comes for his church, they will be left behind. They may be the first to get their acts together after it happens. They will knock at the door of the banquet room but the door will already be closed.

It is much better to simply be prepared.

6.3 The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 all describe the same conversation. It is commonly referred to as the “Olivet Discourse,” since it took place on the Mount of Olives. The subject was end-time events. The following table compares the dialogue in the three books.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
After the disciples commented on the beauty of the temple, Jesus informed them that it would be torn down. (24:1-2)	After the disciples commented on the beauty of the temple, Jesus informed them that it would be torn down. (13:1-2)	After the disciples commented on the beauty of the temple, Jesus informed them that it would be torn down. (21:5-6)

This section seems to have begun at the temple complex, which is a very short distance from the Mount of Olives. The disciples made remarks about the beauty and physical majesty of the temple. Jesus informed them that it would be torn down. This was actually fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

This leads to some of the difficulty in understanding the contents of this discourse. The section discusses events of the last days – when the final judgment is poured out on the earth. Still, some or even much of it seems to have been fulfilled when Rome destroyed Jerusalem – an event that happened in the lifetime of many of Jesus’ followers. Was Jesus talking about the events of AD 70 or was he talking about the close of history as we know it? Perhaps both. We have to remember that God has a different perspective on time than we do. To him, a day is a thousand years and a thousand years a day. The fact is that we have been living in the last days since the resurrection.

What we see here may also be an example of double fulfillment of prophecy. Many expect that another temple will be built before the events of Revelation take place. The destruction in AD 70 may have been a foreshadow of destruction that is yet to take place.

When Jesus told his disciples that the temple was going to be destroyed, it aroused their curiosity. Apparently they left the temple complex and went to the Mount of Olives. Once there, they asked him to elaborate on end-time events.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
While sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Jesus to elaborate on the signs of the end of the age. (24:3)	While sitting on the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus to elaborate on the signs of the end of the age. (13:3-4)	The disciples asked Jesus to elaborate on the signs of the end of the age. (21:7)
Jesus warned against deception. Many would come claiming to be Christ. There would be wars and rumors of wars. There would be famines and earthquakes. These would be the birth pains of the end time. (24:4-8)	Jesus warned against deception. Many would come claiming to be Christ. There would be wars and rumors of wars. There would be famines and earthquakes. These would be the birth pains of the end time. (13:5-8)	Jesus warned against deception. Many would come claiming to be Christ. There would be wars and rumors of wars. There would be famines, earthquakes, pestilence, and fearful events from the heavens. (21:8-11)
Believers will experience hatred, martyrdom, and other forms of persecution. Many will fall away from the faith as a result. False prophets will deceive many people. There will be an increase in wickedness that will cause the love of people to grow cold. Those who persevere and stay faithful to the end will be saved. (24:9-13)	Believers will experience physical persecution. They will find themselves on trial for their faith, but will be able to use such opportunities to witness to governmental leaders. (13:9)	Believers will experience physical persecution. They will find themselves on trial for their faith, but will be able to use such opportunities to witness to governmental leaders. (21:12-13)
The gospel of the Kingdom will be preached to the whole world before the end comes. (24:14)	The gospel must be preached to all nations. (13:10)	
	Whenever believers find themselves on trial, they should not worry about their defense. The Holy Spirit will give them what they are to say when the time is appropriate. (13:11)	Whenever believers find themselves on trial, they should not worry about their defense. Jesus will give them what they are to say when the time is appropriate. (21:14-15)

Matthew	Mark	Luke
	Family members will betray family members because of their faith. Those who stand firm to the end will be saved. (13:12-13)	Family members will betray family members because of their faith. Those who stand firm to the end will be saved. (21:16-19)

One of the signs of the end will be chaos in nature, including famines and earthquakes. There will be chaos in national relationships – wars and rumors of war. There will be spiritual chaos, with false prophets leading people astray. The faithful will face persecution and martyrdom. There will be an unprecedented surge in wickedness and evil in the world. The preponderance of evil will have a numbing effect on people, causing them to be incapable of love.

Some will be put on trial for their faith. They should take comfort in the fact that the Holy Spirit will provide them with their defense when the time is right. Note that there is no promise to deliver them from their trials. Remember that he has already said that many will be martyred at this time.

