

A Study of The Conversations of Jesus

Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth has had a greater impact on the world than any other human being who has ever lived. Whether you believe He was the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, and the Son of God (as I do) or just a Jew from Nazareth, my leading statement cannot be denied. I would also say, however, that it is because He was the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, and the Son of God, that my leading statement is true.

His life can be grouped into four areas: His birth (with its Messianic fulfillments), His sermons (His formal teaching), His conversations (where He has a dialog with someone), and His death (with His resurrection and appearances). This study will focus on His conversations, those instances where Jesus taught informally as He interacted with people.

The conversations of Jesus included here are during His approximately 3½ years of ministry, beginning in the spring of A.D. 29, and His post-resurrection appearances. [Dating calculated by Dr. Harold W. Hoehner from Daniel 9:25-26, and the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C. The map is from Sarah Cook of Olivet Designs.]

It is, admittedly, a bit of a subjective call as to whether a verbal encounter should be labeled a “conversation,” since some involve several back-and-forth comments and some only a few or just one. Also, I have usually followed the conversation presented in just one of the Gospels at a time, generally the one with the most conversation. Although I have not been exhaustive (I do not claim to have covered every conversational comment), I have attempted to be complete (I have covered the longer conversations through His 3½–4 years of ministry). In each case, I have:

- Referenced **The Conversation**
- Quoted **The Text**
- Discussed **The Historical Context**
- Made some **Observations and Interpretations**
- Offered some thoughts about **Applications**
- Asked a **Conversation Question** about the text



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, California), used by permission.

Table of Contents

A General Overview of the Ministry of Jesus	4
1. The Conversation with John the Baptist at the Jordan River	5
2. The Conversation with the Devil and about Temptation	6
3. The Conversation with Nathanael	7
4. The Conversation with His Mother at the Wedding in Cana	8
5. The Conversation with Nicodemus about Being Born Again	9
6. The Conversation with the Woman at the Well	10
7. The Conversation at the Reception, after the Call of Matthew	13
8. The Conversation about Picking Grain on the Sabbath	15
9. The Conversation with Simon the Pharisee	16
10. The Conversation at the Feeding of the 5,000	18
11. The Conversation after Walking on the Water	20
12. The Conversation about Unwashed Hands	21
13. The Conversation about Healing the Gentile Woman's Daughter	22
14. The Conversation about "Who Do You Say That I Am?"	24
15. The Conversation about Who Will Be Greatest in Kingdom of Heaven	25
16. The Conversation about the Cost of Discipleship	27
17. The Conversation with the Pharisees About Determining Truth	29
18. The Conversation About Healing the Man Born Blind	30
19. The Conversation of the Lawyer's Question and the Good Samaritan	32
20. The Conversation about the Hospitality of Mary and Martha	34
21. The Conversation with the Jews about the Son of God	34
22. The Conversation about the Healed Ten Lepers	36

23.	The Conversation about the Narrow Gate	38
24.	The Conversation about Herod	38
25.	The Conversation with the Pharisees about the Sabbath	39
26.	The Conversation about Humbling Yourself	40
27.	The Conversation Predicting the Next Dispensation	40
28.	The Conversation about the Consequences of Discipleship	41
29.	The Conversation about a Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin, and a Lost Son	41
30.	The Conversation about Increasing Our Faith	42
31.	The Conversation about the Raising of Lazarus	43
32.	The Conversation about Confronting Authority	45
33.	The Conversation about Foot Washing	46
34.	The Conversation about the Way, the Truth, and the Life	47
35.	The Conversation at the Trial before the High Priest	48
36.	The Conversation at the Trial Before Pilate	49
37.	The Conversation with the Thief on the Cross	50
38.	The Conversation with Mary Magdalene	51
39.	The Conversation on the Road to Emmaus	53
40.	The Conversation with the Disciples in Jerusalem	56
41.	The Conversation with the Peter in Galilee	56
42.	The Conversation at Jesus' Ascension	57
43.	The Conversation with Saul	58
44.	The Conversation with Ananias	59
45.	The Conversation with the Apostle John	60
	Epilogue	61

A General Overview of the Ministry of Jesus

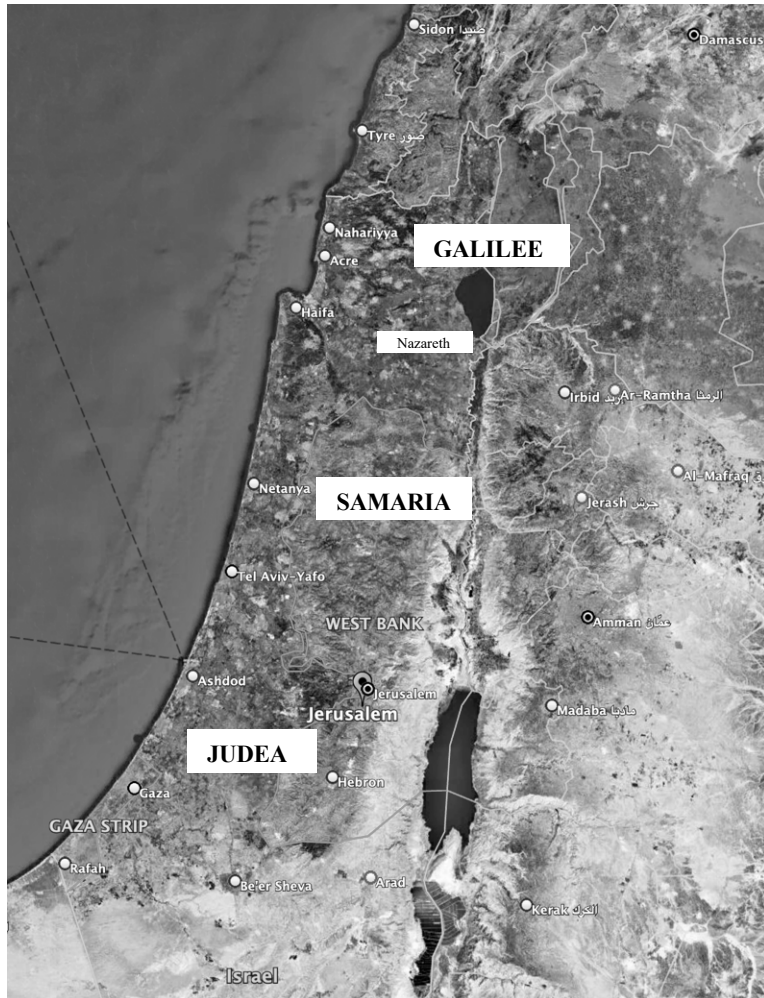
Jesus was the divine Son of God. But He was also a real person who walked the hills of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea at a real time in real history. So, first I want to give a brief geography, history, and chronology of His life.

Spring of 5 B.C., Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.

Spring of 5 B.C.–Spring of A.D. 29, Jesus grew up in Nazareth in the family of Joseph and Mary, who had six other children (Mark 6:3).

Spring of A.D. 29, He left Galilee to be baptized by John the Baptist, after which He was tempted by the devil. Then He went back to Galilee, where He chose the first five of His disciples (two were disciples of John the Baptist), and turned water into wine at Cana (near Nazareth).

Winter/Spring of A.D. 30, approaching the time of the Passover (March or April), Jesus and His disciples walked 80 miles (130 kilometers) south, uphill (2,575 feet/785 meters above sea level) to *Jerusalem*. While there, He chased the money changers out of the Temple (the first time) and taught Nicodemus about being born again.



Late Spring of A.D. 30, He walked back (north) to Galilee, stopping on the way to talk with the woman at the well in Samaria.

Summer of A.D. 30, back in Galilee, He healed a nobleman's son and was rejected at His hometown of Nazareth. Then He and His disciples traveled east (and down –600 ft/180 meters below sea level) to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, where He may have stayed in Peter's house in Capernaum. There He recruited Matthew as a disciple and healed all the sick that came to Him, including Peter's mother-in-law.

Winter/Spring of A.D. 31, He traveled back to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, where He healed a blind lame man at the Pool of Bethesda and gave a long discourse to the Jews.

Spring of A.D. 31, arriving back in Galilee, He confronted the Pharisees over His disciples picking grain on the sabbath.

A.D. 31-32, Jesus carried out what is often called His “Greater Galilean Ministry.” During this time, Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount and His sermon on the level place, raised a widow’s son from the dead at Nain, taught in parables, calmed the sea, fed the 5,000, walked on water and healed all who came to Him. The Greater Galilean Ministry was interrupted by one trip back to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, where He healed a blind lame man at the Pool of Bethesda and gave a long discourse to the Jews. Then He returned to Galilee.

Summer of A.D. 32, He made two trips north. On the first of these trips He healed a Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter. When He returned, He fed the 4,000. On the second trip north, He went up to the Mount of Transfiguration (probably Mt. Hermon).

Fall of A.D. 32–Winter of A.D. 33, Jesus journeyed back south to Judea for what is often called “The Greater Judean Ministry,” where He traveled and taught in the villages throughout Judea. Sometimes He and His disciples would spend the night under the hospitality of their friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. All the while, the tensions were rising between Jesus and the Jewish leadership, especially the Pharisees.

Spring of A.D. 33, during His “Greater Judean Ministry,” Jesus made (at least) two trips to the Transjordan. The second trip was interrupted by the sickness and death of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead at Bethany, just southeast of Jerusalem, on the east side of the Mount of Olives. This was followed by His final week of ministry, when He triumphantly entered Jerusalem, chased the money changers out of the Temple (again), did a lot of teaching, and celebrated the Passover with His disciples. Then He was arrested, tried, crucified, buried, rose from the dead and appeared to multiple people, including giving His disciples “The Great Commission” to reach out to the whole world with the gospel. Then He ascended into heaven.

The Conversation Ministry of Jesus

1. The Conversation with John the Baptist at the Jordan River Spring of A.D. 29

The Text

Matthew 3:13-15, *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.*

But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”

But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Then he permitted Him.

The Historical Context

The first time we hear about Jesus, after He was 12 years old (Luke 2:42), is when He came from Galilee to be baptized by John the Baptist. [Although it may have been developed from the Jewish ceremonial washings (Exodus 19:10), as far as we know, the practice of baptism began with John.] This surprised John, whose baptism was a repentance (Matthew 3:7-8) unto salvation (the same view Peter expressed in Acts 2:38). John was confused because he needed repentance, and Jesus did not. When Jesus asked John to “*Permit it at*



this time,” John obeyed. John knew what Jesus wanted him to do, but there is no indication that John understood why he was to baptize Jesus. Although it did not answer John’s question, he realized an impact of the baptism when *he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”* (Matthew 3:17). This is a rare occasion where all three persons of the Trinity are specifically present (the Trinity is mentioned together in Matthew 28:18-20 and by Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Observations/Interpretations

Apparently, there are two reasons for this baptism:

- (1) Jesus was identifying with the ministry of John, rather than the Jewish religious institutions (Matthew 21:23-25).
- (2) Most likely, Jesus’ reason, for the baptism being *to fulfill all righteousness*, was a reference to John coming in *the spirit and power of Elijah*, because Elijah was to precede the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5; Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17).

Applications

- If we understand what Jesus said, then we should obey Him even if we do not know why. For example, it might seem difficult to love your enemy or turn the other cheek.
- We should identify with those following the Word of God, not just of religious institutions.
- There is nothing wrong with being baptized for salvation if it represents faith in Christ’s death as a payment for sins. There are two basic uses of baptism in the New Testament:
 1. Jesus used baptism as an **identification**, in this case with John’s ministry. The apostles also used baptism for a public identification as a Christian, after salvation (Acts 16:30-33).
 2. John and Peter used baptism for a **salvation** decision (Acts 2:38).

Discussion Question

What was the main connection between Jesus and John the Baptist?

2. The Conversation with the Devil about Temptation Spring of A.D. 29

The Text

Matthew 4:1-3, Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

And the tempter came...to Him, The devil then made three temptation statements: *If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread...throw yourself down (from the pinnacle of the Temple)...fall down and worship me.*

Jesus met all the temptations with Scripture.

The Historical Context

The conversation with the devil was after Jesus was baptized by John and before He chose any of His disciples. So, the temptation preceded Jesus’ ministry.



Observations/Interpretations

Four things should be noted as we consider the conversation Jesus had with the devil:

- (1) This came about by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The point from God's perspective seems to be to demonstrate that Jesus was the Son of God.
- (2) Jesus was now hungry, indicating the devil thought He was now susceptible to temptation.
- (3) The devil is called *the tempter*. The devil's primary anti-ministry seems to be a temptation to violate the Word of God. The devil even misquoted the Bible as part of his temptation.
- (4) The devil seems to have the objective of proving himself superior to Jesus.

Applications

- God never tempts us (James 1:13), but He may allow the devil to tempt us (Job 1:12), in order to allow us to demonstrate our faith in Jesus. We should never think we are being tempted by God.
- We should know the devil may tempt us in our area of physical (or psychological) needs.
- Understand, the temptation of the devil will be to ignore or distort the Word of God.
- Understand, the temptation of the devil will be to get us to ignore or distort the authority, or deity, of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

Why did the Spirit lead Jesus to be tempted by the devil? Why does the author of Hebrews describe Jesus as *One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:15)?

3. The Conversation with Nathanael Summer of A.D. 29

The Text

John 1:47-50, *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him,*

and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

The Historical Context

After the temptation, Jesus returned from the Judean Wilderness to the south end of the Jordan River, where John the Baptist said, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). This inspired John (who became the Apostle John) and Andrew to follow Jesus. Andrew then recruited his brother Peter and the three of them followed Jesus north about 80 miles (130 kilometers) to Galilee, where Jesus found Philip and Philip found Nathanael (John 1:37-43). So, Jesus now had five disciples.

Observations/Interpretations

The initial disciples of Jesus came from John the Baptist. Those disciples then introduced other men they knew to Jesus, saying something like what Andrew told his brother Peter, *"we have found the Messiah"* (John 1:44).

