

The Life of Christ

Book III - His Authority and Teachings

by George Ford

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1. Healing A Leaper

"A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing', he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere." (Mark 1:40-45)

Jesus healed many sick people who had leprosy. In times past, this disease was considered a sign of sin and uncleanness. The term for healing leprosy was "cleansing", indicating that this malady was considered to be a sign of God's judgement against sinners. Reading the Jewish medical books, one finds many cures for all sorts of diseases except for leprosy, for it was thought to be curable only by a miracle from God. We see this view clearly illustrated in the words of King Jehoram, during the days of Elisha, regarding the healing of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:7). A leper was expected to avoid all people, even those from his own household. If he dared to enter a city, he would be lashed forty times. A leper was actually considered to be a dead man; whoever touched him became unclean. He was ordered to observe such mourning practices as tearing his clothes, uncovering his head, covering his mouth, going without bathing, etc. He was always to cry, "unclean, unclean", in order to warn others of his presence. When a leper was healed, he had to prove this by obtaining a certification from the priest, verifying his cure.

One day, Jesus was visiting a city. A leper came to him, even though lepers were forbidden to approach others. One can visualise the crowd dispersing for fear of becoming unclean. His appearance must have been pitiful. We can imagine his head being shaved and uncovered; his clothes, torn; and his voice, hoarse, from the spreading infection. Luke the Evangelist says that he was full of leprosy, and so he must have looked frightening; parts of his nose, ears, lips, and eyelids were probably eaten up, and he went his way shouting "unclean, unclean". When he saw Jesus, he knelt in front of him.

Judging from his outward appearance, he must have felt miserable. But he was actually fortunate because the Spirit of God inspired him to bow down to Christ whom he called "Master". The only ones who had bowed down before Christ, prior to this leper, were the Magi at his manger. Following this leper's example, millions of people from different races have bowed before Christ.

We can still remember the authoritative voice of Christ when he rebuked the Devil, saying, "...it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only..'" How could Jesus accept this worship? Even Christ's apostles and the angels prevented people from worshipping them, because it was forbidden. They knew they were altogether different from Christ, and they were not envious of the divine right of God who alone deserves honour. But Jesus Christ had divine rights; this made it possible for him to accept the worship of that leper.

The story of this leper astonishes us. How was faith born in his heart? All the other sick who sought Jesus' help said, "...But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (Mark 9:22). They said this even though their infirmities were often curable. This leper, who was considered to be incurably ill, said, "if You are willing, You can make me clean." With these words, the leper expressed his belief that Christ could heal him -- an act attributable only to God. The leper was humble; he did not demand that Jesus heal him. Despite his great need, he respected the will of Christ, and because of his great humility and faith, he became worthy of receiving this honour from Jesus.

Since the leper's faith was evident, Christ did not delay healing him. He immediately assured the man that he was willing to restore him. Christ never delays when believers ask for healing from their sins; he grants salvation at once through his forgiveness. Jesus was not moved to cleanse the leper merely out of a mechanical response to his petition, for he is not like that. Jesus also did not do it to become famous, because he later ordered the leper not to tell others about his healing. Jesus performed this marvellous act of mercy because he had compassion on him; he was moved with pity. He stretched out his hand, and touched him.

When Jesus touched the leper, he was proclaiming that God is love. After years of exclusion from his family, and of suffering from this dreadful disease, this man was rewarded for his wonderful faith. Christ comforted him through his touch. We cannot imagine the joy that filled his heart when Jesus, with his hands resting upon the man's head, said, "I am willing", ... "Be clean!" These words restored the leper, and he was made new -- inside and out.

Jesus stressed love's superiority over religious ritual. He said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 12:7). Christ came as God in the flesh to be a final, atoning sacrifice. By touching the leper, he foreshadowed his work of Redemption which is recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus knew of the disadvantages in publicising the news of the leper's healing, but the healed man was so enthusiastic that he wanted to tell everyone. Jesus told him, "See that you don't tell this to anyone...." Jesus did not want the crowd to think that he had become unclean by touching the leper. This would have hindered his ministry. Jesus also did not want more crowds to gather around him, for this would have interfered with his important work of evangelism and teaching. John Chrysostom, one of the Church Fathers, said that Jesus

wanted those who were healed to be quiet and reverent. He wanted them to think of God's mercies towards them so that they would not succumb to feelings of pride. He did not want them to seek fame either, due to the many people that would be impressed by what had happened.

Jesus gave the man an order: "...Show yourself to the priest." It was the duty of every Jew to submit to the Mosaic Law, and Jesus wanted the healed leper to go to the priest in Jerusalem to have his healing certified. A priest's confirmation of his cleansing would make it possible for him to return to his people. It was not easy to get such certification, but it was necessary. Jesus did not want the healed leper to announce his miraculous cure to others because the priest might then refuse him a certification of cleansing when he discovered who it was that had healed him; for the priests hated Christ.

The cured leper disobeyed Jesus and told others of his healing. Because of this, many people gathered around Jesus, and he had to go out into the wilderness to be alone and commune with his Father. Luke says: "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:15,16).

Dear Reader,

This man, in his enthusiasm, disobeyed Jesus, and the result was detrimental to Christ's ministry. He should have submitted to Jesus' command. We need to show our thankfulness to Christ, for his graciously saving us from Sin, by being obedient and submitting to his orders.

2. Two Miracles in Capernaum

2.1. The Miraculous Catch of Fish

"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:1-11).

Peter, James, and John had spent a whole night in vain, trying to catch fish. In the morning, they returned to shore with nothing, and were washing their nets. Jesus came, and many people gathered around him on the shore to listen to God's Word. He got into one of the boats and asked his disciple, Peter, to put out a little from the land. After Jesus had finished his sermon, he told Peter to sail out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch. This did not make sense to Peter; he had just washed his nets and was preparing them for the following night. If he were to throw the nets in again, without success, his efforts would all be in vain, and he would have had to wash the nets all over again. Peter was an experienced fisherman, whereas, Jesus was a carpenter. Why should a fisherman take orders from a carpenter on how to catch fish? Peter had already seen that there were no fish in that area. He hesitated at first, but then obeyed Christ. He was soon rewarded for his obedience, and his boat, as well as that of James and John, were filled with so many fish, that they began to sink. The disciples and everyone with them were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken. Peter was so shaken that he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." We can assume that Peter said this because he was embarrassed for refusing to obey Jesus earlier. He became frightened when he began to comprehend something of the glory and holiness of Christ. The Messiah, who knew all his weaknesses, was with him in his boat. No sinner can stand in the presence of the Most Holy without being afraid. Because Jesus knew Peter's heart, he did not rebuke him for saying, "Go away from me....." Peter's motives were noble, and he was conscious of his sins, even though he had not yet fully understood the person of Christ, nor his reason for coming to earth. He thought that Jesus should keep away from sinners. The Devil often sows such confusion in the minds of sinners in order to hinder them from coming to Christ.

In his great wisdom and love, Jesus refused Peter's request. When believers ask Christ to do something contrary to what would be best for them, he does not grant their petition. Christ responded to Peter's prayer by doing the exact opposite. When Peter asked Christ to depart from him, Jesus came closer. He saw Peter's motives and ignored his words. He then reassured him by telling him not to be afraid. He also told him that he would become a fisher of men. This was a task far more honourable than his previous work. Fishing for souls is a calling that Jesus gives to all his followers, regardless of their abilities or circumstances.

When the disciples brought the two boats to the shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

2.2. The Miracle of Healing a Paralytic

"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the

paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....' He said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!' (Mark 2:1-12)

After Jesus returned from the seashore, he entered a residence and began teaching. Previously, he had taught in the Temple, beside a well, in a synagogue, and from a boat. He now began teaching from a house, and people crowd-ed around him; there was no more room for them, not even near the door. He was proclaiming the Word of God to them. Among the crowd were Pharisees and scribes from many villages and towns in Judea and Galilee. They came to hear his teaching and to see his miracles. We can imagine them sitting in places of honour beside the famous teacher whom they had come to witness. The power of the Lord was there to heal those who were in need. Many were hoping for a chance to reach the wonderful Doctor to receive healing for themselves or their relatives.

Then there was a stirring in the crowd, caused by four men who were carrying a man suffering from paralysis. These men had tried to reach Jesus but could not, because of the crowd. Therefore, they devised a plan by which they would come to Christ. They located the place in the house where Jesus was sitting, and removed the tiles from the section of the roof above him. When they had made an opening, they lowered the bed, on which the paralytic lay, down in front of Jesus. Everyone was amazed to see this. They must have spoken about it for days. There, in front of these people and in front of Jesus, lay the paralytic. He did not say a word or even move, but his pitiful condition spoke loud and clear.