Matthew and Mark both state that the Gospel must be preached to all nations. Based on this statement, some have concluded that Jesus cannot return until 100% of the people on the face of the earth have heard the Gospel preached. This is not a proper interpretation of these verses. The word that is used for "nations" is the Greek word "ethnos." It is the word from which we get "ethnic." In a secular sense, the word refers to ethnic groups or races of people. In a spiritual sense, the word could simply be interpreted to mean Gentiles. Remember that Jesus taught Jews – Jews who would be charged with bringing the Gospel to the Gentile world after his death. Jesus was telling them that the Gentiles would be brought into the Kingdom before the end.

His followers would not necessarily face "peace on earth and goodwill to men." Family members would turn on each other because of their faith. Division, turmoil, and chaos would characterize the world before the end came.

It all sounds too familiar.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
When Daniel's "abomination that causes desolation" occurs, the end is imminent. People should flee from Judea into the mountains. People should run immediately and not stop to take along possessions. It will be a dreadful time, distress such as has never been experienced on the earth before. If God did not intervene to cut short the time, nobody would survive, but for the sake of his elect he will bring the distress to an end. (24:15-22)	When the "abomination that causes desolation" occurs, the end is imminent. People should flee from Judea into the mountains. People should run immediately and not stop to take along possessions. It will be a dreadful time, distress such as has never been experienced on the earth before. If God did not intervene to cut short the time, nobody would survive, but for the sake of his elect he will bring the distress to an end. (13:14-20)	When Jerusalem is surrounded by an army, the end is imminent. People should flee from Judea into the mountains. It will be a dreadful time. People will die in warfare and others will be taken prisoner. Jerusalem will be trampled until the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled. (21:20-24)

The "abomination that causes desolation" is a reference to Daniel 9:27. This seems to refer to a ruler who will enter the temple and set himself up as a god, demanding worship. He will put an end to the offerings of sacrifice to God. As already mentioned, Rome destroyed the temple

(putting an end to the sacrifices) in AD 70. If we did not have the book of Revelation, then one might conclude that this event in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 has already happened. Revelation 13 seems to coincide with Daniel 9, however, and with that perspective we conclude that this looks forward to an event that has not yet transpired.

When the end comes, it will be a terrible time. Jerusalem will be assaulted militarily. The Jewish religious system in Jerusalem will be disrupted. There will be massive destruction and loss of life. God will intervene, however, and bring the warfare to a conclusion for the sake of his elect.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
False Christs and false prophets will appear. They will be able to perform miracles and will deceive many – even some of the elect. When men try to point us to a human Messiah, do not believe it. When Jesus returns, it will be a visible event, like lightening flashing across the sky. (24:23-28)	False Christs and false prophets will appear. They will be able to perform miracles and will deceive many – even some of the elect. (13:21-23)	
After the distress above, the sun will be darkened. There will be chaos in the heavens. The Son of Man will return on the clouds in the sky. Nations will see him and mourn. He will come with great power and glory. Angels will blow a trumpet and he will gather his elect from the earth. (24:29-31)	After the distress above, the sun will be darkened. There will be chaos in the heavens. The Son of Man will return on the clouds in the sky. He will come with great power and glory. He will send his angels to gather his elect from the earth. (13:24-27)	There will be chaos and terror in the heavens and on earth. The Son of Man will visibly return, coming in a cloud. He will come with great power and glory. When that happens, redemption is near. (21:25-28)
Just as we can see a fig tree sprouting and know that summer is near, we should be able to observe these signs and know that the end is near. The generation that sees these signs will not pass away until all has been fulfilled. Nobody, not even the Son, knows the day or hour, only the Father. It will come suddenly as in the days of Noah. People were eating and drinking and carrying on as if everything were normal. Then the flood came suddenly. (24:32-39)	Just as we can see a fig tree sprouting and know that summer is near, we should be able to observe these signs and know that the end is near. The generation that sees these signs will not pass away until all has been fulfilled. Nobody, not even the Son, knows the day or hour, only the Father. Live in a state of preparedness because you will not know when the time is coming. (13:28-37)	Just as we can see a fig tree sprouting and know that summer is near, we should be able to observe these signs and know that the end is near. The generation that sees these signs will not pass away until all has been fulfilled. Nobody, not even the Son, knows the day or hour, only the Father. Live your life in preparedness. Pray that you may escape that which is about to happen so that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. (21:29-36)
Some will be taken and others left behind. Two people will be working side-by-side. One will be taken and the other		

Matthew	Mark	Luke
left. (24:40-41)		

Again, false Christs will abound in the end. Some will be able to work signs and wonders. People should not be deceived, however. When Jesus returns it will be a visible event. The sun will turn dark and the moon to a blood color. Then he will come in the clouds and it will be like lightening flashing across the sky. A trumpet will be sounded and his elect will be gathered from the earth.