Application

We should follow Jesus as He is *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29).

Discussion Question

What does this tell us about how disciples are most likely, initially, recruited?

4. Jesus' Conversation with His Mother at the Wedding in Cana Fall of A.D. 29

The Text

John 2:3-5, *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us [literally what to you and to me woman]? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."*

The **Google Earth photo** shows the west half of the Sea of Galilee with Peter's hometown of Capernaum on the upper right. Notice the city of Nazareth on the lower left corner of the picture and Cana slightly to the northeast, here called "Kafr Kanna."



The Historical Context

This short exchange is the only recorded adult conversation between Jesus and His mother. After recruiting His first five disciples in the summer of A.D. 29, Jesus was living in Galilee, possibly in His hometown of Nazareth. In the fall of that year, the whole family, including Jesus and His five disciples, were invited to a wedding in Cana, next to and just down the hill from Nazareth. The conversation took place on the third day of the wedding feast. [The Ryrie Study Bible says, "A wedding feast often lasted a week."]

Observations/Interpretations

The fact that Mary came to Jesus with the no-wine problem indicates that she knew He could solve the problem. Jesus resisted His mother's request. Doing miracles was to authenticate His being the Son of God and that was to happen during the appointed time for His ministry, which had not begun yet. Nonetheless, Jesus answered His mother's request, and created from water the highest quality wine. This was the first recorded miracle Jesus did as a sign of His being the Messiah, and it served to create the disciples' faith in Jesus.

Application

In our Christian community, Mary should be respected as a godly woman who was entrusted with bearing and raising the Messiah. But we should not pray to Mary. Jesus might answer your prayer as He did Mary's request at Cana. But Mary does not hear and answer prayer. To assume Mary can hear and answer prayer elevates her to a place of Deity, since only God could hear the thousands of prayers offered to Mary continually from all over the world.

The record of the miracles of Jesus is given to us in the Gospels. That allows us to put our faith in historical facts rather than religious imagination (John 20:30-31).

Discussion Question

As adults, what was the relationship between Jesus and His mother Mary?

5. The Conversation with Nicodemus about Being Born Again March/April of A.D. 30

The Text

John 3:1-12, *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night*

And said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

The Historical Context

After the wedding at Cana, Jesus went with His disciples and His family down (686 feet/209 meters below sea level) to Capernaum, where Peter lived. Then, at the time of the Passover (March or April), Jesus and His disciples went 80 miles (130 kilometers) south, *up* (2,575 feet/785 meters above sea level) to Jerusalem. While there, He chased the money changers out of the Temple and performed some signs that caused many to believe. In general, the Pharisees rejected Jesus, but there were at least some who were convinced that He came as a teacher from God. These were represented by a *ruler of the Jews* named Nicodemus.

Observations/Interpretations

Nicodemus, and apparently a few other Pharisees (he said *we*), secretly believed Jesus came *from God as a teacher*. Jesus changed the focus of the discussion by telling Nicodemus he must be *born*

again in order to *see the kingdom of God*. This confused Nicodemus because physical rebirth is impossible. Jesus added some information, which led to further confusion for Nicodemus. There are many opinions from many good scholars about Jesus' statement of the need to be born *of water and the spirit*. I am assuming the water refers to the baptism John used for conversion. At any rate, Jesus explained it as being *born of the Spirit*.

Then He said something neither Nicodemus, nor anyone else, had ever heard before. Those born again of the Spirit are like the wind. Of course, Nicodemus knew about wind. His faith in wind was based on his understanding of real evidence in the real world. But where it came from and where it was going, that Nicodemus did not know. Jesus said a born-again person is like that. The evidence for their faith is real but the re-birth itself comes from God, and it cannot be understood with a physical (or psychological, or philosophical, or religious) explanation.

Nicodemus then indicated he had no idea how that could happen. But Jesus said, as a leader in Israel, Nicodemus should have known about it. Jesus said, "*we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen.*" *We* here seems to refer to Jesus and the Old Testament prophets who had the same conversion message. Jesus called being born again a decision to trust the message of the prophets because of the evidence supplied by the prophets.

Next, Jesus delivered a discourse that is better categorized as a sermon rather than a conversation, so it is outside the purpose of this material. But before He did, Jesus said, "*If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*" *Earthly things* is probably a reference to Jesus' illustrations of water and wind and birth. In the Bible, "belief" (the same word as "faith") is understanding the truth to be true. So Jesus told Nicodemus (if I may paraphrase), "If you do not understand the truth to be true about earthly things, how will you understand the truth to be true about heavenly things?"

Application

If we want to be part of the household of God, destined for heaven, then it is not sufficient to believe Jesus came *from God as a teacher*. Things obtained and developed from natural birth: intelligence, education, training, or indoctrination, will not get us to God. No amount of religion, sincerity, or good deeds will get us to God. In order to get to God, we need to be what Jesus explained to Nicodemus as being *born again*. Being born again results from a decision of faith, trusting the evidence. It is like wind. We understand it to be real from real evidence. But we can only be part of it by faith, understanding what Jesus said about it to also be real.

Discussion Question

What part of the gospel, defined as the plan of salvation, is not included in John 3:16?

6. The Conversation with the Woman at the Well

Spring of A.D. 30

The Text

John 4:7-26, *There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.*

Exchange #1. *Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.*

Therefore, the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Exchange #2. *Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” She said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?”*

Exchange #3. *Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”*

The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.”

Exchange #4. *He said to her, “Go, call your husband and come here.”*

The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.”

Exchange #5. *Jesus said to her, “You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.”*

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

Exchange #6. *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”

Conclusion: *Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”*

In the first Google Earth Photo we can see that Mount Gerizim is north of Jerusalem about halfway to Galilee. **In the second photo** we can see a close-up of Mount Gerizim on the lower left, where the temple the Samaritan woman was referring to is located. Jacob’s Well is across the valley on the east. [Today, a Greek Orthodox Church has been built around and above Jacob’s Well.] This is where the above discussion took place.



The Historical Context

Jesus began His public ministry with baptism from John the Baptist. Then He was tempted by the devil. Then He chose five disciples and returned to Galilee, where He turned water into wine at Cana, visited Capernaum, and traveled south to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. There He chased the money changers out of the Temple and had a *born again* discussion with Nicodemus. Then He began the journey to return to Galilee. But the route He chose took Him through the middle of the country, which means *He had to pass through Samaria* (4:4). At noon, He came to Jacob’s

Well in Sychar (today's Nablus), between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. He rested there, while *His disciples had gone into the city to buy food.*

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus initiated the conversation with the woman (whose name is never mentioned), and He followed it with six other comments. The woman responded to Jesus with six comments/questions. So there are six recorded verbal exchanges between them. [It is not clear how the Apostle John knew about the details of this discussion, possibly from interviewing the woman over the next two days (4:40).]

Exchange #1. Jesus was apparently sitting on the wall-edge of the well, making it awkward for the woman to reach around Him to draw water. Jesus surprised her when He said, *“Give Me a drink.”* She was taken back at this for two reasons: she was a Samaritan and she was a woman. Jesus' simple request seemingly broke two firmly-held traditions.

Exchange #2. Jesus told the woman that, if she knew who He was, she would have asked for *living water*. The woman wondered how He could get living water, or any water at all, since He had no bucket with which to draw, and the well was deep. But she also began to be suspicious because she asked if He was claiming to be greater than Jacob, who gave them the well.

Exchange #3. Jesus then turned the subject from drinking water to *water springing up to eternal life*. Like Nicodemus, the woman was still focused on the physical and asked Him for physical living water.

Exchange #4. Then came the shortest exchange, and the one that turned the focus of the discussion. Jesus simply asked her to *“Go, call your husband and come here,”* and she professed to not have a husband.

Exchange #5. This is the exchange that began the creation of faith in the woman. When Jesus revealed that He was aware of her marital status and marital history, she said, *“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”* His supernatural knowledge of her past led her to the inevitable understanding that He was some sort of prophet. She then turned the subject to religion and especially to what she saw as an unresolvable conflict. *“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain [referring to Mount Gerizim], and you [Jewish] people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”*

Exchange #6. Now that she was thinking in His context, Jesus told her four theological truths:

- (1) Neither Jerusalem nor Gerizim (neither-nor not either-or) will be special places for worshipping God. There is a dispensation change coming where even the Jerusalem Temple will not give special access to God.
- (2) Nonetheless, the Jews are the people God chose to bring the message of salvation to the world.
- (3) Therefore, Jews worship what they know, real revelation from real prophets confirmed by real, supernatural, historical events. The Samaritans worship what they do not know. Their worship only comes to them by man-made superstition.
- (4) It has always been true that *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*. But with the new dispensation, that will be done without designated places of worship. True worship is through our spirit, not our physical temples. And it is done in truth, confessing, and declaring the way things actually are, not covering up the truth with religion or liturgies.

The woman then said, *“I know that Messiah is coming.”* Then Jesus plainly declared: *“I who speak to you am He.”*

Application

One of the main issues in this discussion was about the significance of temples. For Old Testament Jews, the Temple was very important. The Jewish people were also very important because God chose them to write down His revelation to man, *salvation is from the Jews*. But there is a change in dispensation, ...*an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*. Christian church buildings may remind us about God or the need to repent or pray or worship. As such, they have value. But they are man-made. Worship is not something channeled through buildings. Worship of God is not about places, it is about our human spirit being led by the Holy Spirit to come to God in truth.

Discussion Questions

Why did Jesus describe salvation metaphorically as *living water* and with Nicodemus as being *born again*? Since Jesus will be our Judge (John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10), does that mean He will bring up all of our history, as He did the woman at the well?

7. The Conversation at the Reception, after the Call of Matthew Fall of A.D. 30

The Text

Matthew 9:10-17, *Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.*

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”

But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”

And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

The Historical Context

After meeting with the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus and His disciples went north, back to Galilee in the Spring of A.D. 30. There, He healed a nobleman’s son and was rejected at His hometown of Nazareth. Then He and His disciples again traveled east and down to the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in and around Capernaum (600 ft/180 meters below sea level). There He also called four of His disciples to become fishers of men, healed a demon-possessed man, a paralytic, a leper, and Peter’s mother-in-law. Then He saw Matthew, sitting at the tax office that patrolled the main road (the Via Maris, which ran between Egypt and Babylon), as it bordered the north side of Capernaum. Jesus called him to “*follow Me*.” Matthew (also called Levi) immediately followed Jesus and *gave a big reception for Him in*



his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them (Luke 5:29) [Picture from ritmeyer.com]

Observations/Interpretations

Matthew gave a big reception for Jesus and His disciples, to which Matthew invited a group of his unbelieving friends. But there was a strange mix of people—besides Jesus and His disciples and Matthew’s unbeliever friends, there were the Pharisees and some disciples of John the Baptist.

- Exchange #1.** The Pharisees objected to Jesus associating with *tax collectors and sinners*. They made the objection to Jesus’ disciples. But Jesus, hearing this, gave the Pharisees three answers:
- (1) “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick,*” meaning, He came for those who see themselves as spiritually sick, like Matthew’s friends, and unlike the Pharisees, who saw themselves as spiritually healthy.
 - (2) He quoted Hosea 6:6, “*Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice.’*” The word for *compassion* is the word for *mercy*, which is selective non-punishment. Mercy is compassion in action, for someone who does not deserve it. Jesus’ point is that unmerited compassion is more important than keeping the sacrifices of the Law.
 - (3) Jesus also said, “*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*” The word *righteous* is a common word also meaning *right, fair, or just*. So, if you see yourself as a good person, rather than a sinner, Jesus did not come for you.

- Exchange #2.** Some disciples of John the Baptist, who were also at Levi’s party, had a question: “*Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?*” The question shows that Jesus did not mandate fasting, just like He did not mandate against picking grain on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1) or washing before eating (Matthew 15:20). Jesus’ disciples seem to be quite liberal compared to those of John the Baptist. And John’s disciples wanted to know why. Jesus answered:
- (1) His first answer seems to not address their question but be an announcement of His upcoming crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, *when the bridegroom is taken away from them*.
 - (2) His second answer is dispensational. You cannot blend together the new upcoming dispensation of grace with the old dispensation of the Law, or the idea of accessing God through the Law. The *patch of unshrunk cloth* and *new wine* represent the new dispensation coming after Jesus ended the Law on the cross (Romans 10:4). Jesus was preparing His disciples for the new age. If you try to force-fit grace into the Law, you will destroy both.

Applications

Exchange #1. The progressive secular (satanic—2 Corinthians 4:4) world teaches everyone there is no such thing as sin. Everyone is basically good and just needs to follow their heart. These are the self-righteous people Jesus did not come for. The prerequisite for following Jesus is to see yourself as a sinner (Romans 3:23).

Exchange #2. We cannot come to God through religious practices. Building cathedrals, attending masses or services, saying memorized prayers, and keeping religious rituals will not get us to God. They are not only blurred applications of the Mosaic Law, but they will also not accommodate the age of grace. This does not mean Christian practices and procedures are bad. We are commanded to gather together, fellowship together, serve one another and love, in the sense of giving to one another expecting nothing in return (Hebrews 10:24-25). All over the world, local churches, parachurches, missionary organizations, Christian hospitals, and other facilities are giving believers a platform for doing that. The caution is that the organization not become an old wineskin which will no longer accommodate the new wine of the gospel of the church/grace age.

Discussion Question:

When does a ministry new wineskin become a ministry old wine skin?

8. The Conversation about Picking Grain on the Sabbath Spring of A.D. 31

The Text

Mark 2:23-28, *And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain.*

The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Historical Context

After the discussion at Levi's reception, several months passed (from the fall of A.D. 30 to the winter/spring of A.D. 31) before the next recorded substantial conversation. During those months, Jesus and His disciples went south to Jerusalem for the Passover, where Jesus healed a blind lame man at the Pool of Bethesda and gave a long discourse to the Jews, which included the great promise,

John 5:24, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."*

Then He returned north to Galilee, where the above incident occurred as they passed through some grain fields. We can assume they were near Gennesaret, since that is the only place flat enough around the Sea of Galilee to have grain fields. Recent excavations reveal a nearby synagogue (hence the watchful eyes of the Pharisees).