Jesus differed from all other teachers in that he was interested in people's inward disposition more than their outward response. He knew the secrets of their hearts; this is why he was able to direct his words and deeds to meet their internal situations. Jesus began by healing the heart of the paralytic, for he said to him, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The paralytic probably assumed that his sins were the reason for his paralysis, and Christ saw his repentant heart. Jesus was interested in healing his body, but he was more interested in saving his soul. Maybe that paralytic had heard Jesus teach earlier, and was now anticipating a healing miracle from Christ -- one that would restore both his body and soul.

These four men carrying the paralytic showed great faith. Through their action, they expressed the trust that must have existed in his heart. Perhaps his illness had left him mute, and he himself could not express his desire for healing. When Jesus offered him forgiveness for his sins, he must have surely been comforted, and no doubt his heart filled with joy, even though he was still paralysed. His great physical misfortune brought him to Christ who saved him from the greater calamity of bearing the burden of his Sin.

Jesus offers forgiveness only to those who realise their Sin. This paralytic must have sung in his heart with the prophet David: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1,2). A person is blessed because God grants him forgiveness and then pours all his other blessings upon him. When God forgives, he bestows his precious promises, overflowing grace, and eternal glory to those who are forgiven.

When Jesus demonstrated his ability to forgive sins, he proved that his position is superior to any other human being. In several ways, the physical healing of the paralytic was similar to his spiritual restoration. To begin with, carrying his bed was not a condition for his obtaining healing, but a result of it. Likewise, goodness is not a condition for receiving forgiveness, but is the natural result or fruit of this free gift. Also, his body was healed in an instant. In the same way, God does not promise to forgive our sins at some later time, after our death, or when we think we deserve it. A sinner receives forgiveness from Christ, the Saviour, the moment he asks for it with all his heart. Christ, who knows the inner condition of a person, grants the petition. Unlike man, he does not have to wait to make sure that a sinner is ready to receive forgiveness; he knows it immediately. Further, Jesus did not heal the paralytic partially, leaving him to regain his health gradually. He did not ask the four who had carried him there to carry him back home again, but healed him completely, forgiving all his sins in one instant. Christ always does things perfectly. Had Christ left this paralytic with some of his sins unforgiven, he would surely have perished. If a boat has holes in it and its owner fills them, except for one, the boat will still sink. One hole is just as dangerous as a hundred. But thanks be to God because he gives complete, perfect forgiveness.

What Jesus said had great impact on those who were listening to him. After Christ ascended into heaven, his claim to forgive sins was still engraved on Peter's memory. After being arrested for preaching in the Temple, Peter made the following declaration to the council which had met to judge him: "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel" (Acts 5:31).

The prominent visitors from Jerusalem who were near Jesus did not accept his forgiving others' sins. They regarded him as a mere human teacher who had no right to do this. They even considered him to be a blasphemer because he claimed divine rights for himself. According to their Law, anyone who boasted of divine power was a very wicked person who deserved to be stoned.

By presenting proof of his deity, Jesus sought to open their unbelieving eyes to the fact that he was more than just a human teacher. Being both God and man, he had the right to grant forgiveness, and he was therefore not committing blasphemy. His first proof was to tell them their innermost thoughts, even before they expressed them in words. The prophet Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said: "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge

and of the fear of the LORD-- and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears" (Isaiah 11:2,3).

Jesus presented another proof for them to consider; namely, his power to heal the man. Normally, when paralysis has stricken its victim for a long time, it is incurable. Since Jesus healed the paralytic instantly, with the results immediately visible, no one could say that he was a liar. Therefore, Christ said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." As for saying, "Your sins are forgiven", any liar could say this because no one would be able to see its effects. It is therefore easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" than to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk." Anyone who offers forgiveness of sins, after proving his authority by healing a paralytic, can be considered reliable. This is how Jesus refuted his opponents objections. He showed his authority to forgive sins because he is the Son of Man and the Son of God. Then, to prove his words by his deeds, he ordered the paralytic to rise, take up his bed, and walk.

The paralytic rose immediately. Those who refused to make room for him earlier now hurried to clear the way for him to exit. The bed, which had been a symbol of his disability, was now proof of his miraculous healing, and he walked out carrying it. What a strong statement in sup-port of his restoration! He stood up immediately, took up his bed, and walked, glorifying God.

3. Jesus Calls Matthew

"Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me', Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?' On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Mark 2:13-17).

Jesus stood at the customs office where the tax collectors collect taxes from the merchants. He greeted one of the men there and said to him, "Follow me." Christ also invites you to follow him now, just as he invited Matthew (Levi) the tax collector.

If we meditate on this invitation, we can see that it is not as simple as it looks. To begin with, there was much about this man that made others dislike him when they saw him -- especially since he was now with Christ. It is true that he came from their city, Capernaum. His name was *Matthew*, meaning "*the gift of God*". His Hebrew name was *Levi*, meaning "*priest*", which indicates that he came from a noble, priestly family. He was an educated and rich man, but was also a tax collector, one of a despised and hated class. The disciples of Christ were

probably anxious over this invitation -- fearing Matthew would join them. Because Matthew accepted the invitation of Jesus, and became one of his disciples, all Christ's enemies were pleased; they thought this would make Jesus look bad.

The invitation which was extended to Matthew shows us the greatness of Christ who was not influenced by the opinions of the people of his day. This is further evidence of his divine nature, for all other people are concerned about what other people think of them, and seek to conform to society. Did not God say to his people, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways..." (Isaiah 55:8). By not acting like his contemporaries, Jesus showed that he had a different origin, for his principles and thoughts were unique. He was not of this earth. The leaders of the Jews hated tax collectors, and deprived them of their civil rights. They did not accept their testimonies in court, and they put them in the same class as usurers, gamblers, thieves, murderers, adulterers, and pagans. They would not ask the tax collectors for a charitable contribution, nor would they sit with them at meals. They used to liken tax collectors to wild animals. This bad treatment only caused those who had chosen tax-collecting as their profession to become more and more corrupt. Why did Jesus invite a tax collector to join him and become one of his disciples, and later one of his apostles? The answer is that Jesus did not behave like other Jews who hated this class of people. In his great love, Jesus reached out to everyone, especially the outcasts of society, showing them God's tenderness. That is why Jesus invited a tax collector to follow him.

Jesus saw that the faults of the religious leaders were much greater and more deserving of condemnation than those of the tax collectors. Had the Pharisees understood this, they would have escaped judgement. But since they did not, Jesus condemned them openly many times. Sinners who are conscious of their faults and confess them to Jesus are nearer to the Kingdom of God than religious hypocrites who pretend to be righteous. This is why a despised tax collector was given the opportunity to enter heaven before the Pharisees.

Jesus had already saved an outcast when he led the Samaritan woman to repentance and faith. Now, he invited Matthew to enter his spiritual kingdom. Jesus explained that the wickedness of the tax collectors was the reason why he, as the Great Physician, gave them favourable attention; he did not seek healthy people, but the sick. The Saviour of the Pharisees is also the Saviour of the tax collectors. He once told the high priests and elders of the Jews: "...Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first", they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (Matthew 21:31,32). Here, we see Christ implying that he would meet the same fate as John the Baptist who was accepted by repentant sinners, but was rejected by the unrepentant elders of the Jews.

It is likely that Matthew already knew about Jesus Christ. He had probably heard his

preaching several times, and had been moved by it. He may also have seen some of Christ's miracles and believed in him with a simple faith like many others. He probably began to hate his distasteful job, and longed to leave it. Jesus saw the attitude of his heart, and therefore knew that Matthew was ready for an invitation to follow him, and so he invited him. Matthew left everything and followed him. The work of divine grace was evident in him, for he lost his love for money, and sacrificed everything for the sake of Christ.

Matthew not only left his profitable job for Christ's sake, but he also prepared a big banquet in his home for him. He invited many of his colleagues, because other "respectable" people would not normally have responded to his invitation. Maybe he wanted his associates to come to know Jesus too, finding the light as he had; this is what every enlightened follower of Christ should do. Matthew was the only disciple who prepared such a banquet for Jesus. He wanted to express his gratitude to Christ because he had invited him into his circle of disciples and saved him from his sinful plight. Yes, Matthew lost his employment and income, but he gained salvation and forgiveness of sins. Whatever he had previously gained was now counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Jesus rewarded him with an honour that has endured through the ages. Matthew's account of the Gospel is the first of the four which tells the story of the good news of Jesus' coming into the world. His name has been immortalised more than the names of kings, scientists, or men of wealth. Through the Gospel account which he wrote, he has led many souls to Christ. Whoever denies this world, with its evil allurements, to follow and serve the great divine teacher, will be richly rewarded.