These signs are given to us for a reason. Men are smart enough to observe the signs of nature, such as those that occur in trees. The changes in their leaves are signals that seasons are changing. Men know how to read these signs and know what is going on. In a similar manner God is giving us these signs so that we can read them and know that the season is changing. We will not know the day and hour of his return but we should sense the season.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
Jesus gave the Parable of the Watchful Servant and the Parable of the Ten Virgins. (24:42-25:13)		
Jesus gave the Parable of the Talents. (25:14-30)		
The Son of Man will separate the people of the nations like a shepherd separating his flock. The sheep will be at his right hand and the goats on his left. (25:31-33)		
To the sheep he will give eternal reward. He will tell them, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." They will reply that they did not recall doing these things. He will tell them that whenever they did it for one who belonged to him, they did it for him. (25:34-40)		
The goats will be sent to eternal punishment because they failed to do these things – to care for those who belong to Jesus. They are cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (25:41-46)		

Matthew gives us a bit more information than Mark and Luke. He ends the discussion with a word about the judgment that concludes the event. Jesus will separate the world into the sheep and the goats – into the faithful and the unfaithful. The thing that really divides the sheep from the goats is how they treated each other. The point of this is powerful and it is also consistently stressed from Genesis to Revelation. God cares about the way that we relate to him and he also cares about the way we relate to each other. In fact, our love for God is best measured by the way we relate to those he created.

The faithful receive eternal reward. The unfaithful are cast into an eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. Note that God intended hell for Satan and his demons. He did not intend it for people. People can choose to go there, however. If that is their choice, then they receive the same punishment that is given to Satan himself. They have the option, however, to choose eternal reward.

It is also important to notice that there are sheep and there are goats – period. There are not sheep, goats, and those who could not make up their minds. Failure to decide is a decision and failure to commit is a commitment. Sheep follow the Shepherd.

7. The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-7, Cross-reference Luke 6:17-49

One of Jesus' best-known sermons is the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5-7. Luke 6:17-49 records a similar discourse, often called the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew records that his sermon took place on a mountainside and Luke records that it took place on a level place – a plane. It may well be that there was a level place on the mountainside and that these two are different records of the same sermon. It could also be that they are different events but that Jesus taught the same themes in the two events. However one reconciles the differences, the truths they contain are consistent.

We have already considered many sections of the sermon, such as the Lord's Prayer. We will now consider the themes that we have not yet discussed. The first section of Matthew 5 is known as the Beatitudes.

7.1 The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3-12

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Several years ago there was a book written about the Beatitudes. The book was entitled The Be Happy Attitudes. This is an unfortunate title, because the Beatitudes are not about being happy. They are about being holy. The road to holiness is not paved with happy thoughts; it is paved with poverty, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst, and persecution. Yet those who find themselves in this progression to holiness are blessed. This seems like a contradiction of terms to the secular mind. In fact, the Greek word that is rendered “blessed” in the translation actually has the connotation of “hilarious.” Even when we find ourselves in these unhappy circumstances, we should be able to find an overwhelming sense of peace.

As a child in Sunday School I memorized the Beatitudes, but I did not really understand them at that time. I understood it to be some sort of a formula. If I wanted to inherit the earth, then I needed to be meek. If I wanted the kingdom of God, then I needed to be poor in spirit – whatever that meant. I would probably skip the comfort thing because I did not particularly want to have to mourn.

I understood this to be a recipe. I would pick the outcomes that I wanted and follow the appropriate course of action to get to those outcomes. It was like an a-la-carte menu where heaven’s entrees and side dishes were listed along with their prices.