Observations/Interpretations

The disciples were doing what was apparently legal for poor people, but the Pharisees said they were *doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath*. Jesus responded to this in a way which was (for me) unexpected. I would expect Jesus to say something like "My disciples only broke your Pharisaic legalistic version of the Sabbath." But instead, He made three quite unexpected comments:

- (1) David broke the Law of eating the consecrated bread and was innocent because he was hungry.
- (2) *The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*
- (3) *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*

Applications

- Since David broke the Law, and it was morally legitimate, then there has to be an overall Divine wisdom involved in applying the Law. It is not that the Laws are to be viewed hierarchically or that there are exceptions to the Law. Remember, Jesus said, *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17). It is that the Law must be applied with sanctified wisdom. For example, Jesus said, *"Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"* (Luke 14:5). In Matthew 9:13, Jesus said, *"Go and learn what this means..."* then He quoted from Hosea 6:6, *"For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*

- Jesus' second comment takes us back to creation. The Sabbath day was made by God at creation. God rested on the seventh day, thus establishing a seven-day week with a weekend. Virtually the whole world recognizes a seven-day week. And there is no other reason for that except a six-day creation with a seventh day of rest. There is no solar, lunar, number of days in a year, or any other reason for a seven-day week. God did not rest on the seventh day because He needed it. He rested on the seventh day because we need it. The sabbath was not like an idol to bow to. Man was not made for the Sabbath, *The Sabbath was made for man.*
- The third comment Jesus made was to clarify that being the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, He was Lord of the Sabbath.

Discussion Question

What does it mean for us to keep a Sabbath day?

9. The Conversation with Simon the Pharisee Summer of A.D. 31

The Text

Luke 7:40-50,

And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."

[Jesus said] *"A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"*

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The Historical Context

After being baptized by John, and being tempted by the devil, Jesus went north to Galilee, recruiting five of His disciples and turning water to wine at Cana. Then He went south for His first ministry trip to Jerusalem, where He chased the money changers out of the Temple and had a born-again discussion with Nicodemus. Then He returned north, where he talked with the Samaritan woman on the way to Galilee. After being rejected at Nazareth, He went to the area around the north part of the Sea of Galilee for what is often called His "Greater Galilean Ministry," where He did miracles, like giving a miraculous catch of fish and curing all who came for healing. That was in the summer and fall of A.D. 31. That winter, He went back south for His second ministry trip to Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover, where He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda and contended with the Jews over the Sabbath (John 5). Then He returned to Galilee, where His disciples picked grain on the Sabbath.

When He arrived back in Galilee, Jesus named the 12 apostles and then taught them “The Sermon on the Mount” (recorded in Matthew 5–7). Then He preached the sermon on *a level place* to a large crowd (recorded in Luke 6:17-49). Both teachings were from the high mountainous area north of the Sea of Galilee in the Spring of A.D. 31. Then Jesus returned to Capernaum, where He healed a centurion’s servant, who indicated he recognized Jesus’ authority. Jesus said, “...*not even in Israel have I found such great faith*” (Luke 7:9).

In the summer of A.D. 31, Jesus went into the Jezreel Valley, where He raised a boy from the dead during a funeral in the town of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Then, probably on the way back to Capernaum, Jesus answered the doubts delivered by the disciples of John the Baptist and gave a discourse about John being a prophet and *one who is more than a prophet* (Luke 7:18-28). When He arrived back in Capernaum, a Pharisee invited Him to his house for a meal. But a woman also came in who was a known sinner. Weeping, she anointed Jesus’ feet with tears and perfume. When Simon the Pharisee saw this, he thought Jesus should know better than to have this woman touch His feet. Then the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

Once again, we see the contrast between a person who is outwardly religious and one who is outwardly (and actually) sinful. Jesus told a parable about two debtors and pointed out that the woman was forgiven because she was repentant and came to Jesus in humility. Simon the Pharisee was not available for forgiveness because he was like the debtor in the parable who owed little. But let’s look a bit closer.

- (1) Jesus did not say Simon was unloving or he would not have invited Jesus in the first place. However, he did not give Jesus the greeting which was apparently (from what Jesus said here) customary for an invited house guest. Something was restricting his love for Jesus, which was apparently his religion, since we are told he was a Pharisee.
- (2) Jesus made His point with an allegory. The brief story was like Nathan’s allegory when he confronted David about his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-7). The allegory was like a question, where the right answer was the conviction.
- (3) Jesus did not tell the woman she should be more like Simon. Neither, of course, did He tell Simon he should be more like the woman. But He did tell Simon there was something he should learn from the woman. Seeing himself as a sinner is the only path to God. The more he saw himself as a sinner who needed saving, the more love he would have for God when He saved him.
- (4) Something about being a Pharisee made Simon less of a lover of God, in this case the Son of God. Something in his religion warped his values, making him think he was not all that sinful, so he did not need as much forgiveness, so he loved God less. His being a Pharisee dulled his sensitivity to sin.
- (5) Jesus said two things to the woman in the presence of all who were at the table: “*Your sins have been forgiven.*” And “*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*” The first statement declared His Deity. The second spelled out the path to salvation.

Applications

- We should ask ourselves if there is something in our life that is causing us to love Jesus less, such as the Pharisee in the above discussion. Today’s Christianity is filled with more tolerance and compromise than Pharisee-type legalism. But we might ask, “Could a politically conservative mentality, or a financially profitable lifestyle, or a successful career, be keeping us from sensitivity to our sin?”

- The best way (maybe the only way) for a person to be convicted of their need for Jesus is for them to discover that need themselves. Evangelism of hardened hearts, like Simon in the above account, may be best carried out with questions.
- Seeing ourselves as hopeless sinners is the only path toward God.
- A little love for God can be a step toward a great love for God, but it can also make us immune to a great love for God if it settles into a routine.
- The only salvation is faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Discussion Question

What things in our world have the danger of making us like this Pharisee?

10. The Conversation at the Feeding the 5,000 Spring of A.D. 32

The Text

Luke 9:12-17, *Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, “Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.”*

But He said to them, “You give them something to eat!”
And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people. (For there were about five thousand men.)

And He said to His disciples, “Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each.” They did so, and had them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.



The Gospel of John gives us a few more details about the discussion.

John 6:5-9, *Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, [Jesus] said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.*

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?”

The Historical Context

After the discussion at the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus made a tour around some of the cities of Galilee with His disciples and some women who were contributing to their financial support (Luke 8:1-3). That was in the fall and winter of A.D. 32. When a large crowd from the villages began following them, Jesus taught the parable of the Sower and the seed, which He explained to His disciples. Then He told them the parable of the lamp put on a lampstand. Somewhere on the way, His mother and brothers wanted to see Him, but He said His disciples were His mother and brothers.

On one occasion, the Pharisees said He *casts out demons by demons only by Baalzebul*. Jesus gave a logical response followed by the statement, *blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven* (Matthew 12:32). [I have not commented on these because they do not involve a conversation.]

During this (fall and winter of A.D. 32) tour around Galilee, He calmed the sea on the way to the *county of the Gerasenes* (or *Gaderenes*), where He cast out some demons whom He allowed to possess some pigs that drowned in the sea. Back in Capernaum, He did more healing and raised a girl from the dead. He also sent out the 12 apostles on a journey with the power to heal. It was about this time that Jesus received the news about John the Baptist being beheaded in prison by Herod (Mark 14:10-12). *When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing* (Luke 9:10-11). As it was getting toward evening, the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Since they were *now in a desolate place*, they had apparently moved up into the grass land above Bethsaida. The large crowds surrounded Jesus because He healed **everyone** who came for healing. No one else has ever done that, ever, anywhere. The 12 came to Jesus with a very practical issue. It was getting late in the day, the crowd had not eaten all day, and there was no obvious way to feed all these people. There was nothing unreasonable about their concern. Jesus specifically asked Philip, *“Where are we to buy bread?”* Andrew pointed out that *“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?”* So the apostles were looking for practical solutions to this problem and found none.
- (2) When Jesus answered, *“You give them something to eat,”* He was asking the apostles to do something which was logistically impossible. They neither had the funds nor the physical ability to *go and buy food for all these people*.
- (3) The miracle, as with all of Jesus’ miracles, proved that He was the Messiah.
[It should be noted that this is the only miracle which is recorded in all four gospels.]

Applications

- The first solution we should seek for in any situation is the most practical one. Start with what you have.
- God may place us in situations where only He can solve the problem.
- Just because Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children does not mean He will do a miracle to meet all our physical needs today. The point was that only the Son of God could do this. We are to believe based on the record of what He did (John 20:30-31), not to expect to repeat what He did.

Discussion Questions

Why does Jesus not feed and heal people in places all over the world who need food even more than this crowd? Why did Jesus not feed people in places all over Galilee, who needed food and healing as much as or more than this crowd?

11. The Conversation after Walking on the Water

Spring of A.D. 32

The Text

Matthew 14:26-31, *When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and, [The disciples] said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately*

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And

He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he

[Peter] cried out, "Lord, save me!" "Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him and [Jesus] said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

[It should be noted that only Matthew records Peter walking on the water, and in all of history, only two people are ever recorded as walking on water: Jesus and Peter.]

The Historical Context

This event took place during the night, after the feeding of the 5,000.

Matthew 14:22-25, *Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. Then He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea. And He appeared to be walking past them (Mark 6:48). Then the above discussion occurred.*

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) It was completely dark, after 3 A.M., in the middle of a windstorm, when Jesus came walking on the water. Rather than coming to them, He appeared to be walking past them until they saw Him and thought He was a ghost. They were obviously frightened until Jesus identified Himself and told them, *"do not be afraid."*
- (2) There is no such thing as a ghost, but apparently the apostles did not know that. We do not know what the others believed about the figure walking on the water, but Peter was willing to give Him a chance to prove this was the Lord. Peter apparently reasoned that a ghost might walk on water, but only Jesus could allow Peter to walk on the water.
- (3) Jesus confirmed that it was He, by inviting Peter to *"Come!"*
- (4) Peter's water-walking experience had three parts: success, failure, and deliverance. It was successful when he focused on Jesus. It began to fail when he focused on the wind. He was saved when he returned his focus to Jesus. It has been said Peter's call, *"Lord save me,"* is the shortest prayer in the Bible. It is not really a prayer, but it is the shortest request, and it was all that was needed for deliverance.
- (5) The end of this incident is the reprimand by Jesus, who told Peter the reason he began to sink was his doubt, identified as *little faith*.

Applications

- Jesus may involve Himself in our lives in ways that are new, unexpected, and frightening.
- Confirming that Jesus is who He said He was is encouraged.
- God invites us to step out in faith, but it is faith in the direction of God's Word.

- God will not save us from every situation we are in. For example, multitudes of Christians have prayed for healing and died sick. But God saves us from what He says He will save us from (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 14:6).
- Faith in the Bible is understanding the truth (the way things actually are). Initially, Peter understood that Jesus could give him the ability to walk on the water. As Peter began to focus on the wind, he began to have less understanding of the fact that Jesus could do that. Faith is trusting our understanding. Little faith happens when we have less understanding.

Discussion Questions

Was it a good idea for Peter to ask if he could also walk on water? What would represent something like that today?

12. The Conversation about Unwashed Hands Spring of A.D. 32

The Text

Matthew 15:10-20, *After Jesus called the crowd to Him,*

He said to them, “Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”

Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?”

But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Peter said to Him, “Explain the parable to us.”

Jesus said, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.”

The Historical Context

After the feeding of the 5,000 and the incident of walking on the water which followed it, their small boat arrived at the shore in the area of Gennesaret, near where the disciples had earlier picked grain on the Sabbath. But people recognized them and brought their sick to Him for healing. Jesus began traveling about the countryside and visiting the villages where people came to Him, *imploing Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured* (Mark 6:56). But the Pharisees from Jerusalem also sent some of their representatives, along with some scribes, to catch Jesus in an incident of breaking their laws. In this case, they did not challenge His healing but the fact that His disciples did not practice ceremonial washing before eating. Rather than avoid the issue, Jesus confronted the issue in the above discussion.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Jesus made the challenge of the Pharisees into a public lesson. He called the crowd together before addressing the issue.
- (2) Jesus first addressed this externally, saying, it is *“what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.”*

- (3) When the disciples pointed out that His statement offended the Pharisees, Jesus pointed out three things about the Pharisees:
- a) They are not planted (called) by God, so they will one day be uprooted (judged) by God.
 - b) The disciples were not to attempt to correct the scribes and the Pharisees, they were to *let them alone*.
 - c) They *are blind guides of the blind*. Both the Pharisees and the people they are leading were theologically blind to the truth, so they will both fall into the same theological pit, believing what is not true. The point to this part of the discussion is to let the disciples know that they were not being called to fix the errors of the scribes and the Pharisees.
- (4) When the disciples asked for an explanation of the parable about the blind falling into a pit, Jesus pointed out that the real problem is a heart problem. *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.”* It has been said, especially by nutritionists, that, “You are what you eat.” It seems that Jesus said, “You are what you say,” and the real problem is, what we say expresses what comes out of our heart, our core desires.

Applications

- Eating with unwashed hands may not be physically good hygiene, but it does not morally defile a person. Since Jesus called the crowd together for His answer, we can assume this was a lesson for everyone, not just the apostles. The way we eat does not morally defile us (Colossians 2:23).
- Morality cannot be defined by mechanical procedures. But what we say does define us morally, because it announces the condition of our heart, our core desires.
- We are called to deal with problems that come from the human heart not religious procedures.