Matthew showed evidence of his transformed life because he immediately began thinking of giving rather than taking. Some people think that they do the Church a favour when they join it, and they expect worldly benefits in exchange. They are like Peter in one of his lapses when he told Jesus, "...We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" (Matthew 19:27). Instead of considering the Church to be their benefactor for accepting them, they should rather give a large portion of their blessings in appreciation.

In his account of the Gospel, Matthew described how Jesus invited him to be a disciple. With a humility that typified his character, Matthew did not mention that he left all to follow Jesus, or the fact that he prepared a banquet for him. Only Luke tells us this. While Mark and Luke, in their list of the names of the apostles, do not give Matthew the title, "tax collector", Matthew, in his Gospel account, does use this despised title. It seems that he wanted to give the glory to Christ who had graciously condescended to include a tax collector among his chosen apostles.

In many languages, there is a proverb which says, "Birds of a feather, flock together." The Pharisees regarded Christ with scorn because he accepted the fellowship of outcasts, and ate with them. The proverb would be true of Jesus if he had shared with sinners in their sin. But this was not the case. His purpose in associating with sinners was to change them and lead them to the divine light.

Christ accepted the invitation of Matthew and ate in his home. By so doing, he broke down the divisions between different classes of people, showing that God is not partial but accepts people from all nations who fear him and do what is right (Acts 10:35). The people of Jesus' day could not see that, in the sight of God, there is no difference between rich or poor, educated or simple, king or slave. Jesus was the first to teach this principle, leaving it to the world as a precious legacy.

When one considers this unusual gathering in the house of Matthew, one sees a striking contrast. On the one hand, we see Christ who was called the Holy One before his birth and to whom the devils attested, "...I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24). On the other, we see a group of tax collectors and sinners. What brought these two together? The answer is found in the words of Jesus, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The scribes and the Pharisees complained when Jesus accepted the invitation of Matthew. They did not object to tax collectors eating with their own kind, but they were disgusted with Christ for mingling with this despicable crowd, and they reproached him for it.

When Jesus healed a paralytic in another house in the same city, he rebuked the leaders of the Jews, answering their unspoken objections. Perhaps they did not voice their thoughts against him publicly because they were afraid that his answer to their spoken criticisms would be stronger than that to their silent complaints. Therefore, they directed their attack at Christ's disciples, asking why their rabbi associated with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus did not give his disciples a chance to answer the question. He himself responded immediately. The disciples were not yet in a position to give a satisfactory reply to this important question which dealt with the primary purpose of Christ's coming into the world. In his answer, Jesus explained that his outward actions were merely symbols of his spiritual service; he healed bodies to show that he was also the healer of souls. As they had seen his interest in healing the sick, they were also to understand his interest in healing souls from Sin. Christ revealed to the leaders of the Jews that he was the Physician of Souls. They should have realised that, as the Saviour, he offered his service to sinners, not to the righteous. A doctor does not treat a sick person who claims to be well. Likewise, the Saviour does not save a sinner who claims to be righteous. But these leaders of the Jews were doing just that. They boasted that they were teachers of religion, and therefore they thought they needed no Saviour. Had they been truly righteous, they would have rejoiced to see Jesus giving his attention to the lost, leading them to the right path. They should have been pleased that he attended to the sick. This did not mean that he himself was sick, or that he shared their illnesses.

When Jesus declared, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners", he demonstrated the importance of penitence. What is that repentance to which he called people? To begin with, it is an awareness, on the part of a person, that he is a sinner and that Sin is loathsome. Also, the person should have sorrow for his sins, and have a genuine determination to leave them. Lastly, the person must find refuge in God who grants divine forgiveness, seeking his

help to remain faithful.

4. Healing A Sick Man At The Pool Of Bethesda

"Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie-- the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?' 'Sir', the invalid replied, 'I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath" (John 5:1-9).

John the Evangelist tells us how a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years was healed. He stayed by a pool called Bethesda, near Jerusalem, which had a bubbling spring. Whenever that spring bubbled, people claimed that healing properties were released. People flocked to that pool to be healed. Five large porches had been built around it where people could stay while they waited for the bubbling of the waters.

One Sabbath day, Jesus came to this pool and visited one of these porches. He saw a pitiful multitude of sick, blind, lame, and paralysed people, waiting for the movement of the water. Out of all of these, Jesus chose to heal one old man, blessing that Sabbath day with a miracle of mercy. Why did Christ choose this particular man? Maybe it was because of his advanced age or his chronic illness. No doubt, he had been beside this pool the longest. We can infer that Jesus found him to be an appropriate example of a person needing spiritual and physical healing from an illness which others thought was caused by his hidden sins. He was in despair over his hopeless predicament. Unless a person is desperate about his condition, Christ cannot stretch out his hand to help.

Christ stood beside that sick man, looked at him, and asked him a question that appeared to be quite simple: "Do you want to get well?" This teacher from Galilee was interested in an invalid whom he had never met before. It would be possible for the man not to have taken this question from a stranger seriously, but, out of respect for Jesus, he told him how he felt. No doubt, he must have been impressed by the appearance and voice of Christ, for he answered respectfully: "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." The only requirement Jesus made of this man, for his healing, was that he himself should desire it. Because Jesus always wants every sinner to be saved, he, in essence, was asking the man if he really wanted salvation. God wants everyone to be saved, but each sinner has to ask for salvation individually.

From the reply of this sick man, we can see how feeble his sickness had made him; when the waters bubbled, he was never able to reach the pool before the others. We also find that he was alone, without anyone to give him this vital assistance. Had he only known that Jesus selected him because he was without help, his disposition would have changed from despair to hope. This Saviour is still seeking and saving all who realise and confess that they have no one else to aid them. David wrote: "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save" (Psalms 146:3).

The fact that this sick man was beside the pool draws us that he wanted to be healed. Why then did Jesus ask him, "Do you want to get well?" It could be that the will of this sick man, like his body, had become destitute after so many repeated failures, and the long duration of his illness. It was therefore necessary for his will to be revitalised so that he could surrender himself to the healing power of Christ. Jesus wanted to rouse him from the sluggishness to which he had long become accustomed; he also seeks to do the same with sinners who practice external religious rituals in hope of being saved from their sins. As the man tried to break the power of Sin in his life, he was afraid of failure, for he had failed so often in the past. With the passing of time and no hope of improvement, his will had become stagnant, and he stopped asking for help. That is why Jesus asked him if he wanted to be made well.

Christ insists on asking those whom he wants to help if they really desire his assistance, because many people do not want the salvation he offers. Christ only grants this precious gift to those who ask for it with all their hearts.

This man had chosen to pursue his own method of healing. Yet, his cure came to him in a way completely different than he had expected. He had always looked to the pool for blessing, when the angel supposedly came to move the water. But Christ, the one whom all the angels obey, came instead. He gave this invalid complete healing in a way he never imagined possible.

Christ said to the sick man: "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." We would not be astonished if the sick man had answered with the following words: "Please help me up and take me to the pool when the water moves. Then I will be able to carry my bed and walk. If you really are concerned with my situation, wait beside me until the water moves. Be my friend in time of need. Be the one whose help I have always waited for, but who never came." Even though he did not say these words, he did have faith and acted upon it; and for this we praise him! We learn from this man that the necessary knowledge of salvation is acquired from Christ himself, through meditating on his teachings. It does not from our own preconceived ideas, or from other people.

Since healing from sickness is a symbol of salvation from Sin, Jesus did not postpone healing the sick man, despite the fact that it was the Sabbath. Salvation also cannot be delayed. When Jesus said to the man, "Get up!", he was telling him to do all he could. Jesus still says to

sinners: "Be sure that the One who orders you to come to him will give you the necessary power to do so. You can study the Bible. You can bow down in prayer. You can find fellowship and instruction among other believers. You can seek the counsel of those whom you consider to be spiritual leaders. Now get up, and move spiritually!"