I have a very different understanding of this today. Jesus knew that anyone on the road to righteousness would find himself poor in spirit, in mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, etc. Jesus was offering reassurance to those who would find themselves in these circumstances, promising them that there is a reward for making the journey. Furthermore, this is not really a “pick and choose” menu. It is a progression. The Beatitudes describe the milestones on the journey to righteousness.

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

It all starts with being poor in spirit. This may seem like a weird thing to expect of believers. Our desire is to be Spirit-filled. Why, then, would we find ourselves poor in spirit?

Someone who is poor does not necessarily live without the things that he or she needs. More than likely, however, the supply comes from some benevolent source rather than from what the poor person is able to supply with his own means. A person who is poor in spirit is one who does not and cannot rely on his own spiritual resources for survival. He must look to God for spiritual support in order to survive. A person who is poor in spirit has died to self and submitted to the Spirit of God. These are the people who enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Becoming poor in spirit is the first milestone on the journey to righteousness. It leads to the next step, which is mourning.

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

Now, why is mourning a good thing? Mourning is associated with death. When did death become good?

We mourn over the loss of something that was dear to us. When we come in Christ, we typically have something that is dear to us that we need to lose – our sin. Most of us have spent years cultivating a relationship with sin. Rebellion has been our constant companion. It needs to die. Furthermore we need to be in grief over it. The mourning is not because we are parting ways with our sin, but because we ever chose it in the first place. We need to be in grief over the pain and destruction that our sin has caused and the division that it has placed between us and our God.

When we become poor in spirit, a natural byproduct of that is to mourn over our sinful condition. The good news is that this mourning – repentance – results in comfort – forgiveness.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Once we are dependent upon the Spirit of God and have mourned over our sinful condition, it will leave us in a state of meekness. Meek does not mean weak. A person who is meek is not necessarily someone who is wishy-washy or spiritless. Meekness is humility. Anyone who has emptied himself of his own spirit, realized his total dependence upon the Spirit of God, and been overwhelmed by his own sinful condition will be humbled by the process. There will be no spiritual arrogance about this person. He will mourn with others who are dealing with their own sin. He will be so overwhelmed by the goodness of God that he will comprehend his standing before God and the relationship that he is supposed to have with his fellow man. That is meekness. The meek individual is submitted to God and anxious to sin no more. The meek individual does not sit in judgment upon fellow believers, but instead wants to help them find relief from the bondage of sin. The meek will inherit the earth, which means that God's creation belongs to the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Having emptied ourselves of our own spirit and relied upon the Spirit of God for survival, having mourned over our own spiritual condition, having been humbled into a proper standing before God and fellow man, we will be left with a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. The elimination of sin from our lives leaves a void that will be filled one way or another. We can choose to fill that void with more sin, which will put us back right where we started. The choice that we need to make, however, is to fill the void with righteousness. After God forgives us of sin, he begins the process of sanctifying us, which means changing us into the image of Christ. This process will happen at a speed which we can influence. It is our hunger for righteousness that hurries this process along.

God does not violate our free will. As long as we choose sin over righteousness, then we impede our own sanctification. If our spiritual poverty is real, however, and we have truly mourned over our sin, it is inconceivable that we would continue to choose sin. Yet conceivable or not, we all continue to fail, we all continue to rebel, and we are in constant need of further mourning. Hopefully over time, however, our hunger and thirst for righteousness begins to exceed our tendency to sin. The good news is that a hunger and thirst for righteousness is a longing that God will always satisfy abundantly.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Meekness and righteousness produce mercy. As we get further along in our journey to holiness, we must surely point the way for people who are further behind in the journey. Those who are struggling – those who are in need in whatever sense – are worthy of our help. The journey from heathen to holy is a journey from self to selflessness. We must reach a point of spiritual maturity where the well being of others becomes a major concern. We become people of mercy. And as people of mercy, we become people who receive mercy. There are people further along the journey than we are. We need their help. Because they have already passed this milestone, they are people of mercy as well and they are there for us. More importantly, we receive the mercy and favor of God because we are operating as agents of his grace to a world in need.

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

Purity of heart is the next milestone. It is a natural outgrowth of having made the journey thus far. Anyone who is spiritually dependent upon God, mournful over his sinful condition, humbled

before God and man, thirsty for righteousness, and operating in mercy will grow in purity of heart. His will is being conformed to the will of God. His mind is being conformed to the mind of God. When that happens, he will be able to see God.