Discussion Question

What is it that comes out of our mouth (which comes from the heart) that defiles us? Is it more like verbal blasphemy, or is it unbiblical ideas?

13. The Conversation about Healing the Gentile Woman’s Daughter Spring of A.D. 32

The Text

Matthew 15:21-29, *Jesus went away from there and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.”* [Mark calls her a Gentile from the Syrophoenician race (Mark 7:26).]

But He did not answer her a word.

And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, “Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.”

But He answered and said, *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*

But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

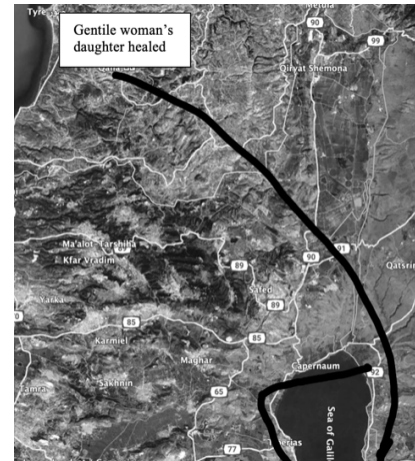
And He answered and said, *“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”*

But she said, *“Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”*

Then Jesus said to her, *“O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.*

The Historical Context

After feeding the 5,000 and walking on the water, Jesus and His disciples came to the shore near Gennesaret. There He healed many people and confronted the scribes over the ritual of handwashing. After this, Jesus went to Capernaum and the crowd followed Him, finding Him by the seashore. But Jesus told them, “*you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*” Then He gave the extended message that began with telling them, “*I am the bread of life*” and ended telling them, “*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*” (John 6:34-66). Because of those comments, many of His followers left Him. After that, He went up north to the area of Tyre and Sidon. There is no reason given for this trip. It is to a Gentile area, and the only time we know of when Jesus was by the Mediterranean coast. During that trip, the above conversation took place.



Observations/Interpretations

This whole encounter seems surprising and out of character for Jesus, who willingly healed all who came to Him. So we can only conclude that there is some significant reason we should know about this since two of the gospels (Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30) include this conversation in great detail. Clearly, Jesus’ reputation as a healer and a descendent of David had reached all the way up to *the district of Tyre and Sidon* (in southern Lebanon—Sidon is 50 miles/80km north of Capernaum).

- (1) The first thing the woman did was to call out for mercy from Jesus, addressing Him as “*Lord, son of David.*”
- (2) At first, Jesus did not answer her, but when she persisted, He said, “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*” The point Jesus made was that He was not sent to help her with her daughter because she was a Gentile. But there is a greater point being made here. This was not just about healing Gentiles. This was not the first Gentile Jesus healed. He healed a centurion’s servant in Luke 2, a demon-possessed Gadarene in Matthew 8, and a Samaritan leper in Luke 17. And a Samaritan was the hero of Jesus’ good-neighbor story in Luke 10:36. Jesus’ point was not to shun the woman because she was a Gentile but to declare the dispensational distinction in His mission.
- (3) The disciples wanted to simply dismiss the woman, but Jesus wanted to emphasize the difference between the significance of being *sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, and the superiority of faith. Even when Jesus presented her with the household-dog illustration (the dog representing the Gentiles), rather than being offended, she persisted in coming to Jesus with faith and humility.

Applications

- We can only come to God, begging for mercy. But we should also notice this woman’s daughter, and many throughout and beyond Judea, were sick and had sick loved ones who were not healed. God does not heal a world full of sick and suffering people. He healed through Jesus to prove He was the Messiah of Israel.
- There is no mistaking the dispensational emphasis in this discussion. After His resurrection, the church age began where Jesus’ message, and that of the apostles, presented Him as the Savior of the world (Matthew 28:18-20), not just the Jews (Ephesians 3:3-9). Jesus did not have a different gospel message, but there was a different target audience.

- After making the strong dispensational point, Jesus made an even stronger point. He told the woman, *your faith is great*. Her faith took precedence over Jesus *being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Faith is always trusting your understanding. In the Bible, faith is always trusting your understanding of the truth.

Discussion Questions

Why did Jesus make it so difficult for this woman to get Him to help her? Is that the same today?

14. The Conversation about "Who Do You Say That I Am?" Summer of A.D. 32

The Text

Matthew 16:13-19, *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

The Historical Context

After the healing encounter with the Gentile woman, Jesus and His disciples returned south to Galilee. There, once again, He healed all the sick who were brought to Him. There were also about 4,000 men plus women and children, and He fed the whole group in a way similar to the earlier feeding of the 5,000, this time with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Matthew 29-39; Mark 8:1-9). Matthew tells us afterwards they picked up seven large baskets of food. Next, Jesus and His disciples went to region of Dalmanutha, a town also called Magadan, where Mary Magdalen was from (cf. Matt. 15:39), near Tiberias. There, the Pharisees asked for a sign. Jesus and the disciples crossed over to Capernaum or Bethsaida, where Jesus warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees, and the disciples thought He was talking about bread. Then they walked up to Northern Galilee in the district of Caesarea Philippi, near the base of Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in Israel and their primary source of fresh water. That is where the above conversation took place.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Jesus initiated this conversation, asking, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* Of course, Jesus asked this, not because He did not know, but to bring out the responses of the apostles. Their response indicated that most people thought He was either John the Baptist raised from the dead (as Herod thought after having John beheaded in prison—Matthew 14:1) or that He was one of the major prophets like Elijah or Jeremiah. Apparently, these people recognized Jesus' message (morality and theology) as consistent with the prophets and not the Jewish leadership. But most people who witnessed His teaching and His miracles did not believe, or were at least confused, about His being the Messiah.
- (2) Next, Jesus asked the 12 who they thought He was, and Peter immediately answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Seemingly, he spoke for everyone.

- (3) Since Peter gave the answer, Jesus focused on Peter. But He also said that even with all the miracles Peter saw, his belief that Jesus was the Son of God came from God. *“Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”*
- (4) Next, Jesus said three specific things about Peter, personally:
- “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.”*
 - “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”*
 - “Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”*

Applications

- The key application for all of us is the answer to the question, “Who do you say Jesus is?” The Apostle John later affirmed in John 4:2, *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*
- The Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, those who claim Jesus was just a good man proclaiming peace on earth or even some miracle worker, are part of what John called the *Antichrist* (1 John 4:3).
- The three specific promises (responsibilities) given to Peter have been greatly debated over the years. But let’s put down what we know:
 - (a) *“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.”* Peter’s confession, *“you are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* is certainly the *rock* upon which the church is built. But it should also be noted that Jesus changed the tense of the word *rock*. It may be that Jesus was praising Peter for his accurate statement about Jesus Himself and proclaiming the building of the church on *Himself* (1 Corinthians 3:11 says He is the *foundation* of the church). Although Peter was probably never the bishop of Rome or the first in a succession of popes, he was the first leader of the church, as noted in the first chapters of Acts.
 - (b) *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”* Wherever Peter brought the gospel, they had the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Peter was the first to bring the gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles.
 - (c) *“Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”* The application to us is the same as the apostles in the general sense that those who we lead to Christ on earth are bound for heaven. This gives us the responsibility to spread the gospel as a means of releasing people from the binding of Satan. But it should also be noted that this had some specific applications to Peter personally. Besides bringing the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2) and the Gentiles (Acts 10), Peter initiated the appointment of Matthias (Acts 1:26), healed the man at the temple Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-8), and initiated the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

Discussion Question

Is there any way in which Peter is the rock upon which the church is built?

15. The Conversation about Who Will Be Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Fall of A.D. 32

The Text

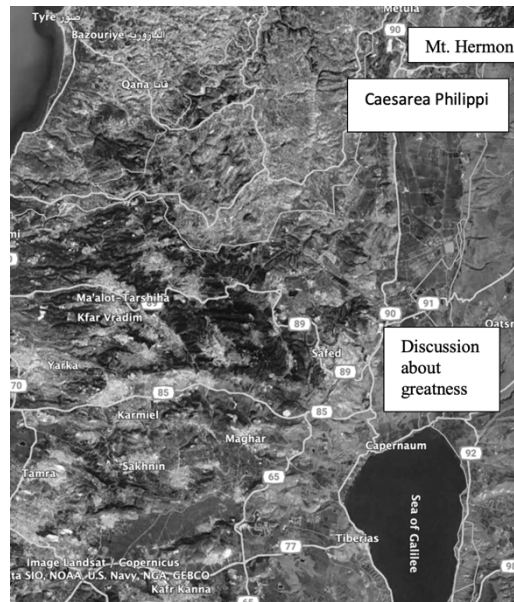
Luke 9:46-48,

An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest.

But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.”

The Historical Context

Eight days after the discussion in Caesarea Philippi about who He was, Jesus chose Peter, James, and John to go up with Him on a mountain (probably Mount Hermon) where He was transfigured before them, *where the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem* (Luke 9:29-31). Their discussion was, however, not recorded. After their return from the mountain and before they started back south to Lower Galilee, Jesus healed a boy who was possessed by a strong demon. During their walk from Upper to Lower Galilee, the above discussion took place.



Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The discussion took place when the disciples were talking among themselves, probably walking enough of a distance behind so that Jesus was not part of the discussion.
- (2) Jesus entered into the discussion because He knew their thoughts. And He did so not by immediately correcting them but by illustrating greatness with a child. In so doing, He made three points:
 - a) *Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me,*
 - b) *Whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me;*
 - c) *The one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.*



Applications

- It is okay to talk theology and morality among ourselves, but we need to understand it is not the same as including the input from Jesus.
- The child example is all about humility, *“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:4).
- The “receive” example is about faith. *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God [even] to those who believe on His name* (John 1:12). To believe in God means to believe in Jesus.
- The primary point of this example is to define leadership as giving and serving. The greatest giver is always the greatest leader—in every situation.

Discussion Questions

What would be an example today of fulfilling Jesus’ statement: *“The one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great?”* How do we become *the least among all* those around us?

16. The Conversation about the Cost of Discipleship Fall of A.D. 32

The Text

Luke 9:57-62, *As they were going along the road,*

Someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go."

And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

And He said to another, "Follow Me."

But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."

But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God."

Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home."

But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The Historical Context

After the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration and the healing of the demon-possessed boy, Jesus and His disciples journeyed south toward Lower Galilee. On the way, the disciples argued about who would be the greatest in the kingdom and tried to hinder others casting out demons in Jesus' name. But Jesus said, "*do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you*" (Luke 9:50).

We do not know exactly how long Jesus stayed in Galilee before going to Jerusalem. John 7:1 says it was *after these things*, which is a vague time reference. But we know that when He left Galilee (for the last time) it was near the time of the Feast of Booths, which is in October (John 7:2). Before leaving Galilee, Jesus had a discussion with His (unbelieving) brothers. They thought He should become a high-profile figure at the upcoming Feast of the Booths in Jerusalem. But going publicly to this feast did not fit His timing, because Jesus also knew He was to be crucified at the time of the Passover, buried, raise from the dead and ascend into heaven in the spring of the coming year (A.D. 33). So He did not go publicly with His brothers to the feast but later *as if in secret* with His disciples (John 7:10).

Before leaving, He sent messengers ahead to make arrangements for places to stay as they passed through Samaria. *But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem* (Luke 9:53). The disciples wanted to rain down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, but Jesus rebuked them. So they began walking south down that road toward Jerusalem. During that walk, the above discussion about being a disciple took place. [Matthew 8:18-22 records two similar conversations, but they probably took place at a different time and place. Talking about who should be a disciple probably occurred several times during their travels.]

Observations/Interpretations

(1) The first comment was made by some unknown person *as they were going along the road*.

He said, "*I will follow You wherever You go.*" Jesus' answer was about His physical situation.

He said, "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*" Since we hear no more from the man, we can assume that discouraged him from being one of Jesus' disciples.

Ryrie has this valuable comment on Jesus' self-designation as *Son of Man*:

“Son of Man” is the name that links Him to the earth and to His mission. It was His favorite designation of Himself (used more than 80 times) and was based on Dan. 7:13-14. It emphasizes (1) His lowliness and humanity (v. 20), (2) His suffering and death (Luke 19:10), and (3) His future reign as King (24:27). [Ryrie Study Bible]

- (2) We do not have the initial comments for the second conversation. Obviously, Jesus did not just invite some random person to follow Him. And although *Follow Me* was not an invitation to be one of the 12 apostles, it was an invitation to be a disciple.

The request, “*Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father,*” is given without explanation. There are three common explanations:

- One is that his father was not dead or even near death, and this was a figure of speech, meaning to wait until he received the inheritance of his father's estate. I know of no biblical or cultural precedent for this explanation.
- Another explanation is that his father was at the point of death, and he wanted to wait to follow Jesus, as a disciple, until after his father passed away. I also know of no precedent for this explanation.
- Or another is that his father had died, and he wanted to attend, probably lead, the funeral procession. This has one biblical precedent. When Jacob died, Joseph told Pharaoh: “*My father made me swear, saying, ‘Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.’ Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return*” (Genesis 50:5).

There is nothing in the text that would lead us to believe the words of the request were to be given some metaphorical meaning. So the best explanation is that Jesus was asking him to follow Him immediately.

- (3) The third discussion seemed to come from a reasonable request: “*first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.*” Jesus seemed to use the request, not to specifically deny it, although that would be the result, but to make the point: “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*”

Applications

- Following Jesus means to abandon all focus on earthly possessions. Obviously, if a person has a spouse and a family, they have a responsibility to provide them with reasonable support. Nonetheless, following Jesus, as the apostles did, impacted their families. We know there was a group that followed Jesus in His homeless lifestyle (Luke 8:1-4), and apparently most of the apostles were married (1 Corinthians 9:5).
- While in Galilee, they probably stayed most of the time with Peter and in Jerusalem with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But they owned nothing. Following Jesus means seeing our physical possessions as something provided by God.
- The application of this unprecedented comment, *Allow the dead to bury their own dead*, seems actually quite straightforward. The physically dead cannot bury the physically dead so the most obvious meaning is the spiritually dead should bury the physically dead. The comment means we should not focus on funerals or memorial services which generally serve to glorify the dead as saints “who are in a better place” [and usually they are neither saints nor in a better place].
- When I was a boy, I actually cultivated with a one-horse cultivator, narrow like a plow. If you look away for only a short time you will be out of the row tearing up the crop in the next row. This is even more so turning over a furrow with a plow. The point is, we cannot have a double

focus. We cannot focus on the Kingdom of God and look back at the world. For example, Jesus said, “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man...*” (Matthew 15:19-20).