Christ instilled hope in the heart of this desperate man. He felt new energy in his muscles, and was healed immediately; he stood up, carried his bed, and walked. When Jesus asked him to carry his bed, he wanted the man to demonstrate his instantaneous healing which was free and complete, in an act which would honour his healer. He wanted him to leave that place where he had been lying for so many years -- never to return to it. It is as if Jesus had commanded him to get up and begin doing useful things for himself and others. Christ tells the sinner: "Rectify the effects of your sins, as much as possible, now that you have received free and complete forgiveness. Then, go out and do what you know to be God's will for yourself and others. Instead of having them carry you, you carry them. Instead of having them serve you, you serve them. Show by your good works the evidence of your salvation. Announce your resolve never to go back to your old sinful life."

When Christ told the sick man to walk, it is clear that he wanted him to be healed. He also wanted him to leave the company of the sick, join the fellowship of those who are well, and become like them. He needed to go out among the people to show them what Jesus had done for him. Every saved sinner should leave his old corrupt associations and join the fellowship of believers, so that his faith can grow stronger. Through his words and deeds, he should demonstrate to everyone the important change that had taken place in him, and in so doing he will glorify his Saviour. Christ made the porches of Bethesda into a place where the power of his divine healing was manifested. Jesus also makes the place of repentant prayer a place of salvation.

"So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.' But he replied, 'The man who made me well said to me, "Pick up your mat and walk.'" So they asked him, 'Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?' The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.' The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:10-18).

The sick man obeyed the orders of his healer. He carried his bed and walked among the people. It was a Sabbath. The Jewish elders criticised him, and when they asked him who it was that had ordered him to carry his bed, he said he did not know. Many people are pleased with what Jesus does for them; yet, they do not care to develop an intimate relationship with him or to express their gratitude to him for the salvation they have received.

Blind fanaticism filled the spirits of the Jewish elders. They wanted to condemn Jesus because he had told the sick man to carry his bed on a Sabbath. They did not care to ask the sick man who it was that had healed him. Instead, they asked: "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" When they discovered that he did not know, they left. But Jesus did not leave him. He went to him in the Temple and said: "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." All the suffering that a person endures will not bring him to repentance or quench the evil tendencies within him. The former misery of that healed man did not guarantee that he would stay away from sin. That is why Jesus warned him not to return to it.

As soon as the man discovered the name of his healer, he told the Jewish elders. They wanted to kill Christ because he had healed on the Sabbath and said that God was his Father. By this, he was making himself equal with God. In the Scriptures, we find mankind repeatedly described as children of God. This description, however, does not mean that people are on the same level as God. Because Jesus stressed his equality with God, the Jewish elders regarded his words as sacrilege, and they started thinking about how to put him to death as a blasphemer. In actuality, we are indebted to them for their aggressive resistance toward Jesus, for it gave him the opportunity to publicly proclaim his true divine nature and intimate union with the Father.

"Jesus gave them this answer: 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. `Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me'" (John 5:19-30).

Christ did not deny his claim of equality with God, his Father. He did not remain quiet either, lest his silence be considered an acknowledgement of their opinion of him. He did just the opposite; he expounded this accusation, saying that whatever the Father does, he himself does also; for the Father loves him and shows him all that he does. Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so too the Son grants life to whom he is pleased to give it. The Father will judge no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son that all may honour the Son just as they do the Father. Therefore, those who do not honour the Son do not honour the

Father who sent him. The Father has life in himself, and he has granted the Son to have life in himself; he has given authority to the Son to judge, because he is the Son of Man.

Christ did not refute the fact that God was his Father, or that he shared equality with him. In fact, he would not keep silent about it but confirmed this fact by more statements to this effect, such as the following:

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. `You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. `I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"
(John 5:31-47).

Jesus presents us with five testimonies to his being the only Son of God:

1. The testimony of John the Baptist. Christ's listeners had probably already heard John's announcement that Jesus was the Son of God. Christ referred to the testimony of John the Baptist because his listeners would not doubt its truthfulness; they could not deny it. Thus, Christ used it to help his audience believe that he was the Son of God.
2. The testimony of his own great works and miracles.
3. The testimony of one whose greatness could not be compared with any other: the Father himself. Jesus' listeners had sunk so deeply into sin that they did not listen to the voice of the Father. They could not see him either, as Jesus had.
4. The testimony of Holy Scripture. Christ said: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me."
5. The testimony of their great lawgiver, Moses. Jesus said: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Christ described the two-fold task with which the Father had entrusted him; namely, to restore life and to destroy it. He made it clear, however, that people are damned by their own

choice when he said: "...You are not willing to come to me that you may have life." Lest his listeners believe that his nature was solely divine, he also emphasised his humanity. He said that the Father had given him authority to execute judgement because he is the Son of Man. Philippians 2:5-11 makes this clear:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus rebuked his listeners for not caring about the glory which the Father gives. Their only concern was the worldly glory which came from man."

Dear Reader, what do you think of Christ? Will you believe what the Gospel says about him?

5. Jesus Teaches About Fasting

"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins' (Mark 2:18-22).

Apparently, the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting according to Jewish tradition whereas Jesus and his disciples did not fast. When Matthew, the tax collector, was called to follow Christ, he prepared a banquet for him and his disciples. This drew criticism from the Jewish leaders.

The Jews thought highly of fasting, and even today it is considered to be very important. The Law required them to fast one day each year, on the Day of Atonement. They thought that their fasting itself would please God, so they added more annual fastings, after their return from the Babylonian captivity. They soon imposed upon themselves two fast days per week, year-round. From Christ's reply, one concludes that fasting is voluntary and dependent on circumstances. There is no need to fast except when it is appropriate to do so. It should not become a set duty to be observed at certain times, regardless of the prevailing conditions. Because the Jews did not fast with proper motives, God often found their self-denial to be unacceptable. The prophet Isaiah writes about how God views fasting. In Isaiah 58:3, the Jews confront God with the following question: "'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'" God gives

them the following reply:

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Isaiah 58:3-7)

Acceptable fasting is that which comes as a result of real sorrow. One notices that the sad person does not eat. He cannot enjoy his meal because of his sadness, for his body cannot easily digest the food. A joyful spirit stimulates digestion, whereas sadness hinders it. Humbling the body without humbling the spirit is useless. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned us against pride and hypocrisy while fasting. He said that the fasting which God accepts is that which no one knows about except God and the person fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).

When Jesus spoke to the Jewish elders concerning fasting, he explained that the disciples of the Baptist had reason to fast. Their teacher and master was taken away from them and had been thrown in prison unjustly. The disciples of Jesus had no reason to fast, however, because their master was still with them. Jesus said that a time would come when their bridegroom (he himself) would be taken away from them; then they would fast. In saying this, Jesus was hinting at the cruelty and hard-heartedness of the Jews which would lead them to crucify him. Yes, Jesus offered himself on the Cross by his own free will, but his death was carried out through the hostility of his own people. The prophet Isaiah described this when he wrote: "By oppression and judgement he was taken away" (Isaiah 53:8). The Apostle Peter depicted this as well: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23).

The disciples of John the Baptist were listening to Jesus as he spoke about fasting. Jesus reminded them that their master had likened him to a bridegroom, and his disciples to the wedding guests. How can wedding guests fast and mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? This illustration is the strongest analogy Christ used to explain the total unity between himself and believers. This unity is like the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride. Jesus loves believers even unto death, and will continue to do so throughout eternity. This love effects a complete union between himself and all believers. The two become one; they are in Christ and he is in them.

They are the body and he is the head. He pays all their debts to God, provides all their needs,

shares their difficulties, and carries their burdens. He sympathises with their weakness, is patient with their mistakes, and never leaves them. If someone does them good or ill, he considers it as being done to him. He is ready to give them the glory which the Father has given him before the creation of the world. Where he is, there they will also be. This noble relationship is the joyous result of believing in him and being united to him.

After Christ had explained that the believers' union with him resembles the relation between a bridegroom and bride, he went on to give his view of the Mosaic traditions. He used two parables which were aimed especially at the disciples of the Baptist, for they thought that the Good News which Jesus had brought would be added to the old, which Moses had given them. They thought the old would stay, not needing to be replaced by the new. This would mean that Christ and his disciples would have to keep all the Jewish ordinances. But Jesus said that the new order, if connected to the old, would destroy it; nothing would be gained because the new was stronger. He said: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse." (Mark 2:21). No wise person would do that; neither would he put new wine into old wineskins, for it would result in the loss of both the wineskins and the wine. Garments clothe people, while skins contain wine. Christ taught that when a cloth has done its work and has become old, it is discarded and something new is used in its place. It is not patched. This does not mean that the old is bad, but that it has fulfilled its purpose. When someone wants to attend a wedding, he does not repair an old piece of clothing with holes in it. He buys new clothes for the occasion. This is also true of our religious life. If any of the disciples of the Baptist or the Pharisees wanted to follow Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, they would have to put on new clothes; that is, they would have to adopt new practices -- baptism instead of circumcision, Holy Communion instead of the Passover Feast, the priesthood of all the believers instead of the Levitical priesthood, worship on the first day instead of the seventh, and the Church, or collective body of believers, instead of the Temple.