God reveals himself to different people in different ways. Romans 1 teaches us that God has been revealing himself to man from the beginning of time through creation itself. The universe is a display of the glory of its creator. Still, some people seem to have a much clearer understanding of God than others. Some seem to hear his voice clearer or more often than others. Some see his hand moving more obviously than others. It is the purity of heart – the conformance to his likeness – that makes the difference.

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

Those with purity of heart, who begin to perceive God, will share with others what they see and hear. They become instruments of spreading the peace of God to a world in need of peace. This is not talking about law and order. It does not mean that they will bring about a cessation of wars. It is referring to a spiritual peace that comes only through a relationship with the Prince of Peace. The peacemakers bring spiritual security to those who have been lost. They remove from harm's way those whose souls have been threatened or harassed by the enemy. Having been adopted as joint heirs with Jesus – having become the sons of God – they offer his peace to the world.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The peacemakers advance the Kingdom of God. This happens in an atmosphere commonly called spiritual warfare. Satan does not care for the fact that his kingdom is being defeated and that his boundaries are being attacked. Those who fight at the front lines must anticipate a battle. This battle will come in the form of persecution, accusations, lies, etc. Some will be killed for the faith. Others will suffer more subtle forms of persecution. However it comes, it is real, it is hurtful, and it should not be a surprise. Remember that our supreme commander in this battle was nailed to a tree.

In the midst of the battle, however, we should have an inexplicable peace. We know the persecution is coming. We know from whence it comes. We know why. And because of it, we are blessed. We are hilarious. We are amused at the enemy's pathetic efforts to hang on to a battle that he has already lost. We are honored to be instruments of the victory. We take our places with prophets, apostles, and countless champions of the faith who have sacrificed even life itself for the cause. We know that we have the ultimate benefactor waiting to say "Well done, good and faithful servant." The eternal reward ahead overwhelms the perception of the persecution now.

So how do you get from where you are to where God wants you to be?

- Die to self and become completely dependent upon his spirit for your very survival.
- Mourn over your sinful condition.
- Be humbled into a proper relationship with God and with fellow man.
- Supplant your desire to sin with a hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Be a person of mercy.
- Seek purity of heart – let God mold you into the image of his son.
- Share his peace with a world in need.

- Become a soldier in his army, prepared to deal with the persecution that comes with the job.

You'll be holy. You'll be blessed. You'll be happy. You'll be hilarious.

7.2 Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We have encountered the salt analogy already, in the Section on the Parables, specifically the Parable of Counting the Cost. We are to season and to preserve the world around us, just as salt seasons and preserves meat.

The analogy about light is fairly obvious. Light drives out darkness. We are instruments of God's spiritual light, designed to drive out spiritual darkness. Light that is hidden does not achieve the purpose of driving out darkness. We cannot hide our spiritual light if we are to be useful in driving out darkness.

We are to publicly bring glory to God. His radiance should shine through us to the world around us. His name must be lifted up from our lips publicly. That does not mean that we should all find a soapbox and the nearest street corner. It means that as we go about our normal business we are to be people of God.

7.3 Jesus and the Law

Matthew 5:17-48

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

It is extremely important for Christians to realize that Jesus did NOT come to deliver us from the law of the Old Testament. He came to fulfill that law. He did come to free us from misunderstandings about the law.

The Jews had taken the laws and the commandments and had constructed an elaborate law system of their own, with God's laws buried somewhere deep at the core. The plain and simple requirements of God were shrouded with so many layers of Pharisaical law that they were no longer visible. Jesus came to peel off the extraneous layers and to restore the law to a fresh and vital priority in people's lives.

The law as it was delivered to Moses was precious to Jesus. It contained the Father's standards for his people. How could Jesus set it aside? Jesus was the Word of God. The Word of God would not set aside the Word of God.

Jesus' teachings were marked by an authority the people had never heard. There is a formula in this section: "You have heard ... but I say ..." The people were not used to hearing teaching like

that. Everything their teachers said was justified by “it is written ...” Jesus justified his words by his own authority.