Discussion Question

What is the cost of discipleship today, for someone married with a spouse and children?

17. The Conversation with the Pharisees About Determining Truth Fall of A.D. 32

The Text

John 8:12-20,

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

The Pharisees said to Him, “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”

So they were saying to Him, “Where is Your Father?”

Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”

These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

This discussion, centering around who Jesus was, continued for some time. John also included the comment, *As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So, Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free”* (John 8:31-32).

The Historical Context

In the Fall of A.D. 32, Jesus left Galilee and went to the Feast of the Booths. Rather than going with His brothers, He went later, secretly with His disciples. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, *the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, “Where is He?”* (John 7:11). *...But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach* (John 7:14). This led to many back-and-forth comments that are not really a discussion. For example, Jesus said, *“My teaching is not Mine but His who sent me”* (John 7:16). Some from the crowd said, *“You have a demon”* (John 7:20). *But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, “When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?”* (John 7:31). The Pharisees and the chief priests sent messengers to arrest Him, but after listening to Him, they walked away. Nicodemus also told them, *“Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him”* (John 7:50). In the midst of all these comments at the Feast of Booths, the above conversation took place.

[The NASB Strong’s notes add the comment “Later mss add the story of the adulterous woman, numbering it as John 7:53-8:11.” This story is not in the earlier mss of the Gospel of John.]

Observations/Interpretations

1. Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the *Light of the world*. Light is often used in the Bible as a metaphor of the revelation of holiness and truth (Isaiah 9:2; Psalm 36:9; John 1:9; 3:19; 1 John 1:5-7). Jesus presented Himself as the embodiment of both. Then He added, “*he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness.*” In other words, He also claimed to be the way to live life according to the character of God, which is the light in a dark world.
2. The Pharisees had no concept of truth. They determined truth by witnesses rather than the way things actually are. They could only conclude Jesus’ testimony was not true because He testified about Himself. But Jesus declared that truth stands by itself. Jesus referred to the Law which required at least two witnesses to convict in a murder trial (Deuteronomy 17:6). Jesus positions the truth as the accused person on trial, with He and God the Father as witnesses.
3. Jesus also brought up the subject of judgment. He said, “*You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true.*” The NASB adds the word *even*, which is not in the Greek text. If I may give an unauthorized DeWitt expanded paraphrase, Jesus was saying, “You Pharisees judge knowing only fleshly (not spiritual) truth. I am not judging now in the sense of condemnation but when I do (John 5:22), My judgment will be according to the way things actually are, as created by the Father and displayed as light by the Son.” Jesus also gave the reason for their inability to understand. “*You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father.*”
4. The disciples of Jesus are truly free because they continue in His words and because His words are the truth, the way things actually are, and that is what sets them free.

Applications

- The most dynamic statement here is Jesus’ claim to be the *Light of the world*. No sane person has ever, or would ever, make such a claim unless it were true. The claim forces the world to consider Jesus—accept Him or reject Him. Jesus is saying that everything He said, did, thought, taught, or implied was the way things actually are, and anything contrary to that is wrong. It is walking in darkness.
- It is interesting that most people cannot define “truth,” and our scholarship usually (if not always) sees it as relative. Basic to any understanding of reality is to realize there is an absolute way God meant things to be. That was embodied in Jesus as the light of the world.
- Jesus’ first coming as the incarnation, the God-man, was not to judge but to save. But He stated and applied the truth, and the truth itself judged the Pharisees. We are not to judge in the sense of punishment (giving retribution), but we are to judge in the sense of discernment, and proclaim the truth, which is the light, personified in Christ, which judges the world.
- The only way to be free, from the sinful darkness of this world, is to continue keeping the words of Christ.

Discussion Questions

How should we determine the truth? For example, as believers we understand that the Bible is true. How do we know that? If we say we know it is true by faith, how do we determine true faith?

18. The Conversation About Healing the Man Born Blind Fall of A.D. 32

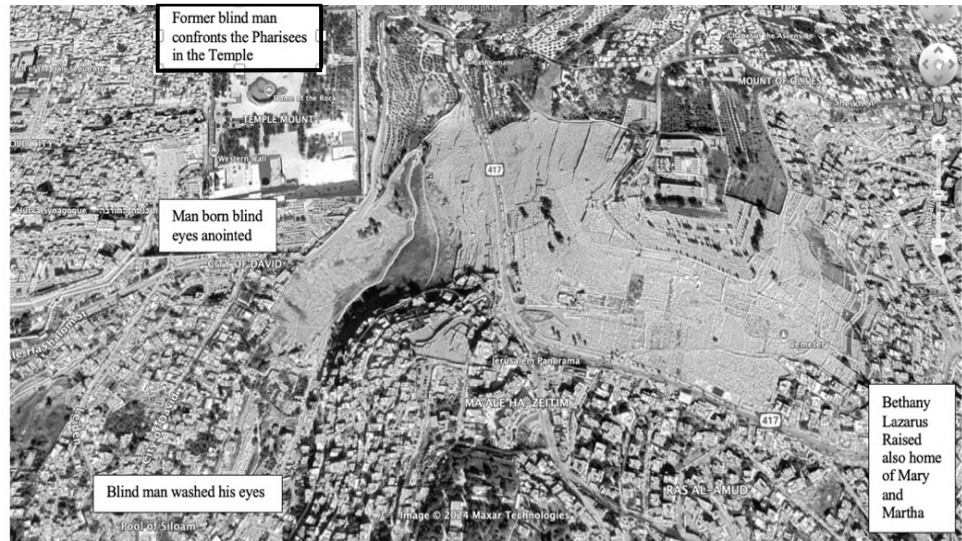
The Text

John 9:1-3, *As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.*

And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”

Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

This is followed by the healing of the blind man and an interrogation by the Pharisees, especially because the healing was done on a Sabbath day.



John 9:29-39,

[The Pharisees said] *“We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.”*

The man answered and said to them, *“Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”*

They answered him, *“You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” So, they put him out.*

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

He answered, *“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”*

Jesus said to him, *“You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.”*

And he said, *“Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.*

And Jesus said, *“For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (John 9:39).*

The Historical Context

In October of A.D. 32, Jesus left Galilee to arrive in Jerusalem in the midst of the Feast of Booths. The Jewish crowd there was looking for Him, and when He arrived, He went to the Temple and began to teach, on the Sabbath, and answer questions about who He was. It turned into an argument with the Pharisees, which ended when *they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.* Then John tells us about an amazing healing and the above discussion.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The man born blind was probably a young adult (surmised from the discussion between the Pharisees and his parents), and he had lived blind his whole life, so that Jesus could display the works of God by healing him.
- (2) The Pharisees thought they controlled the work of God. Everyone should be under the control of the Pharisees or Sadducees or the chief priests or elders, all legally controlled by the Sanhedrin.

Jesus was operating outside of that control, claiming a direct connection to God as His Father. The formerly blind man pointed out that Jesus' miracles could only be done by God, yet the Pharisees did not know who He was. They responded by putting the formerly blind man out of the synagogue.

- (3) Jesus later found the formerly blind man and asked him, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* After Jesus explained that He was referring to Himself, the formerly blind man *said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.*

Applications

- We need to understand that God's values are not our values. God is no humanist. The revelations of God through Jesus were so valuable, it was good for this man to live half of his life as a blind man, just so Jesus could heal him, verifying beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. As the formerly blind man pointed out, *“Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind”* (John 9:32).
- Many of our Christian organizations are extremely valuable. All over the world Christians have established effective beneficial endeavors—local churches, orphanages, hospitals, multiple efforts to help the poor, sick and homeless. Often these are also used for evangelism. All Christians should be involved in more than one organized evangelical effort. But you may also find over time that, as these become established as traditions, they will attract, or generate, something like Pharisees.
- Jesus did not only address the man's sight, He also addressed his faith. The most significant question was, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

Discussion Question

How do you evaluate Jesus' comment, *“For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind”*?

19. The Conversation about the Lawyer's Question and the “Good Samaritan” Answer Fall of A.D. 32

The Text

Luke 10:25-29 & 36-37,

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?”

And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

As an answer to that question, Jesus told the story about “The Good Samaritan,” after which Jesus asked him, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?”

And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”

The Historical Context

Jesus left Galilee in the fall of A.D. 32 and confronted the Pharisees at the Temple in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths. Then *they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple* (John 8:59). As He was leaving the Temple Mount area to the south, He encountered a man blind from birth, whom He healed, having him wash in the Pool of Siloam, south of the Temple at the lower end of David's city of Zion. Somewhere in that area, Jesus *appointed seventy others and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come* (Luke 10:1). This probably focused on the cities of Judea. After the 70 returned, Jesus thanked God for their mission. Then, while teaching somewhere in Judea, the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The lawyer had one of the most basic religious questions, "*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Although the lawyer's question was meant to *put Him to the test*, he knew the biblically correct answer (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Since loving God and loving your neighbor is not an answer the Pharisees would likely give, the lawyer probably heard Jesus give that answer (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30). Since he was a lawyer, Jesus asked him about the Law, and he gave the legally correct answer to the question.
- (2) The other interesting thing here is that the lawyer's follow-up question was not about how to love God nor how to love his neighbor but, "*Who is my neighbor?*" And after Jesus gave the "Good Samaritan" story as an answer, Jesus asked him who the neighbor was, and the lawyer also answered correctly, "*The one who showed mercy.*"

Applications

- The lawyer asked about obtaining eternal life as an inheritance, not as a gift from God. It seems that at least some of the Jews saw eternal life as an inheritance, since the man we often call the rich young ruler asked that question (Mark 10:17). This man was a lawyer, so Jesus asked him about the Law. The lawyer gave the answer, "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, ...and your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus said, "*you have answered correctly; do this and you will live.*" Performance righteousness, as an answer to eternal life, always assumes the possibility of performing the righteousness. No one can perfectly love God or his neighbor. The lawyer seemed to know that, so he asked what seemed to him an impossible question to answer because we are surrounded by neighbors. When dealing with people who hold to a performance righteousness, ask them for some details about their performance.
- Jesus' answer to "*who is my neighbor?*" was a story that condemned the priests and Levites for favoring Jews over Samaritans. God has always been merciful, and salvation has always been by grace through faith, but the answer of showing mercy, unmerited compassion, was an introduction into a new dispensation where the compassion of God, rather than the Law of God, was the answer to the lawyer's question about eternal life.

Discussion Questions

Since the lawyer gave the right answer, why was he *wishing to justify himself*? Who is my neighbor? I am surrounded by a subdivision of neighbors with needs. I go to a church full of people with needs. I have a family with needs and friends with families with needs. Who is my neighbor?

20. The Conversation about the Hospitality of Mary and Martha Fall of A.D. 32

The Text

Luke 10:38-42, *Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word.*

*But **Martha** was distracted with all her preparations; and she **came up to Him and said**, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."*

***But the Lord answered and said to her**, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

The Historical Context

In the fall of A.D. 32, Jesus left Galilee and came to Jerusalem during the middle of the Feast of Booths. After contending with the Pharisees at the Temple, Jesus healed a man blind from birth and sent out 70 followers, two-by-two, into some Judean cities He planned to visit. Their travels were very successful, reporting *even the demons are subject to your name* (Luke 10:17). While Jesus was addressing the disciples somewhere in or near Jerusalem, a lawyer stood up and asked how to inherit eternal life. After that discussion Jesus went up over the Mount of Olives to the town of Bethany, where He visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and the above conversation took place.

Observations/Interpretations

In Luke 10, we are told about Mary and Martha, while Jesus was teaching in their home. Mary was listening and Martha was doing all the preparations, presumably for a meal. Martha made a seemingly reasonable request for Mary to help her with the preparations, but Jesus said, "*Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*"

Application

Life is filled with good things that are the enemy of the best things, urgent things which are the enemy of important things. Things which are actually urgent and need to be done are often (or usually) the things which keep us from taking time to listen to Jesus.

Discussion Questions

Is it more important to go to church on Sunday rather than to keep your business open? Is it more important to stay home and read your Bible on Sunday than to go to church on Sunday? What are some examples today of listening to Jesus, as Mary did, rather than making important preparations, as Martha did?

21. The Conversation with the Jews about the Son of God Winter of A.D. 32-33

The Text

John 10:24-39,

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”

The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are Gods?’ If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.

The Historical Context

As He was leaving the Temple during the Feast of Booths in the Fall of A.D. 32, Jesus healed a man blind from birth and then sent out seventy disciples in pairs to cities He would visit. After their return, He crossed the Mount of Olives to Bethany for a visit with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. But in the winter, Jesus went back to the Temple at the time of the Feast of the Dedication, near the time we celebrate Christmas.

John 10:22-23, *At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.*

Ryrie comments,

The Feast of the Dedication. This was instituted in 165 B.C. by Judas Maccabeus in commemoration of the cleansing and reopening of the Temple after its desecration by the Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C. (Dan. 11:31; 1 Macc. 4:52-59). It is also called the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah. The date falls near the winter solstice, Dec. 22.