With this good illustration, Jesus clarified the fact that the traditional Mosaic order had served its purpose and had thus become old. It could not be reformed. It had to be replaced with something superior which would supersede it. The Law of Moses was like skin or the outside cover of religion. In the second illustration, Jesus said that whoever accepts his new teaching has to accept it with a new heart which is born through the work of the Holy Spirit. When Christ concluded his discourse, saying, "And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better'" (Luke 5:39), he meant that the renewed heart is like a new skin which can bear the pressure of new wine, the powerful Christian message. This is how Saint Basilus interpreted it. Saint Augustine said that this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the new wine was poured with force into new skins; that is, the Holy Spirit filled the new apostles who were born from above. Some commentators have described the old skins as the Pharisees and the new skins as the apostles.

The disciples of the Baptist held on to the old wine. This is what most people usually do. They need to realise that the new is much better than the old. This understanding can be attained through careful meditation and consideration. A knowledge of this is essential when seeking to share the new light with others. We must not be harsh or overbearing, but should determine which obstacles stand in the way of their seeing the superiority of the new wine.

6. Jesus Teaches About The Sabbath

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, 'Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' Jesus answered them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'" (Luke 6:1-5).

Jesus and his disciples were walking through the grain fields. The disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain. The Law of Moses permitted this. It said, "If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain" (Deuteronomy 23:25). However, when the disciples did this, it was a Sabbath, and the Jewish elders had ruled that plucking is like harvesting; and harvesting is not allowed on the Sabbath. They also considered rubbing the heads of grain as threshing; and threshing too was not allowed on the Sabbath. Therefore, the Jewish elders considered the disciples' action to be breaking one of the Ten Commandments which God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The thunder and lightning which accompanied the giving of these commandments emphasised their importance and severity. The ritualistic Jewish elders had seized on the one commandment regarding Sabbath-keeping since it was concerned with outward observances. They went to great extremes in formulating prohibitions on all kinds of activity which went beyond the true intent of the Law.

The Pharisees criticised what the disciples of Christ had done. They said, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus replied by quoting the Torah which they knew by heart. He rebuked them because they did not recall what David, their great king, leader, and prophet, had done. When he and his men were hungry, they ate the sacred bread which only priests were to eat. This meant that David broke the law for the sake of mercy on that occasion. If God did not rebuke David for this, then the Son of David, who was much greater, could surely give permission to his followers to pluck and eat heads of grain on the Sabbath.

According to the teachings of Christ, the first commandment, loving God with our whole being, does not contradict the second one, which is to love others. We cannot please God by keeping the Sabbath while, at the same time, we are unkind towards others. Christ, therefore, reminded his listeners of the prophetic word which says, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,

and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). If Jesus' listeners had understood the meaning of this passage, they would not have passed judgement on his innocent disciples.

Jesus then made reference to another instance which recurred every Sabbath with the leaders' full awareness. This was in obedience to divine orders and was not a human tradition. He said, "Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?" (Matthew 12:5). They desecrate the Sabbath by lighting the fire for the sacrifices and by working twice as hard for the sake of religious service.

Christ asserted his religious authority on this occasion. He claimed to be greater than the Temple, for he is its Lord. If it was permissible to break the laws of the Sabbath in the service of the majestic Temple, how much more would the Lord of the Temple have the right to violate the man-made prohibitions which the Jews prescribed for that day, for he is the Lord of the Temple and Lord of the Sabbath. In fact, he himself is the Temple, for in him the fullness of deity dwells in the flesh (Colossians 2:9). In him, true worship is rendered to God because he is the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). If the Temple is greater than the Sabbath, how much greater is the Lord of the Temple!

Christ made an additional comment concerning the Sabbath. He said that this day was made for man, and not man for the day (Mark 2:27). Both the Sabbath and the Temple are for the service of man. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and he honoured it. At the same time, he broadened its usefulness and liberated it from the bonds which the Pharisees had put on it. If Christ were a mere man, he would have had no right to call himself the Lord of the Sabbath.

From many verses in the New Testament -- especially those dealing with the resurrection -- we can conclude that Christ used his authority as Lord of the Sabbath to move the primary day of worship from the seventh day of the week to the first, which is Sunday. Sunday has come to be called "the Lord's Day". The principle here is to have one day per week set apart for good works (works of mercy), worship, and rest. As long as we fully consecrate one day a week to the worship of the Lord and service, we fulfill the intent of the divine commandment. The apostles of Christ, under his guidance and inspired by the Holy Spirit, moved this day from the seventh to the first day of the week. But this did not change the spirit of the commandment nor its purpose. God, in the Old Testament, gave the seventh day a special place, but reserved a nobler day for the New Testament age: the first day of the week. As the Jewish Sabbath was to commemorate the divine work in creation, the Christian day of worship pays tribute to something even greater: the work of Redemption which was consummated when our Redeemer rose from the dead on the first day of the week. This is why we call it "the Lord's Day." Worship on the first day of the week also helps us to remember the day of Pentecost, when the Christian Church was initiated by the outpouring of the wonderful Holy Spirit. The benefits of honouring the Christian day of worship in the history of civilisation since the days of Christ cannot be overestimated.

"Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (Matthew 12:9-14).

On another Sabbath day, Jesus taught his third lesson on the subject of the Sabbath. He gave the first lesson in the Temple, the second in the fields, and this third one in a synagogue. On that Sabbath day, when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, the scribes and Pharisees present noticed that there was a man whose right hand was withered. Christ was known to cure all those whom he saw were sick, as well as those who came and asked him for healing. The scribes and Pharisees were hoping that this man would be healed, not because they pitied him, but because they wanted to find some fault against Jesus, which they could report to the Jewish religious leaders. Hence, their interest in this sick man! Then they asked Jesus: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Christ did not respect their question because they were being insincere. He asked the sick man to stand in their midst, so that his adversaries would be silenced, and to show them that he was not afraid of them. He then asked, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). Restoring this man on the Sabbath would be doing good, whereas their desire to kill Christ on the Sabbath was wicked. Now, who was keeping the commandment and who is breaking it? He reminded them that each of them, if owning a sheep which fell into a pit on the Sabbath day, would surely rescue it. How much more then should one save a human soul which is of far greater value than a sheep! Whoever neglects doing good, when he can, should be considered evil. Likewise, whoever disregards leading a soul to salvation, when he is able to do so, contributes to that soul's damnation. Christ condemned the scribes and Pharisees by his question, and they were unable to object.

Jesus waited for their answer, but they kept quiet. By their silence, they admitted that Jesus had the moral authority. Unfortunately, their consciences were not troubled because of their error; neither did they confess their sin nor ask for forgiveness from the man whose hand was withered. Jesus was angered and saddened by their hardness of heart. Indignation, for the Lord's cause, is noble, and sadness over the state of his kingdom sanctifies anger and makes it virtuous. We read in the Bible many times about God's anger; yet, God is holy and perfect! This is how we view the anger of Christ. In its rightful place, anger is a commendable. Christ was angry at those proud people, but was full of pity for the man whose hand was withered. He healed him with a few words, and by this miraculous cure, he proved that he was indeed the Lord of the Sabbath. He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." A normal response to this sort of statement would be, "Lord, I cannot. If I could stretch my hand, I would not need

your help." But this man believed the impossible, and Jesus healed him, not partially but completely. His hand was restored. Christ does not give incomplete forgiveness either; he grants full pardon to all who come to him. In the example of the man with the withered hand, we see a true example of salvation. This man was not healed by what he did but by what Jesus did. Christ will not heal unless a person believes in him and his work. The work which saves a sinner is the work of Christ, not the work of man. The salvation which Christ offers sinners depends on their faith in his person and work as Saviour.

On these three occasions, when Jesus spoke concerning the Sabbath, he expounded a great principle, saying, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). This agrees with what the Apostle Paul said, concerning how God "has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Jesus' words angered the scribes and Pharisees. Luke the Evangelist says that they were filled with anger and discussed with one another what to do to Jesus (Luke 6:11). In order to keep the commandment regarding the Sabbath, they were willing to break the sixth commandment which says, "You shall not murder." Their thoughts toward Christ, and dealings with him, were identical to the way the people of the world have treated God's men in all ages. The prophets, apostles, reformers, and martyrs, with their burning zeal and outstanding piety, suffered a similar fate as Jesus. When the righteous are being scrutinised by hostile people, it is beneficial because it makes them more careful in their public and private life, and the radiance of their testimony becomes brighter.