The people were excited to hear the fresh interpretations of the law. Take, for instance, “Do not murder.” This was one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus did not tell the people that murder was no longer a problem. But he did tell them that the physical act of murder had never been the real issue. Hate was the issue. Murder was the physical conclusion of hatred. We must guard our hearts against hatred. That is the real sin. If we have that under control, murder will not be an problem. If our relationship with our fellow man is out of order, that should be restored before entering into worship because we should not worship in a state of unrepentant sin.

Jesus took a similar approach on the commandment “Do not commit adultery.” Adultery is the physical conclusion of lust. Lust is the real sin. We must guard our hearts against lust. Jesus put high priority on marriage and on the home. Things that threaten the marriage or the home are to be avoided. Activities or attitudes that would injure marriage are sin.

He wanted us to be people of integrity. Our “yes” should be “yes” and our “no” should be “no.” If we are to be good witnesses for him, then we must be believable people.

Exodus 21:24 is the source of the law “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” This law was given to people to limit retribution – not to require it. God told the people that punishment should fit the crime. If someone injures your eye, the most that you could do in return was to injure his eye. Prior to the giving of this law, if you injured somebody’s tooth, he might retaliate by killing you and your family. The intention of the law was to limit retaliatory behavior. It was motivated out of love and fair treatment. Jesus brought the spirit of the law to its logical conclusion – turn the other cheek. If someone strikes you on your right cheek, do not retaliate. Offer him your left. The demonstration of loving forgiveness will be far more powerful than any display of revenge.

Jesus calls upon us to be people who fervently seek to be right with the world. We are supposed to love and pray even for our enemies.

This section does raise some interesting questions. Jesus did not do away with the law. After his death, however, we see that his followers abandoned the laws regarding ritual cleanliness, the dietary laws, the sacrificial system, and other requirements laid out in the books of Moses. Why is that if Jesus did not do away with the law?

To answer this, one must carefully examine the words of Jesus spoken above. Note that he said:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

After the resurrection, everything was accomplished with respect to much of the law.

Consider man when he was in the Garden of Eden. At that time, did the commandment “Do not murder” apply? Yes. Murder has always been a violation of God’s standards. It is a behavior that man needed to avoid in the Garden and still should avoid today. But back in the Garden, was there a concept of ceremonial cleanliness? Were there dietary restrictions (other than that on the tree of knowledge of good and evil)? Was regular blood sacrifice necessary? The answer to all of these is “no.” The reason that these did not apply is because there was no sin problem.

The sacrificial system was given to us to atone for sin. The laws about diet and ceremonial cleanliness were given so that sinful man could approach a sinless God. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of these laws once and for all. When he died, everything had been accomplished because sin had been defeated.

The law has two basic components. One is a behavioral standard. It still applies. Jesus clarified it but did not set it aside. The other part of the law dealt with the sin problem. It gave methods by which man, still in a sinful condition, could approach God for the purpose of atoning for sin and reestablishing relationship. Jesus did not set aside this part of the law; he fulfilled it. Therefore his followers did not have to live under the requirements of this part of the law because they no longer had an unresolved sin problem.

Jesus did not do away with the law. He liberated people to live under the law rather than under the Pharisaical tradition that clouded the spirit of the law. The law was never meant to be a list of do's and don't's. It was meant to be a revelation of the character of God and of his standards for his creation. Jesus came to be the perfect image of the Father and as part of that he restored a pure law to his followers.

7.4 Motives for Doing Good

Matthew 6:1-4

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Somehow this section must be balanced with the verse that says, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Both texts assume that we, as believers, will do good works. We will have acts of righteousness. We will give to the needy. One text indicates, however, that these things should be done publicly whereas the other seems to indicate that they should be done in private. Why the conflict?

The difference in the two is motivation. Do not do good works for the purpose of calling attention to yourself. Do not seek the attention and honor of men in what you do. If you do, you are likely to get their attention and even their honor, but that is all the reward you can expect.

If you do good deeds for the purpose of glorifying God, then you will receive your reward from him. You will bring honor to him and draw others to him. That should be the motivation for good deeds and this is what brings the ultimate benefit.

Do good works. Do not seek the approval of men when you do. Feel the favor of the Father. He stands ready to give it to you.

7.5 Do Not Judge

Matthew 7:1-5

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Don't take it personally, but when Jesus ascended, he did not leave you in charge. You did not become boss. You did not become the standard by which the world is measured.