It was probably at this Feast of Dedication that the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The Jews asked Jesus to tell them *plainly* if He was claiming to be the Messiah. Jesus said He already did that in both words and deeds. His point was, they were not asking because they were open to believe in Him but because they did not believe in Him. They were actually looking for a reason to stone Him.
- (2) Jesus said their problem was they did not believe. Then He defined “belief” as “*My sheep hear My voice...and they follow Me.*” His sheep are those who understand the truth of who He is, from His claim to be the Son of God and, as He said, “*the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me.*” That would be works like feeding 5,000 and 4,000 men plus women and children, like calming the sea, like walking on water, like healing everyone brought to Him, and raising the dead. Jesus’ disciples had no reasonable choice but to believe He was the Christ.
- (3) Jesus also commented on what He does for those who believe in Him. “*I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*”
- (4) The Jews based their justification for stoning Jesus, not on what He did, or even what He taught, but that He defined Himself with the phrase, *the Son of God*. The Hebrew word usually

translated *God* or *gods* is אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*). Jesus then pointed out that the Old Testament used that word in different ways. The word itself means one who is sovereign over something. In Psalm 82:1, the NASB translates it *rulers*. In Psalm 82:6, it refers to the Israelites because, unlike the rest of the world, they do not *walk about in darkness*. In Exodus 21:6 and 22:8, it means human judges. The actual name of God was given to Moses at the burning bush when God said His name for all generations was *Yahweh* (יְהוָה). And since Yahweh is a sovereign God, Moses often expressed the name of God as *Yahweh Elohim* (for example 11 times in Genesis 2). Jesus is making the point that He is the Son of God based on His teaching and His miraculous works, not because He used the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament word אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*).

Applications/Interpretations

- Many people, even believers, often create a Jesus they like: in songs, messages, and concerts because they do not like the real Jesus described in the gospels.
- The reason people do not believe in something is because they do not understand it to be true. Unbelievers in Jesus, as the Christ, can only become believers by an increase in their understanding.
- We proclaim Jesus as Deity, the Son of God, because of His truthful words and His miraculous deeds.

Discussion Questions

Christians following Jesus have a message of love your enemy, turn the other cheek, and blessed are the peacemakers. So why have they been persecuted so much over the centuries? Actually, it seems, the closer they are to Jesus, the more they are hated. Why is that?

22. The Conversation about the Healed Ten Lepers Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 17:11-19, *While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and They raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed.*

Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? “Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”

And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

The Historical Context

During the winter and early spring of A.D. 33, approximately three months before His crucifixion, Jesus left Jerusalem and traveled around the villages of Israel. As He entered a village just south of Galilee, He was met by ten lepers who were not allowed to enter the village.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The lepers were 9 Jews and one Gentile (a Samaritan). Being banned from the village, they cried out to Jesus, calling Him *Master* (ἐπιστάτης, *epistates*), an unusual title for Jesus, meaning *commander* or *chief*.

- (2) *He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."* The Mosaic Law said that lepers, who claimed they were cleansed, should show themselves to the priests, who could certify that the man or woman no longer had leprosy (Leviticus 14:1-32). These men were still leprous when Jesus told them to go and report to the priests.
- (3) As they were going along the way toward Jerusalem to the priests, *one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.* So, one of them, instead of following Jesus' orders, interrupted his visit to the priests to come back and glorify God and give thanks to Jesus.
- (4) Jesus pointed out, to those around Him, that only one of the ten returned giving thanks, bowing down in front of Jesus, and it was the Samaritan. Jesus told him, *"Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."*

Applications

- Jesus healed lepers for the same reason He healed everybody He healed, to demonstrate that He was the Messiah, the Christ. That does not mean we should expect healing from healers today because they are not the Christ.
- These lepers had faith in their healing because they started toward Jerusalem to show the priests they had been cleansed, before they were cleansed. Obedience to Jesus assumes He will do what He said. If you do not think Jesus is doing what He said He would do, then you do not understand what He said He would do.
- Thankfulness should be added to obedience.
- Jesus told the thankful cleansed leper, *your faith has made you well.* Again, Jesus described obedience and thankfulness as being connected to faith. And biblical faith is trusting our understanding of the truth, the way things actually are.

Discussion Question

Is thankfulness a priority over obedience?

Visiting the Cities of Judah – A Historical Comment

It seems that the few months before His crucifixion, during the winter and spring of A.D. 33, Jesus traveled around in the villages, primarily in Judah but as far north as Galilee. As they were walking along and visiting some of the villages, there are very little actual discussions recorded, but several people asked a question which He answered with a short discourse.

During this time, He made at least two trips to the Transjordan. The first is recorded in John 10.

John 10:40, *And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He was staying there.*

After this, He traveled around and visited the villages from Judea through Samaria even into Galilee. Luke tells us,

Luke 13:22, *And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem.*

Luke 17:11, *While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee.*

23. The Conversation about the Narrow Gate

Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 13:23-24, 29-30,

Someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"

And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ...And they will come from east and west and from north and south and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

The Historical Context

These comments occurred during the journeys of Jesus mentioned above, a few months before His crucifixion. As they were walking along and visiting the villages, various people asked questions. The interesting thing here is that this is not a question from the Pharisees and scribes but from the Jewish villagers.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Jesus' answer to the question, "*Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?*" seems to be "Yes." Salvation is a narrow gate. Even many who are seeking to enter it will not find it.
- (2) Jesus predicted the same dispensation change that Paul elaborated on when Jesus said, "*They will come from east and west and from north and south and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.*"

Applications

- Big rallies and conferences designed to save multitudes of people are a good thing. But we should not say that multitudes are saved because they came to our rallies and conferences.
- As we study the gospels, we should understand that one of the aspects of Jesus' ministry was to set Judaism aside and introduce the church age.

Discussion Question

From all over the world, we hear of thousands of people (Muslims, Hindus, tribal religious) are becoming Christians. How does that square with Jesus' narrow gate in Matthew 7:13-14?

24. The Conversation about Herod

Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 13:31-35, *Just at that time some Pharisees approached,*

saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You."

And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal.' Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem."

The Historical Context

This took place during the winter and spring of A.D. 33, while Jesus was visiting the Judean villages. The warning about Herod apparently came from Pharisees living in the villages.

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus told the Pharisees to tell Herod He would complete His ministry and Herod would not stop it.

Application

We should stick to our calling as long as possible. Our calling should be discerned from our gifts, abilities, desires, and our life situation (our cross—Luke 9:23).

Discussion Questions

What was Jesus' philosophy about government leaders trying to destroy His ministry? How does this square with Peter and Paul's commands to obey government leaders (Romans 13:1)?

25. The Conversation with the Pharisees about the Sabbath

Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 14:1-6, *It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy.*

And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

But they kept silent.

And He took hold of him and healed him and sent him away.

And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

And they could make no reply to this.

The Historical Context

While on His spring trip around the Judean villages, Jesus came across a leader of the Pharisees who invited Him over for lunch on a Sabbath. So apparently the Pharisees thought it was okay to invite someone over for a meal on the Sabbath, but not to heal the sick on the Sabbath.

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus repeatedly contended with the Pharisees about keeping the Sabbath. His arguments never seemed to be about the rabbinical applications of the Sabbath but the meaning of the Sabbath itself. The Pharisees had good biblical grounds for Sabbath-keeping. It was set apart at creation and commanded by the Mosaic Law that no work should be done on the day we call Saturday. Jesus seems to have argued about its application, not its validity. Jesus violated the Pharisees' Sabbath laws to show that the Pharisees did not represent God. The laws of God need to be applied with the wisdom of God, not legalistically.

Discussion Questions

What is the thinking of Jesus about keeping the Sabbath? What about other laws, like hand washing before eating and picking grain on the Sabbath? Are there times when it is valid to break some of the Ten Commandments? What principle did Jesus use to apply the Law?

26. The Conversation about Humbling Yourself

Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 14:10-14, [Jesus said] *“But when you are invited, [by someone to a wedding feast] go and recline at the last place so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*
And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Observations/Interpretations

There appears to be two closely related principles here: one about humility and one about giving, and both are about heavenly rewards. Apparently, there were various degrees of honor indicated by where you sat at a Jewish wedding feast, or maybe any feast, or in the synagogue. And many Jews took it upon themselves to sit at the more honorable seats. Jesus said, *“recline at the last place.”* But the goal of this seems to be moved to a higher seat, to be exalted to a higher position by the one who invited you. The motivation for taking the lower seat is to be moved to a higher seat, in order to *have honor in the sight of all who are at the table*. Then Jesus moved immediately into a scenario where we are doing the inviting with the principle, give to those who cannot give back, again *“for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

Discussion Question

Does this mean God rewards some of those in heaven with higher places based on their earthly humility? What would be an example today of taking places of humility and avoiding places of honor?

27. The Conversation Predicting the Next Dispensation

Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 14:15-24, quoting verses 23-24,

Jesus told a story about a man who gave a big dinner party and invited many guests, all of whom gave excuses why they could not come. *And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.’”*

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus, once again, used a story to predict the upcoming dispensation change, explained in detail later by the letters of the apostles. The initial invited guests are the Jews as a nation, those on the *highways and along the hedges* are Gentiles invited to be part of the church.

Discussion Question

Who would be those today that we should no longer invite, and who are those along *the highways and along the hedges*, who are compelled to come in?

28. The Conversation about the Consequences of Discipleship Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 14:25-43, quoting 25-27 and 33,

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." [Then He gives two examples about counting the cost] He ends His point with the statement: *"So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."*

The Historical Context

Even in the villages, and probably from village to village, large crowds were following Jesus because of His healing and other miracles. But Jesus spoke to the crowd in the villages about discipleship defined in two ways: (1) hating those closest to you and (2) carrying your own cross. The Greek word for "hate" is the very common word *μισέω* (*miseō*). The Greek Strong's Dictionary defines it as "hatred; to detest (especially to persecute); by extension, to love less."

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus addressed the crowd about discipleship. Crowds do not gather for discipleship.

Applications

I do not go to a football game to learn to play football. I do not go to a concert to learn play a musical instrument. Jesus was looking for disciples, not followers. He healed people and fed people to prove He was the Messiah, not to gather a crowd of followers. If a ministry is focused on assembling large crowds of people, discipleship is unlikely.

Discussion Questions

Why did Jesus use the most common word for *hate* to compare Him to our families? What did He mean by carrying your own cross? What does it mean "...none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions"?

29. The Conversation about a Lost Sheep, a Lost Coin, and a Lost Son Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 15:1-32, *Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

So **He told them** three parables: about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost (prodigal) son.

The Historical Context

This took place sometime during Jesus' ministry tour of the villages of Judea. It is technically not a discussion since the Pharisees and the scribes did not directly ask Jesus a question, but they were making accusations about Him to which He responded.

Observations/Interpretations

In the three parables, the emphasis is on finding that which is lost. The lost sheep and the lost coin make no effort to return home, the lost son does. In all three cases, the focus is on the one seeking the lost. But the third parable reveals three attitudes: the father's, the prodigal's, and the brother who stayed home.

Discussion Question

The point of the first two stories was the priority of finding the lost sheep and the lost coin which already belonged to the owner. What is the point of the third story?

30. The Conversation about Increasing Our Faith Early Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 17:5-6,

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you."

The Historical Context

The disciples probably asked this question as they were walking between villages.

Observations/Interpretations

What Jesus said indicated that the issue was not the amount of faith but the **kind** of faith. If they had the right kind of faith, a tiny amount of it could uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. He said the same thing about moving a mountain. *"Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him"* (Mark 11:23).

Applications

There is no record of anything like this ever being done. The closest was Moses parting the Red Sea, and that happened because it was what God was doing at the time. If your faith was a perfect understanding of what God was doing, and God was going to move a mountain or a mulberry tree, then your faith would move the mountain or the mulberry tree. For example, if I made it clear that I was not speaking metaphorically, and I said, "Would you believe me?" No, you would not. Suppose Jesus said the same thing, "Mount Everest will be thrown into the Pacific Ocean." Would you believe Him? If you are a Christian believer, you would say, "Yes." What is the difference? Answer: "Jesus knows what God is doing, and I do not."

Discussion Questions

I know a man who considered himself a healer. When he was dying of cancer, he told his friends Jesus would heal him, and to prove he had no doubt, he said that if he died, Jesus would raise him from the dead. He died two years ago. He is still dead. How should we understand Jesus' statement

“whoever believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him”? How can your faith move a mountain or a mulberry tree? What is Jesus’ definition of *believes*?

31. The Conversation about the Raising of Lazarus

Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

John 11:17-44, *So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles [3 kilometers] off; and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house.*

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”

When she had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister, saying secretly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and was coming to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

*Therefore, when **Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him**, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

*When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and **[Jesus] said**, “Where have you laid him?”*

***They said to Him**, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?”*

So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.

Jesus said, “Remove the stone.”

Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

So they removed the stone.

*Then **Jesus raised His eyes, and said**, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.”*

*When He had said these things, **He cried out with a loud voice**, “Lazarus, come forth.” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth.*

Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The Historical Context

After His tour around the villages of Judah and Samaria, Jesus returned to the Transjordan, where He heard about the sickness, then death, of His friend Lazarus, the brother of His friends Mary and Martha. So Jesus came to their hometown of Bethany. This is where the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The first discussion here is between Jesus and Martha. She believed, as all believers do, *that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*. But Jesus was there to demonstrate a different point. He said, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”* Jesus shifted the focus from the death of Lazarus, even from the raising of Lazarus, to who He was. Martha then confirmed, *“Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”*
- (2) When Mary came to see Jesus, she said the same thing as her sister, *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

Nothing else is recorded about their discussion, but John tells us Jesus *was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled*, and when they brought Him to the tomb, *Jesus wept*. Why Jesus was troubled and wept is never explained. It was not just because Lazarus died, since He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. I suspect Ryrie’s explanation is the best. He said,

He was deeply moved within because of the sorrow that sickness and death brought. I believe Jesus wept because we have to live in a cursed world of suffering and death. When Jesus told them to *remove the stone*, Martha, reminded Him, *“by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.”* But Jesus reminded her, *“Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”* So they removed the stone. And He cried out with a loud voice, *“Lazarus, come forth,”* which he did, bound hand and foot with wrappings, just the way they had buried him. [The Ryrie Study Bible]

Applications

- The point of this miracle, and the reason the Apostle John told us about it, is to believe the statement of Jesus, *“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.”*
- Death is a curse, not a celebration. When believing loved ones die, we often talk about good things, even funny things, about their life and their joy in heaven. But they also had to suffer the curse of death, which usually has suffering connected to it. Nothing in the Bible says that death is an occasion for celebration. Instead, Jesus was moved, troubled, and wept.
- After giving a public prayer, Jesus commanded, *“Lazarus, come forth.”* But the text never tells us from where his spirit came forth. We know that normal death results in the spirit of the person being in a bodily form in the afterlife (Luke 16:19-31). But none of those who were raised from the dead report having an afterlife experience or an NDE (near death experience). When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, the text says, *her spirit returned* (Luke 8:55). Where the spirit was in the interim, we are not told.