7. Jesus Chooses His Disciples

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all" (Luke 6:12-19).

The rulers of the Jews joined forces in their hatred against Jesus. Although they belonged to different sects, they united to kill him. The Pharisees hated him for "breaking" the Sabbath. They considered him to be a corrupting influence, a blasphemer, a Samaritan, and a deceiver, possessed by a devil. He associated with sinners, and, in their view, had dishonoured their Law and Temple. The Herodians, on the other hand, were afraid that he would usurp the throne from King Herod.

When Christ saw that the elders of the Jews were in league against him, he went away to the shore of the Sea of Galilee to minister to the needy crowd and to choose the followers whom he would train for service. He wanted these apostles to declare the Good News after he would die at the hands of the Jewish leaders, resurrect, and ascend into heaven. Many came to him from Galilee, Judea, Idumaea, the coasts of Tyre, Sidon, and Berea; and he healed them all.

In this great crowd, some came to listen to Jesus' teaching while most others sought healing. Christ cast out evil spirits from those who were possessed. Demons recognised him and said, "You are the Son of God." Devils saw the divine authority of Christ, and testified to it. People crowded around Jesus in order to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them. He told his disciples to keep a small boat nearby so that he could step into it when pressure from the crowds necessitated it. He himself was often emptied and exhausted in order to fill, strengthen, and relieve others.

Let us now look at his choice of apostles whose task it would be to heal the sick, drive out demons in his name, spread his teachings, organise the groups of believers, and record the truths of the Faith for future generations. Jesus did not choose the great people of the world lest they would claim credit for themselves; God would not then be honoured as he should. All glory belongs to God alone. The Apostle Paul said the following in support of this: "...But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Jesus chose the weak and ignorant, and enabled them to serve him. The result was that they excelled much more in their influence than any worldly leaders of their day. Jesus chose them in the early years of his ministry in order to train them before his ascension into heaven.

The apostles stayed with Jesus long enough to know him intimately, and their faith in him grew. They experienced his love, and endured troubles and persecution for his sake. Christ chose twelve of them -- the same number as the tribes of Israel. By this, he wanted to bridge the Old and New Testaments. The choice of apostles was crucial, so Christ spent the whole night in prayer before his selection. That night of prayer sowed spiritual seed in their lives. Their later works and writings yielded a harvest that has influenced mankind throughout the generations. This harvest continues today for the glory of God and his Christ.

"Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve-- designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mark 3:13-15).

Christ called the twelve disciples *apostles* (Greek: "the sent ones") because he would send them to work in his name, not their own. Later, he said, "...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). He appointed them long enough before his ascension so that they would have time to unlearn the misguided ideas and cultural customs that they had been

taught during childhood, and which they had learned from their leaders as adults. He wanted to satisfy them with his new spiritual food, the true Godly instruction, in order to help them discern the nature of the old and new teaching.

We can visualise Jesus looking with love at the group assembled before him. We can hear him graciously explaining the importance of his new project to his chosen apostles. He told them about his loving purposes and the great responsibilities they would be asked to carry. What could his audience have been thinking prior to his choosing anyone? All of them were probably hoping to be one of the chosen. They trusted Jesus, their beloved teacher, absolutely, and for them it was a golden opportunity to accompany him and listen to his wisdom. Then, an opportunity for noble service arose. No doubt, the hearts of those gathered were filled with joy as he began naming his apostles one by one. Most likely, some wanted to congratulate those whom he had selected; others probably struggled with feelings of envy.

Jesus may have chosen Simon because of his energy and zeal. His name comes first, which suggests that Jesus called him first. We can infer that Christ gave him the new name, Peter, in order to differentiate between him and the another man named Simon, whom he had also chosen. After this, we find Andrew's name. Andrew was the first to follow Jesus and was also the first Christian evangelist in history, inviting his brother, Peter, to follow Christ. There is not find much else recorded about him in Scripture later. Jesus then chose the two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were from the same town and had the same occupation as Andrew and Peter. The older one, James, became a leading elder of the Church after the ascension of Christ. Herod Agrippa killed him to please the Jews fifteen years later. John, the younger one, lived a long life, and served many churches after all his other colleagues had died.

The reason for mentioning these four apostles first is because these were the first ones to follow Jesus while he was still relatively unknown. Jesus then chose two others, Philip and Nathanael. Philip is not mentioned after that, except in John's account of the Gospel. Nathanael is another name for Bartholomew. These six were the first half of the apostles. All of them had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had remained with him because they had recognised the essence of true spirituality which he proclaimed. No doubt, all the disciples felt honoured for having been chosen by Jesus.

The choosing of Matthew, the tax collector, to the position of apostleship, is thought-provoking. Would a man of his calibre be able to be an apostle? Spiritually and mentally, he was suited for the task. By selecting him, Jesus proved that many of those, whom others despise, are important in the sight of God. Choosing Matthew was a good example of the power of the grace of God which takes an outcast and makes of him a great apostle. The apostle whose name appears in conjunction with Matthew's is Thomas. We do not know anything about his past. In this, he is different from the seven who were chosen before him. We then find another: James. He was given the title of "James the Less". Some

think that he was the brother of Matthew because both had a father named Alphaeus. But this may not be true because the two names are not found together in the same way as with Peter and Andrew, and James and John.

We are astonished at the person Christ chose after that: Simon the Zealot, an enemy of the Romans. He was a member of a society that rebelled against Rome, and therefore, his people respected him. Jesus wished to add, to his group of disciples, one of his kind so that the group would include people of different temperaments, and backgrounds. The eleventh apostle had several names: Judas, the brother of James, and Lebbaeus or Thaddaeus.

The last apostle, Judas Iscariot, came from Judea. All the others were from Galilee. He was different from the others because he came from a different area, and because he betrayed his master. His name is always followed by the terrible adjective, "traitor". Although Judas did not manifest the necessary characteristics for being an apostle, Jesus may have chosen him in order to fulfil prophecy and bring about God's will (see Psalm 41:9; 109:7,8). By selecting Judas, Jesus may also have wanted to provide his followers with an example of how to reach out to the lost. Some people do not respond immediately, and the methods that lead one person to repentance may not necessarily work with others. Judas had no reason to betray Christ, but he did nevertheless. He had had many chances to reform, but he neglected them.

Judas may not have been a wicked man when he first followed, Jesus. But after he became an apostle, he went astray like those who begin well but end badly, due to their faulty understanding of divine grace. Judas was the treasurer of the group, and his being placed in this position was probably decided by his colleagues. They may have found him enterprising and business-minded.

With a full understanding of what would happen to his disciples in the future, Jesus brought his selection of apostles to a close. With the spirit of prophecy, he not only saw their weaknesses and mistakes, but also their zeal, energy, and victory over difficulties and persecution. Moreover, he saw the influence their preaching would have during their lifetime. He also saw the effect their writings and the institutions, which they would found, would have on others after their deaths. He saw them crowned with exceeding glory among the martyrs, sitting at the right hand of the divine throne, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

8. The Sermon On The Mount

After choosing the apostles, Christ preached a decisive sermon -- the "Sermon on the Mount". It deserves careful consideration because it is a guideline and complete summary of what God expects from people in matters of religion. Christ presented it on a hill near Capernaum. Most commentators think that the place of its delivery was at the Horns of Hattin, north of Tiberias. It is the best known and longest-recorded sermon of Christ, and its

excellence is readily acknowledged by all -- even by the foes of Christianity.

This sermon is the constitution of the new spiritual kingdom which Jesus established. It is based on the revelations to Moses and the prophets, which Christ came to fulfil. God spoke of Christ as the king of this spiritual kingdom through the prophet David, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Psalm 2:6). As a king, it was essential for him to deliver a special decree to the apostles, his ambassadors, announcing the new elements of his kingdom, as well as the new meanings of the old order. The king not only appointed his apostles, but also gave them special power to undertake their wonderful, varied task.

Before listening to the words of Christ, let us consider the context in which this sermon was given. It was not delivered like the Old Testament Law on barren Mount Sinai, by the voice of the invisible God, accompanied with thunder, lightning, earthquake, and fire. No one was supposed to come near that mountain except Moses, and whoever approached would be stoned to death. By contrast, the Sermon on the Mount was delivered on Mount Hattin, carpeted with greenery; the singing of birds could be heard, and the pleasant fragrance of wildflowers perfumed the air. The message that was heard came from the lips of the gentle, incarnate God who was surrounded by his disciples and an attentive crowd, gathered from all regions of Palestine.