Like all Scripture, this passage must be understood in context. Remember that Jesus also told us: (Matthew 7:15-16) "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." On the one hand, we are to be wise in recognizing the wolves in sheep's clothing, but on the other hand we are not supposed to judge others. We are supposed to recognize that there are tares among the wheat, but we are not supposed to judge. How does one reconcile these two facts?

The answer to this may best be found in the story of the woman caught in adultery, found in John 8. The people in the story were quick to hand this woman over to judgment, even though all of them were guilty of sin as well. Jesus never said that the woman was innocent. He never indicated that she did not deserve the judgment that they sought. He very effectively pointed out, however, that each of them should worry about cleaning up his or her own act and leave the judgment to the Judge.

It is true that we should be wary to look for fruit in the lives of other, but this is primarily for the purpose of knowing whether or not they are worthy of our complete spiritual trust. Some people will take advantage of others who submit to them spiritually. Before contributing money to something which calls itself a ministry, it is incumbent to check out how the ministry uses its contributions. If the ministry has no fruit, then it is not worthy of our money. We have no business submitting to the spiritual authority of a minister whose life bears no fruit.

Being unwilling to submit to the authority of a minister is very different, however, than wishing the judgment of God to fall upon him. Remember that God is in the business of reconciling. The day will come when the door will close and judgment will finally fall, but until that time, God is busy wooing people back into his good favor. Do we really want God to lose his patience and start "zapping" sinners? If so, where does that leave us?

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus said "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." Keep your wits about you, but worry more about your own innocence than the faults of others.

7.6 The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is so familiar that most people probably think it is secular. The words were part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. They are profound.

Jesus thought they were so important, in fact, that he said of them, "for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." The theme of everything in the Bible is relationship, and there are two primary aspects to the relationship:

- God cares how we relate to him.
- God cares how we relate to each other.

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Our devotion to him is measured by how we treat each other. Following the Golden Rule is part of being the salt of the earth. Although there is no guarantee, people are more likely to treat you right if you are in the habit of treating them as you would have them treat you.

If we really would all treat each other as we would want others to treat us, the world would be a much more livable place.

Realistically, that will never happen. There is no way in the present age that everyone will operate under this premise. So where does that leave me? If I operate under the Golden Rule but other people do not, will it result in people taking advantage of me? Yes. So what? The Golden Rule is not about how others treat me. It is about how I treat others. If I follow the rule, I have the peace that comes from innocence, regardless of how others treat me. God will uphold me. Should any vengeance be due, it will be his and not mine. I am freed from the burden of having to get even with anyone.

The Kingdom of God is not about being treated well while you are here. It is not about getting a fair deal. It is about spiritual victory that comes from innocence and obedience. It is about storing up treasures in heaven, sometimes at the expense of treasures on earth.

7.7 The Narrow Gate, False Prophets, and Judgment

Matthew 7:13-28

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the

winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

This is one of the scariest passages of Scripture. If ever there was a passage to repudiate the concept that "all roads lead to heaven," this is it. The fact is that there is a wide road that leads to destruction, but the gate to salvation is narrow. Only a few will find it.

When judgment day comes, many people will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Jesus will reply to them, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" That is a terrifying fact.

The warning is strong and certain. The wolves in sheep's clothing are real. The false prophets abound. They will lead many to destruction.

There are churches that have "Christian" on the letterhead, but they have nothing to do with Christ. They bear no fruit. They do not serve the Body of Christ. They do not lead their people into a relationship with the Creator. They lull their people into a false sense of security but they do not teach them to recognize the voice of the Shepherd.

Some of these churches even have flashy ministries. They see their leaders and/or members prophesy, drive out demons, and perform miracles. Really! (Remember that Satan can do all of those things!) But they do not convict people of their sin. They do not provide them with healing for their hurts. They do not nurture them in the process of sanctification. It is a facade.

This passage is not meant to frighten those who are legitimately saved. It is not meant to confuse people into trying to "work" their way into salvation. Salvation is by grace. If you really do have a relationship with the Savior, then this passage should not threaten you.

But this passage is meant to frighten those who have a superficial relationship with Jesus. Hopefully it will "scare the hell" out of some of them, or at least scare some of them out of hell.