Discussion Question

What is the difference between being raised from the dead, like Lazarus, the boy at Nain, and a ruler’s daughter, and the resurrection of the dead?

32. The Conversation about Confronting Authority Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Matthew 21:23-27, *When He entered the temple, [after the “The Triumphal Entry.”]*

The chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?” And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.”

And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.”

He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

The Historical Context

After raising Lazarus from the dead in the Spring of A.D. 33, events moved quickly toward the last week. The raising of Lazarus got the attention of everyone, especially the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. Then Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem, as a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, in what is usually called “The Triumphal Entry.” When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He observed the money changers back in business. Mark 11:12-15 tells us Jesus also *drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.* That is what triggered the above discussion.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Official authorities, in this case, *the chief priests and the elders*, are authority-oriented. Jesus was not authorized by any Jewish organization. He was not a priest or a Pharisee or a Sadducee or a scribe or a synagogue-authorized rabbi. Yet He was policing the activity of the Temple, and He chased them out, based on Scripture. Isaiah 56:7 says, *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the people.”*
- (2) Jesus made a deal with them. If they answer His question, He will answer their question. Actually, it is the same answer. The question is, “Where did John the Baptist get his authority?” This is one of the most clever answers ever given. It was simple, easy to understand, and right to the point. They probably did not believe John’s authority came from heaven either. But they were afraid of public opinion, and most Jews believed John was a prophet, even though he, like Jesus, was not from any of those Jewish authority-giving organizations.

Applications

- It is common for the institutions we create to place authority in its leaders, rather than in Scripture. We do it with official denominations, but more often today, it is done with our super-star speakers and worship leaders.
- Our authority is in the Scripture, left to us from biblical prophets and apostles. We should make it clear to people that we are not claiming personal or institutional authority but the authority of those prophets and apostles of God who recorded the Bible.

Discussion Questions

What is the difference between responsibility and authority? Does anyone in the church have authority today?

33. The Conversation about Foot Washing

Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

John 13:4-14, [Jesus] got up from supper and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

So He came to **Simon Peter**. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter."

Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

The Historical Context

[I realize various possible chronologies have been proposed for what happened on what day of the final week. I will be following the traditional order of events, which seem best to me. I realize good cases have been made for other scenarios. Also, it should be noted that when the gospel accounts differ, best rendering of events is done by adding them together. What is clear is they were written independently. They did not copy each other.]

Sunday was "The Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem, one week before His resurrection. When He arrived, Jesus went to the Temple, where He chased out the money changers (again) and contended with the Jews about authority. Jesus and His disciples probably spent the evenings of Sunday through Wednesday in Bethany, most likely at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Mark 11:19). However, one of those evenings He was also in the home of Simon the leper (apparently someone Jesus had healed), when an unnamed woman anointed Jesus with some very costly perfume (Mark 14:3).

Monday He returned to the Temple, where Matthew 21:12-13 says He chased the money changers out of the Temple again. It seems He did that both Sunday evening and Monday morning. This is likely, since it was the Passover week, and many were arriving to buy animals to sacrifice. There also seems to be a double cursing of a fig tree, which Peter pointed out on Monday morning (Mark 11:20). That Monday, Jesus healed many in the Temple. He and the apostles again spent the night in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany (Matthew 21:17).

Tuesday (two days before the Passover—Matthew 26:2) is often called "The Busy Day," where we have the teaching recorded in Matthew 21:23 through the end of Matthew 25.

Wednesday is often called the quiet day, although some of the teaching recorded in Matthew 22–25 may have been done on Wednesday.

Thursday is the day when the Galileans celebrated Passover. Jesus sent some of His disciples to organize the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-19), which they ate together that evening.

The above instance, during the "Upper Room Discourse," took place on that Thursday evening, before **Friday**, the day of His trials and crucifixion.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Jesus cleansed the Temple, chasing out the money changers. He never did that with a synagogue.
- (2) Two days before, Jesus knew He was to be arrested, tried, and crucified, yet He was still teaching.
- (3) The foot washing was not meant to be repeated as a ceremony. It was symbolic of the attitude of the church, believers serving one another, as a slave would do with a household guest.

Applications

- The Temple was the central place of worship in Israel. Today, believers are called the temple of God because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Synagogues were built during the Babylonian Captivity, as a place for the Jews to assemble and pray. Christians today also build many useful structures, but only believers themselves are the temple of God.
- Earlier in His ministry, during His “Sermon on the Mount” in Galilee, Jesus said, *“Do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (Matthew 6:34). Not worrying about tomorrow is almost impossible, but Jesus demonstrated it, teaching all day, two days before He knew He would be arrested, scourged, and crucified.
- The church is made up of believers, who should give to one another, as a household slave gives to the guests of the master.

Discussion Questions

Is foot washing meant to be a ceremony? If foot washing is not a ceremony, how should it be applied today, say, in a family or extended family or local church?

34. The Conversation about the Way, the Truth, and the Life Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

John 14:2-11,

[Jesus said] *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.”*

Thomas said to Him, *“Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”*

Jesus said to him, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”*

Philip said to Him, *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”*

Jesus said to him, *“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.”*

The Historical Context

The context is the same, since this discussion was also part of the “Upper Room Discourse.”

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Jesus said, *“I go and prepare a place for you.”* The place is probably the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21).
- (2) *“I will come again and receive you to Myself,”* is probably a reference to the Rapture that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
- (3) Jesus declared (revealed) that He was the only way of salvation for everyone.

Applications

- Our eternal future is connected to whatever Jesus has prepared for us.
- The next prophetic event is the Rapture, Jesus coming for His Church.
- Jesus is *the way, and the truth, and the life*. All other ways are religions of the devil. All other philosophies are a lie. All other teaching leads to eternal spiritual death (2 Cor 4:4).

Discussion Question

Jesus said, *“I will come again and receive you to Myself.”* Does this sound more like the Rapture or the Second Coming?

35. The Conversation at the Trial before the High Priest Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

John 18:19-24,

The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.”

*When He had said this, **one of the officers** standing nearby struck Jesus, **saying**, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?”*

Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?”

So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

The Historical Context

During the last week: Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey (fulfilling Zechariah 9:9), chased the money changers out of the Temple (maybe twice), cursed a fig tree, argued at least one full day with the Jewish leadership, was anointed with perfume, ate the Passover with His disciples, was arrested and taken to the Sanhedrin. Before being taken to Caiaphas, the current high priest, Jesus was interviewed by the former high priest Annas, where the above conversation took place.

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus challenged the former high priest Annas to point out anything He taught that was said in private or was incorrect. Since Annas could not answer that, one of the officers struck Him and sent Him on to Caiaphas, the current high priest.

Application

We should always be in a position where what we say can be public knowledge and unable to be denied as the truth.

- (2) The discussion clarified that Jesus was claiming to be a king, but His kingdom was not of this world.
- (3) Jesus turned the subject from His being a king to the nature of truth. He said, *“I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”* Like most worldly secularists, Pilate could only see truth as relative, so he said, *“What is truth?”*
- (4) Jesus made it clear to Pilate, *“You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.”*

Applications

- Understand that the secular world is only interested in things of this world. Secularists do not see religion as a spiritual thing or from God. For example, both dominant political parties in America see religions as a voting bloc.
- Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world, so stop trying to make it part of your social or political agenda to fix the world.
- Jesus said, *“I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.”* The truth is the way things actually are. We should have the same agenda. Our witnessing should not be promoting an organization or its cause or its leaders. We are only here to bring a message of the way things actually are.
- Whatever power and authority we might think we have, or the leaders of our organizations think they have, it is only part of what has been given by God.

Discussion Question

Jesus answered, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting...”* If, as believers, we are part of His kingdom, what should we fight for in this world?

37. The Conversation with the Thief on the Cross Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 23:39-43, *One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”*

And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

The Historical Context

Here we come to the end of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. Born in Bethlehem around 5 B.C., Jesus grew up in Nazareth, until He left to be baptized by John the Baptist in the lower Jordan River in the spring of A.D. 29. After the baptism, He was tempted by the devil, chose His first five disciples, and returned to Galilee, where He turned water into wine, before journeying south to Jerusalem, where He told Nicodemus he must be born again. Then He returned north through Samaria, where He had a discussion with the woman at the well, and on to Galilee, where He had His Greater Galilean Ministry, including two trips north, where He healed a Canaanite woman’s daughter and encountered Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Then He left Galilee and went south for His Greater Judean ministry. This included two or more trips to the Transjordan,

the last one interrupted by going back to the Jerusalem area, where He raised Lazarus from the dead, completed a final week of ministry, and was arrested, tried, and crucified. As He hung on the cross, the above conversion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus was crucified between a believing criminal and an unbelieving criminal. But there was a glaring difference between the two criminals.

- (1) The unbelieving criminal was focused on improving his life situation by having Jesus eliminate his suffering, whereas the believing criminal had a focus on the Kingdom of God.
- (2) Since they were dying, we can assume the believing criminal was asking to be part of Jesus' heavenly kingdom. One criminal had an earthly focus, the other had a heavenly focus.
- (3) The discussion between the two criminals reveals a primary difference in their sense of justice. The believing criminal understood he was receiving a just punishment.
- (4) The believing criminal revealed his faith by asking Jesus, "*remember me when You come in Your kingdom!*" This demonstrated his faith that Jesus was the Christ.
- (5) Jesus' comment to the believing criminal, "*today you shall be with Me in Paradise,*" shows that salvation is based on faith alone. The believing criminal had no opportunity to perform good works to demonstrate his faith. His salvation was not based on a life of good deeds that ended in his being accepted by God. His salvation began with being accepted by God.
- (6) "*today you shall be with Me*" also shows that at death, the believer is immediately with Jesus. Paul wrote, "*to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord*" (2 Cor 5:8).

Applications

- Do not proclaim a salvation that includes good works or a commitment to do good works.
- Do not proclaim a gospel that promises to remove (eliminate or heal) this world's suffering.
- Death, for the believer, is to leave this earth and immediately be *at home with the Lord*.

Discussion Question

How would you define the faith of the believing criminal?

38. The Conversation with Mary Magdalene Spring of A.D. 33

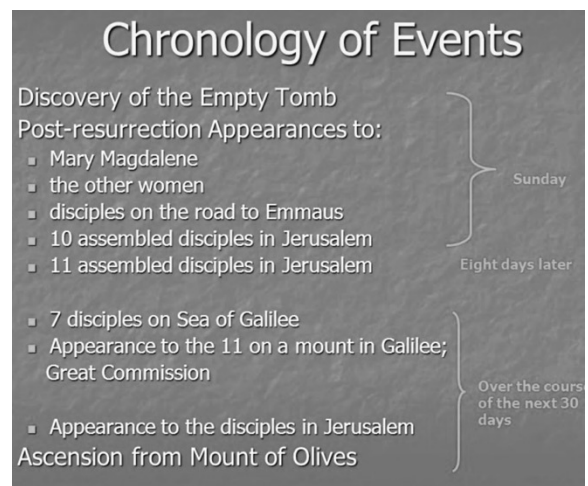
The Text

John 20:11-18, *But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.*

And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the



gardener, **she said to Him**, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and **said to Him** in Hebrew, “**Rabboni!**” (which means, Teacher).

Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her.

The Historical Context

After His trial, Pilate handed Jesus over to the Jewish leaders, who incited the crowd to demand that He be crucified. Pilate then had Him scourged, and the Jews mocked Him with a purple robe and a crown of thorns. Then He was crucified between two thieves. After His death, two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, buried the body in a new tomb in a garden just outside of the city (today such a place is marked by The Garden Tomb). The body was placed in the tomb on Friday, no one visited the tomb on Saturday the Sabbath, but on Sunday morning, the above conversation took place. [Chronology from sideplayer.com]

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The first evidence of the resurrection of Jesus was an empty tomb and a discussion between Mary Magdalene and two angels. [Note: Angels announced the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:9-14) and the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16:5-6). They were also at Christ’s ascension, announcing His Second Coming, saying, “*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way... (Acts 1:11).*]
- (2) First the angels, then Jesus, asked Mary the same question, “*Why are you weeping?*” She should not be weeping because *...He has risen, just as He said... (Matt 28:6).*
- (3) When Mary realized it was Jesus, she grabbed hold of Him until He told her not to do that, giving the reason, “*I have not yet ascended to the Father.*” So we know three things about the appearance of Jesus’ resurrected body: (1) It was of real substance. He was not a ghost, since she could hold on to Him. (2) His body was not yet in the state it would be after He *ascended to the Father*. And (3) Mary reported the event to the 11 apostles, not as a vision or mystical experience but as a real historical event.
- (4) Mary would probably not have been *clinging* to Him if she had seen Him in His glorified state:
Matthew 17:2, *And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.*
Revelation 1:14-15, *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.*

Applications/Interpretations

- Christianity is 100% based on an empty tomb. Never accept a presentation of Jesus without an empty tomb, and the resurrection appearances that followed. The gospels were all written to tell us about the empty tomb. There is no more certain event in all of history than the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. *...if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain (1 Cor 15:14).*
- Notice, Jesus appeared to people as a real historical event, not a mystical experience.