It is said that there is a Jewish tradition describing how the Messiah will appear, standing by the seashore near Jaffa, ordering the sea to yield up its treasure. The sea will immediately cast at his feet the jewels and treasures buried in its depths. He will dress his followers with gorgeous clothes, deck them with precious stones, and feed them with heavenly manna, much sweeter and tastier than that which they had in the wilderness. This tradition, however, portrays a coming, imaginary Messiah, and it is deceptive.

Is not the actual scene we are now contemplating more beautiful and perfect? Are there any gems in the bed of the sea to compare with the fundamental spiritual teachings before us? Are there garments more gorgeous than the commendable qualities embodied in this sermon, and exemplified in Christ's character? Does ordering the sea to yield up its treasures demonstrate the same awesome authority as rebuking devils, raising the dead, or demanding his followers to forgive offences?

Not all the teachings of Jesus on this Mount were new. The Jews were familiar with the foundational truths of his teachings through their knowledge of the Old Testament; even the Gentiles had principles in their laws which reflected the Law of God (see Romans 2:14,15). Christ's teachings breathed life into the Old Testament Law just as God breathed life into the beautiful body of Adam after he had formed it from the dust of the earth.

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the

earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:1-12).

8.1. The Beginning of the Sermon

Jesus went up the mount. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He taught them, beginning his sermon with the word, "blessed". The spirit of the Old Covenant was evident in the words, "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out" (Deuteronomy 27:26). It is also seen in the detailed curses uttered on Mount Ebal. As for the New Covenant which Jesus initiated, it reads, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The word, "blessed", is the same expression his noble ancestor David used in some of his Psalms, which are noted for their exceptional beauty.

Jesus began his sermon with blessings, not with commands. He had come from the Father to return to mankind the happiness that was forfeited because of Sin. Therefore, he made joy one of the most important principles of his kingdom. In the word, "blessed", he combined commendation, joy, and happiness, for he spoke about true, not imaginary blessedness. In the world today, we see that the principles of his new kingdom have been gaining influence, century after century, since the day they first appeared. Many people, even intellectual giants of many creeds and persuasions, agree that the Law of Christ is the most noble of all that which has appeared during the history of religion.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, there is something which deserves special attention. It is in line with the divine saying, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways' says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). Among the first things Jesus did was to overthrow the false religious ideas which were prevalent in his day.

8.2. Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

The first blessing is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The contemporaries of Jesus would never have thought that the poor could possess the kingdom of heaven. They felt that the religious leaders, priests, scribes, and Pharisees would be first in line, having authority and the best position in the earthly kingdom which the Messiah would set up. However, Christ did not say that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such, but to the poor in spirit, for it is they who will reign with him. He had said previously, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor..." (Luke

4:18). This is why he directed his first blessing to the poor in spirit, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

8.3. Blessed are Those who Mourn

The second blessing is one of comfort for those who mourn in the midst of life's tragedies, but who also can rejoice after the time of weeping has passed. Christ's listeners would have agreed that comfort is something the rich enjoy, because their numerous friends can console them, easing the catastrophe. However, Jesus had those in mind who weep for their wrongdoing and wretchedness. In their case, divine consolation is the result of their sins being forgiven; and they are given double blessing for all their iniquities (Isaiah 40:2).

8.4. Blessed are the Meek

The third blessing is that of inheriting the earth. Who are they who will receive it? They are not the people in authority, nor the influential who increase their wealth by cunningly controlling others. Rather, it is the meek who will inherit the earth. In the kingdom of Christ, it is those who love, not the domineering, who will inherit the earth. David saw this truth when he wrote: "A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace" (Psalm 37:10,11).

8.5. Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness

The fourth blessing is one of satisfaction or filling. Christ's listeners thought he meant the rich who are at ease in this life, due to their material wealth; they can buy anything they want. They know nothing of hunger. However, Jesus describes the satisfied as those who do not care for riches and do not covet the material of this world. They are those who hunger and thirst for heavenly righteousness -- for themselves and those around them. In the kingdom of Christ, these are the ones who will be filled. "...My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame" (Isaiah 65:13).

8.6. Blessed are the Merciful

The fifth blessing promises mercy to those who themselves are merciful. They will receive mercy from God and man. Are they the rich, the rulers, or those in authority? Are they those who oppress others and are feared? Are those who serve religious interests the ones who can expect consideration from God? Christ says that those who will obtain mercy are the considerate, not the haughty who lord it over others. They submit to others instead of

expecting others to yield to them. The kingdom of Christ is for the merciful, not the mighty. Solomon said, "A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself" (Proverbs 11:17). His father, David, said, "To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless" (Psalm 18:25).

8.7. Blessed are the Pure in Heart

The sixth blessing is difficult to understand. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Is it not impossible to see God in this world? Is he not the one who sees, yet is himself unseen? Did not Christ once say, "No one has ever seen God..." (John 1:18)? The noblest of man's desires is to see God with his own eyes. Jesus' listeners thought that those who would see God would be the prosperous in the world, especially those with deep theological insight. But Jesus said that the pure in heart are the ones who will see God. The prophet David said: "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psalm 24:3,4).

8.8. Blessed are the Peacemakers

The seventh blessing is one of sonship to God. But not all who claim to be sons of God are such. No doubt, Christ's listeners thought that they were the sons of God since they were the children of Abraham, the chosen people. They were the ones who entered into a covenant with God by circumcision. They were the children of Israel who sought to oppose the Romans, wanting to liberate their holy nation, leaving God as their only true king. They were the ones who wanted to fight other people, forcing them to follow their religion, and making them their servants. But Jesus said that the children of God are the peacemakers, not the violent. Peace is the cornerstone of Jesus' kingdom. The sons of God are the ones who make peace with God through obedience, and with man by love. The Gospel teaches that Jesus came to unite all people, thus making peace (Ephesians 2:15). "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:18).

8.9. Blessed are Those who are Persecuted for the sake of Righteousness

The last blessing is for those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they will experience true and lasting joy. Christ's listeners thought that the kingdom of heaven was for those who are outwardly pious -those who fast often, pray, and give alms. The Jews thought that they were the blessed ones because they had the hope that their coming Messiah would make those whose glory was like the light of a star to become like the light of moon, and vice versa. They believed that their kingdom would be established, and that the glory of Israel would be doubled. These felt that they were the ones

who would possess the kingdom, and be enriched by it. But Jesus described the kingdom as being for those who are persecuted for righteousness -- the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the gentle, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. Although the world ignores these people, God will grant them the kingdom of heaven.

8.10. Summary of the Beatitudes

These eight blessings (commonly referred to as "beatitudes") do not deal with external religious practice. In essence, Jesus said that the poor of the world are those who will be wealthy in the heavenly kingdom, the sad are those who will be comforted, those who weep now are those who will laugh, the submissive are the ones who will rule the earth, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are the ones who will be filled. Those who give are the ones who will receive, and the childlike are the ones who will understand (Matthew 11:25). The peacemaker, not the warrior, is the victor and son of the King. The one who is expelled from his home for the sake of Christ has a permanent citizenship in heaven.

These beatitudes were like an axe which Jesus swung at the roots of the tree of worldly aspirations, which the Jews had planted in their minds concerning the coming of their Messiah. True, permanent blessedness is not dependent on external, religious practice, nor on material success, but on the internal state of the soul and its eternal well-being. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, his conversation targeted the spiritual nature of his kingdom. When he spoke to the Samaritan woman, he described God as being spirit, and his kingdom being a spiritual one. In the Sermon on the Mount, the same theme is dominant. We still need this kind of teaching today. How far this is from what we see among some influential church denominations where material standards displace spiritual ones, and where the clergy and teachers seem only to be interested in worldly glory.

These beatitudes were an introduction to further instruction, and they were aimed at those who would be his apostles. It was as if he were telling them: "After you acquire these basic qualities, you will be hated even by your own. When you are treated in this way, you will be blessed. Do not sorrow or complain when all these unpleasant things happen to you for the sake of the Son of Man. On the contrary, rejoice because your reward in heaven is great. In this, you will be like the prophets who went before you. They all had the noble honour of being God's messengers and were persecuted because of it."