Check your status. Are you growing in Christ-likeness? Does your sin bother you? Does the Holy Spirit operate freely in your life? Do you hear the voice of God regularly? Is Jesus your Lord (and not just your Savior)? If not, fix it. Surround yourself with people who can help you in the journey (i.e. make sure you are plugged into a healthy church).

Saturate your mind with the Word of God and let it be the foundation upon which you build your life. Any other foundation will crumble.

When the day comes, you will either hear "Well done, good and faithful servant" or "Away from me, I never knew you." You have to choose now.

8. Jesus' Charge to the Church Today

The majority of Jesus' teaching was focused on the lives of those who followed him – particularly the twelve. He ministered directly to their lives. He did leave instructions on how they should organize and function as the Body of Christ after he departed.

Matthew 10:7-9 says:

As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

We, the church are to spread the message of the Kingdom of Heaven. The proclamation of the Gospel is to be accompanied by a demonstration of the power of the Kingdom. Jesus came to heal, drive out demons, etc. This is part of what the Kingdom is about. As we proclaim the message of the Kingdom, we should validate that message by tangibly showing that the message is true. Remember that John 14:12 says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." The Holy Spirit was given to us to equip us to do the "stuff" of the Kingdom. The proclamation is diluted without the demonstration.

Matthew 16:17-20 says:

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

The meaning of this passage has been disputed in church history. The traditional Catholic interpretation is that "this rock" refers to the man "Peter." "Upon this rock (Peter) I will build my church." With this understanding, Peter becomes the foundation of the church. Catholics consider him to be the first pope and they consider the other popes to be spiritual descendants of Peter. This is where papal authority is derived.

Protestants (as expected) interpret this passage differently. They interpret "this rock" to be Peter's confession, and not Peter himself. Just prior to this passage, Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was. Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." To this, Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." The confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God is something that can only be revealed to us by the Father through the Holy Spirit. This confession is the foundation of the church – not Peter the man.

Peter seemed to be the "head" apostle, but he was also a fallible man. He denied Jesus three times on the night of the crucifixion. Fairly early in the Book of Acts, he dropped out of sight and never really had a place of prominence in the church again.

The church is not built on men, made of clay. It is built on the confession of Christ, made of rock. God would continue to reveal truth to men and that truth would form the foundation of the church. The gates of Hell will never prevail against this confession.

Then Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Jesus granted his authority to his Church. But what does it mean to bind and to loose? What exactly is it that we have the authority to do?

These refer to spiritual warfare. We have the authority to bind and loose spiritual powers. We have been given the authority to bind demons. They may be restrained from harassing people who are looking to God for spiritual freedom. We have the authority to loose angels to do battle for us.

We have been left amazingly well equipped to do our job. We have the Holy Spirit, enabling us to demonstrate the power of the kingdom. We have spiritual authority over the powers of darkness. We have God's armies, waiting to do battle for us. So why does the battle continue to rage?

Unfortunately most of us still cling to a certain amount of sin. Sin diminishes the Spirit's ability or willingness to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom through us. It gives the forces of darkness a foothold in our lives, diminishing our authority over them. It chokes out everything that God wants to do in our lives.

It is all so obvious. If we want to live lives of power, if we want to walk in authority and victory, we simply need to resist sin.

Matthew 28:18-20 says:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This passage is known as the Great Commission. This has been adopted by some as a call to overseas missions. That may certainly be an aspect of the Great Commission, but it is not the main intent. Most of us will never be called to uproot our lives, move to some faraway place, and attempt missionary activity. All of us are called to the Great Commission, however.

In Greek, the phrase "Therefore go and make disciples..." really has the meaning "As you go about your business, make disciples..." When you go to work, make disciples. When you go to the store, make disciples. Make disciples of the people with whom you have contact on a customary basis. Win them to Christ. Baptize them. Teach them to obey everything Jesus taught us.

And what did Jesus teach us? What was his commission? Luke 4:18-19 says:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This should be the pursuit of his disciples. As we go about our normal, daily routines, we are to preach the good news to those who are in need of good news. At work today, we should release from prison those in spiritual bondage. In our own neighborhoods, we should heal the sick, raise the dead, and give sight to the blind. At the local mall, we should help the oppressed to find freedom. Everywhere we go, we should proclaim to a hurting and lost world the year of the Lord's favor.

That means us. That means now. Go do it!

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