Discussion Question

Why did Mary Magdalene first not recognize Jesus, and why did she suddenly recognize Him?

39. The Conversation on the Road to Emmaus Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 24:13-26, *And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. And **they were talking with each other** about all the things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.*

*And **He said to them**, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?”*

*And they stood still, looking sad. **One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him**, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?”*

*And **He said to them**, “What things?”*

*And **they said to Him**, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”*

*And **He said to them**, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, **He explained to them** the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

*And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But **they urged Him, saying**, “Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.” So He went to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.*

***They said to one another**, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”*

The Historical Context

Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Sunday morning and He appeared to some other women as well. Meanwhile, Mary told the disciples. Peter and John then came to see the empty tomb but did not see Jesus. After appearing to the women at the tomb, sometime during that day, Jesus appeared to two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples may have been two men, one of them is identified as Cleopas (in verse 18) However Ryrie suggests,

The other may have been his wife (v. 32: “our heart”). Many identify Cleopas with the “Clopas” mentioned in John 19:25, in which case his wife’s name was Mary.

John 19:25 ...But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. [The Ryrie Study Bible]

The location of Emmaus is unknown but it was somewhere less than seven miles from Jerusalem.

Observations/Interpretations

(1) The two travelers were prevented from recognizing Jesus, so they gave Him a report about the crucifixion, empty tomb, and the report of His resurrection by the women who saw Him. This is

significant because it is a historical report of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus given within days of the event. And the report was that everybody in Jerusalem was talking about it. *Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?"* He might have said, "Are you from Mars? How could you walk through Jerusalem not know about these things?" Which demonstrates that this was a public generally verifiable event, not some private mystical experience.

- (2) We should also notice that the two travelers pointed out, *Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.* This tells us that all the Old Testament has things hidden in it that reveal things about Jesus and maybe one day in heaven Jesus will reveal those things to us. But it is also important to notice that the disciples by themselves did not know those things. God had chosen to tell us that the Scriptures, whatever they are talking about historically, and contextually, they are also talking about Jesus. God has also chosen to not let us know what all those meanings are. So unless the author, or a New Testament author, tells us what they are, we should not guess about it.

Applications

We should teach that the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was a historical fact, reported within days of its occurrence, and it was in the context of fulfilled biblical prophecy.

We know that the Old Testament Scripture referred to Jesus. And some of those references are hidden, sometimes even from the human author, since God is also the author. But do not read Jesus back into the Old Testament unless a New Testament author tells you to. For example, we do not know if Genesis 3:15 refers to Jesus when it says *He will bruise you on the head*, because no biblical author confirms that interpretation. But we do know that Isaiah 7:14, *Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel*, refers to Jesus, because Matthew 1:23 says it does.

Discussion Question

Why were the disciples on the road to Emmaus prevented from recognizing Jesus?

40. The Conversation with the Disciples in Jerusalem Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

Luke 24:33-49, *And **they** got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, **saying**, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."*

They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

*While they were telling these things, **He Himself** stood in their midst and **said to them**, "Peace be to you."*

But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

*And **He said to them**, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.*

*While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, **He said to them**, "Have you anything here to eat?"*

They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

Now **He said to them**, “*These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*”

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and **He said to them**, “*Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*”

The Historical Context

In the Spring A.D. 33, during His “Greater Judean Ministry,” Jesus made (at least) two trips to the Transjordan. The last trip was interrupted by the sickness and death of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead at Bethany, just southeast of Jerusalem, on the east side of the Mount of Olives. This was followed by His final week of ministry where He triumphantly entered Jerusalem, chased the money changers out of the Temple (again), did a lot of teaching, and celebrated the Passover with His disciples. Then He was arrested, tried, crucified, buried, rose from the dead and appeared to multiple people. Beginning on Sunday morning, He appeared to Mary Magdalene, then some other women, then to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He also appeared to Simon Peter, but we do not know exactly where that fits in the order of appearances. The two disciples, who spoke with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, gathered together with the eleven in Jerusalem. During this gathering Jesus appeared in the room with them.

Observations/Interpretations

Jesus made five significant points here:

- (1) He said, “*Peace be to you.*” Their circumstances were anything but peaceful, hiding from the Jews in some room in Jerusalem. The peace Jesus was going to leave with them was not just a feeling but confidence in the physical reality of His resurrection.
- (2) He said, “*See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*” By doing this, Jesus proved He was not a spirit or a ghost but a resurrected person with an actual body.
- (3) He asked for something to eat and ate some fish before them. This demonstrated that His body was able to eat.
- (4) *He opened their minds to understand the Old Testament Scriptures which taught, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day.*
- (5) He announced a change in dispensation from being sent only *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 10:6; 15:24) *to repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations.*

Applications

- The peace that Jesus wants us to have is not in pleasant safe circumstances but in the confidence of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.
- We can know that the resurrected body is not a spirit but substantive form. There are no such things as ghosts.
- We should understand that we are in the church/grace age. We are not part of God’s promises to Israel.

Discussion Question

Peter wrote, “*though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls*” (1 Peter 1:8-9). So, why are the resurrection appearances of Jesus important?

41. The Conversation with the Peter in Galilee Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

John 21:13-19, *Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. So when they had finished breakfast,*

Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Tend My lambs.”

He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.”

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?”

Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?”

And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go.” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.

And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

The Historical Context

After Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Sunday morning, He appeared to some other women as well. Meanwhile, Mary told the disciples. Peter and John then came to see the empty tomb but did not see Jesus. Sometime during that day, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. That Sunday evening, Jesus appeared to 10 of the disciples, without Thomas, in a closed room, where He greeted them in peace, He showed them the scars of the wounds in His hands and side, commissioned them to be apostles, and breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Eight days later He appeared to the 11, including Thomas who also felt Jesus’ scars. All this took place in or near Jerusalem. John then adds the comment,

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:39).

Then the apostles traveled back to Galilee and went fishing. After catching nothing all night, Jesus appeared on the shore and told them to *cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat* where they caught 153 large fish. After roasting some of the fish for breakfast, the above discussion took place.

Observations/Interpretations

(1) Jesus’ initial question, “*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*” seems to refer to the immediate miraculous catch of fish. Did Peter love Jesus more than his occupation? Most see

this question and answer as Peter loving Jesus more than the other apostles, but there is nothing in the context to support that. The immediate big event was the huge catch of fish.

- (2) The two most common Greek words for “love” are used here, *agape*, which focuses on giving and *phileō*, which focuses on affection. But we should not make a big interpretative deal about it because words of similar meaning are often interchanged. The point is that Jesus is asking Peter about his commitment of giving and affection—for Him.
- (3) The responsibility assigned to Peter was to take care of those who believe in Jesus, *Shepherd My sheep*.

Applications

- The basic question for being a disciple of Jesus is, “Are we willing to make Him a priority over what we have in this world?”
- A second way to put our basic commitment to discipleship is “Do we love (give to and have an affection for) Jesus over everything and everyone else?”
- The most basic task of discipleship is to care for believers as a shepherd would care for his sheep.

Discussion Questions

When Jesus said, “*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*” Was He asking about the other disciples or the fish? What would be the implication of each?

42. The Conversation at Jesus' Ascension Spring of A.D. 33

The Text

*Acts 1:1-9, The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after **He had by the Holy Spirit given orders** to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and **speaking** of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

*Gathering them together, **He commanded them** not to leave Jerusalem, but **to wait for** what the Father had promised, “Which,” **He said**, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

*So when they had come together, **they were asking Him**, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”*

***He said to them**, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

*And **after He had said these things**, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

The Historical Context

Jesus' earthly ministry was complete. On the cross, He said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). He was baptized by John and tempted by the devil. He chose 12 disciples, preached the holiness of God, and proclaimed Himself as the Christ to the Jews in Galilee and Judea, with many miraculous proofs, including healing everyone who came to Him. He was arrested, tried, crucified and buried. He rose from the dead and appeared to multiple people. As he was about to leave this earthly mission, He

gathered His disciples together on the Mount of Olives one last time. Luke captures this for us in the above paragraph.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) Luke tells us that Jesus *presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days*. This is the only reference to His time on earth between His resurrection and ascension.
- (2) What He talked about during this time was the *kingdom of God*. This could be a reference to the Millennial Kingdom or the godliness He had proclaimed throughout His earthly ministry.
- (3) He predicted the beginning of the church when He said, *“you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now...”* and *“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*
- (4) The disciples asked the same question they had asked throughout His ministry, *“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”* Jesus did not deny that He would do that. He actually affirmed it by saying, *“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.”*

Applications

When studying the Scripture, understand it in the context of what the author is talking about rather than imposing your context or question on the text. Jesus was telling them about the beginning of the church by referring to the upcoming indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, the apostles missed His point because they were thinking about a political kingdom where the Jews would rule themselves.

Discussion Question

What did Luke mean when he said Jesus was *speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God?*

43. The Conversation with Saul Spring of A.D. 36?

The Text

Acts 9:1-9, Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

*As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and **heard a voice saying to him**, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*

*And **he said**, “Who are You, Lord?”*

*And **He said**, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”*

*The men who traveled with him stood speechless, **hearing the voice** but seeing no one.*

Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

The Historical Context

The early church believers faced fierce persecution from the Jews. We are told in Acts 2–4 that Peter and John were thrown into prison, called before the authorities, and threatened if they did not stop proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. Later on, Stephen was stoned to death, the Apostle James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod, and Peter was put in prison. In the context of this, Saul was *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*.

Observations/Interpretations

- (1) The Jewish high priest in Jerusalem had (or thought he had) authority over other synagogues. Paul's letters from him were enough to arrest Jewish Christians, at that time called those *belonging to the Way*.
- (2) Five things happened to Paul on the road as he approached Damascus:
 - a) He saw that *a light from heaven that flashed around him*,
 - b) He heard a voice saying to him, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (Acts 9:7, *The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.*)
 - c) He also saw Jesus, although it does not say so in the above passage, it is documented in 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; and 15:8.
 - d) He was told to "*get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.*"
 - e) He was blind, *he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

Applications

We should not expect a calling like Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. No one else had such a calling. But God does call people to serve Him with their desires, gifts, abilities, and in the midst of their life situations.

Discussion Question

Why was no one else ever called to ministry the way Paul was?

44. The Conversation with Ananias

A.D. 36?

The Text

Acts 9:10-17,

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias."

And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The Historical Context

We are told, *there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias*. Ananias is a common name, it occurs 10 times in the New Testament, but this Ananias is only mentioned in this passage. We know that he had been a believer long enough to know that Paul did much harm to the saints at Jerusalem, and that Paul had *authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name*. Ananias is called a “disciple,” the term Luke used for a believer throughout the book of Acts. Either he was saved in Jerusalem, say, from Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, or someone from Damascus became a believer in Jerusalem and traveled to Damascus and led Ananias to Christ.

Observations/Interpretations

1. Ananias was well-informed about the situation of persecution in Jerusalem. So apparently word of mouth was a very effective way of communicating that information. It may actually still be the most accurate means of communication. With the media, you get information with a bias of a certain perspective. And you never get all the information. With word of mouth, when someone tells you something, you can ask questions for clarification. Of course, word of mouth can be bias as well, but then you have an opportunity to ask questions to determine that.
2. Jesus told Ananias three things about Paul, which were reasons why Ananias should go and find him:
 - a) *“He is a chosen instrument of Mine.”* As with our salvation, Jesus chose Paul before Paul chose Jesus.
 - b) He will *“bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”* There was a new dispensation coming where both Jews and Gentiles would be included without racial distinctions (Gal 3:28).
 - c) *“I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”*

Applications

- Do not depend on the media, even the Christian media, for all your information about what is going on in the church today. Go to sources where you can have a dialogue about the situation.
- A call of God is a call to suffering because the world hates the truth.

Discussion Question

Why did God involve Ananias in the commission of Paul? God could have just spoken to Paul in a vision, why involve Ananias?

45. The Conversation with the Apostle John

A.D. 90?

The Text

Revelation 1:8-11, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

The Historical Context

It was the end of the first century, probably in the mid A.D. 90s when the Apostle John was exiled to the Island of Patmos. It is likely that John moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus around A.D. 70, the year the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. After that he wrote the Gospel of John as well as the epistles I, II, and III John. Eusebius (A.D. 260–340) tells us that John was exiled to the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian in A.D. 95 and that he was released eighteen months later by Nerva [Ecclesiastical History 3.20. 8-9]. During this 18 months, John received the Book of Revelation. “The Expositors Bible Commentary” reports,

Patmos lies about thirty-seven miles [60 kilometers] west-southwest of Miletus, in the Icarian [Aegean] Sea. Consisting mainly of volcanic hills and rocky ground, Patmos is about ten miles long and six miles wide at the north end. It was an island used for Roman penal purposes. Tacitus refers to the use of such small islands for political banishment (Annals 3.68; 4.30; 15.71).

Observations/Interpretations

John, who was the only living apostle (probably for the last 20 years), clearly the most significant person in the church at the time, calls himself, *I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus*. This self-description not only reveals John’s humility but shows us that he does not believe in leadership titles of authority.

Applications

The example of John tells us we should avoid positions of authority and titles like: Pope, Bishop, Cardinal, Father, Reverend, or Pastor.

Discussion Question

What did John mean when He said, *I...was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*?

Epilogue Spring A.D. 33

Luke tells us, “*To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of **forty days** and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). After the encounter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus appeared to the 11 apostles two more times, we are aware of, over about 30 days (for a total of 40 days). One was on a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus gave them what we generally call “The Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20. The second, and last time, He appeared to the 11 was at His ascension from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

- **Acts 1:11-12**, [Two angels said] “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven*”... *from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem.*
- **Zechariah 14:4**, [Zechariah said] *In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.*
- **Revelation 1:7**, [John said] *BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*