8.11. "You are the Salt and Light"

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine

before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus told his disciples that they were the salt and light of the world. Even if the world refused them, they should not lose their savour or power. Salt in food is unseen but has great effect, altering its flavour. Likewise, Christians, although often unseen and unnoticed, will have a positive effect on those around them and on the world as a whole. Light is concentrated in one small flame but it illuminates all those around, and allows others to see. It is the same with Christians. People will see their good works and will glorify their heavenly Father, not them. People do not light a lamp to look at it, but to see other things by its light. Salt has no value in itself except through its action; lamps also have little value outside of their purpose of providing light. The same was true of Jesus' apostles whose value lay in their teaching and illuminating others. Christ chose them for this purpose -- to be salt and light -- not just among the people of Israel, but also among all the peoples of the earth. In your personal walk, the "salt and light" influences of your life must be seen over and above your words, for a living example will do what mere words could never achieve.

8.12. Fulfilling the Law, Not Abolishing It

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-20).

By these words, Jesus revealed that his new teaching does not abolish the inspired Torah. Until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle will pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. Jesus came to fulfil the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets, not to abrogate them. He replaced that which was temporal. After fulfilling the Law and the prophets, he came to do away with the works of evil. He never came to suppress the Law or the teachings of the prophets. The Law would not be removed any more than the seed in a flower or fruit could be. The Law in the hands of the scribes and Pharisees did not bear the fruit of goodness; it was like the seed of inedible fruit. Jesus said, "...Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." He did not come to release people from the demands of the Law but to show them its greatness in a way which they had never before imagined.

8.13. The Law of Reconciliation

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will

be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Matthew 5:21-26).

Jesus said that the commandment which prohibits killing also prohibits anger, gossip, and hatred. Your prayers and offerings will be accepted, not only when you refrain from killing, but also when you avoid feelings of hatred toward others. This is the spirit of the Law rather than its letter.

The Jews were taught to leave the sacrifice of the Passover in front of the altar and go home to remove all leaven from their dwellings. Jesus was now telling them to go home and be reconciled to their brother before presenting their prayers to God.

8.14. The Law of Purity

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:27-30).

How many people confess their sinful actions but take no notice of their thoughts. They forget that looking lustfully at another person is the same as committing adultery, because this is the root and the cause of the action. It is better to extract the root before the sin has a chance to grow. It is much better for a person to lose his most precious possession -- even though it be a part of his body -- than to lose eternal life. Incurring God's condemnation is death and hell, whereas obeying him leads to happiness and eternal life.

8.15. The Law of Divorce

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31,32).

Moses permitted the Jews to divorce because of their hard hearts. God never wanted this because he hates divorce. Christ does not want it to be practised among Christians either.

A Jewish man could divorce his wife for the slightest reason and with only a word. Moses made divorce harder, requiring the man to present his wife with a certificate of annulment before the separation occurred. However, in the Christian era, the sanctity and permanence of marriage should be understood and respected. Thus, a woman remains tied to her husband, even though divorced for any reason other than adultery. Whoever marries such a woman commits adultery because, in the sight of God, she is still united to her first husband.

8.16. The Law of Truth

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

The Jews were commanded to perform what they swore to do. But Jesus here tells us not to swear at all, neither falsely nor truthfully. When a person is not sure he will be believed, he swears. That shows that his conversation is a mixture of truth and falsehood. Christians, when giving an answer, should simply say "Yes" or "No", knowing that anything else comes from the evil one.

8.17. The Law of Rights

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:38-42).

The Mosaic Law of justice says: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth.." (Exodus 21:24). Jesus, however, came with a new teaching. He wanted to remove the spirit of revenge from the hearts of people. Civil law does not allow for personal retaliation. It leaves this to the judges who punish offenders (Romans 13). This conforms to the teaching of the Gospel: "...Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Christ wants us to renounce our personal rights, for this is better than quarrelling.

8.18. The Law of Love

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If

you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

Some think that it is all right to hate those who hate them, and to be an enemy to those who show enmity toward them. But the spirit of the Law is the same as the one who ordained it -- the one who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. He grants rain to his enemies as well as his children. If we hate our enemies and do good only to those who are good to us, then we are just like the pagans and idolaters. We should not repay evil with evil. When we overcome evil with good, we kill enmity and quench the fires of hatred. If we adopt God's Law for our lives, then we truly become his children. We have to first learn to obey God's commandments in our heart before we can keep them outwardly.

8.19. Giving Alms and Fasting

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:1-4).

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18)

The new law of Christ's kingdom does not abolish Old Testament precepts inspired by God. We should give alms to the needy, pray to God, and fast, in order to discipline ourselves. However, Jesus added that we should not do this in front of people, making it a cause for boasting and receiving praise from others. That would be hypocrisy. Let us give our alms, say our prayers, and practice our fasting in secret -- to God and not for our neighbours to see -- otherwise, God will not accept them. Christ does not want his followers to act hypocritically like the Jewish leaders, for this is what they were doing. We should not be like them, for their practices were despicable to God.

8.20. Prayer

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on

babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:5-15).

Prayer is one of the most important aspects of religion. Christ presented his disciples with an exemplary prayer. All who pray it sincerely express the spirit of sonship that exists between them and God, calling him "Father". The mutual love that exists between the heavenly Father and his children will be reflected in them, and their obedience to and dependence on him for their physical and spiritual needs will be evident. The relationship of love which they enjoy, as God's children, will inspire them to share with others what they themselves possess. The true child of God will manifest brotherly love towards others. The true Christian does not pray, "my Father", but "our Father". He asks the heavenly Father to forgive his sins as he has forgiven the sins of others. Christ taught clearly the reality of the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of all mankind. This basic fact was not clear in the teaching of the Jewish leaders.

In the Lord's Prayer, one clearly sees the spirit of sonship as well as the spirit of brotherly love. We also see the spirit of reverent worship because the Lord's day, his house, his book, his servants, and the Church are considered holy. Christ taught us to ask God not to lead us into temptation. This petition acknowledges the powerful authority of the devil, and his control over man. No one can escape from him, except through God's power. In the Lord's Prayer, we see the subject of putting the affairs of God before our own interests because God is supreme. To him belong the kingdom, the power, and the glory.

The spirit of childlike faith, brotherly love, and worship inspired this intense yet simple prayer. When Jesus taught it to his disciples, his role as mediator had not begun, and so he did not end it with his name; but since he has ascended into heaven, prayers are now to be offered in the name of Jesus. Christ did not mention the Holy Spirit in that prayer because his coming into the world to dwell in believers' hearts was not yet understood by the apostles.

8.21. The Believer and the Love of Money

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:19-34).

Jesus warned his disciples against the love of money. He reminded them that the riches of this world are vain; only the heavenly treasures will last. Happy is the person whose heart is fixed on heaven, not on earth. Doing good becomes easier for him. If one is driven by the love of money, he cannot love God as he should. Treasures in heaven are the fruit of what a man does and gives for the good of others, out of love for God.

Jesus told his disciples that because they are the light of the world, they will bring light to others. The whole body is illuminated by the eye which is the lamp of the body. If the disciples of Jesus were to lose their light, how would those, without the means of righteousness, come to understand the truth? In order to be able to illuminate others, one must depend completely upon the heavenly Father for providing earthly needs. God takes care of the birds and the flowers. If he does this, he will surely take care of men and women whom he created in his own image, and who are his children. If he cares for all living things, whether great or small, he will surely provide for us. Will he who gave us a body withhold clothing from us? He gave us our precious life; surely he will give us the necessary food to sustain it. Yes, a person should take care of his physical needs, but he should do this without worry, trusting fully in God's providence. God wants us to pay attention to spiritual matters first; then, he will take care of all our needs. If it were not for God's providential grace, we would all be unbelievers. An essential command which Jesus gave us is: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

8.22. Do Not Judge

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye', when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces (Matthew 7:1-6).

Jesus does not want us to judge others. People will treat us as we treat them. Whoever reveals others' mistakes will have his own shortcomings exposed. The one who judges others is usually driven by pride and revenge. In both cases, he may be wrong, for when he sees the faults of others, he may exaggerate them. When we see our own flaws, we minimise them. A wrongdoer cannot reform another who is not as bad as he himself is. We need to take the following words to heart: "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Jesus also wants us to be wise and discerning in our religious conversation, lest we subject our words to mockery and scorn. If we are not careful, we will be like those who give what is sacred to the dogs or who cast pearls before swine. Our words should be appropriate to the circumstances, and for those who will hear what we say.

8.23. Ask and It Will Be Given You

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:7-12).

Our heavenly Father is indeed willing to answer our prayers. If an earthly father who is a sinner does not hesitate to give his children what they ask for -- if it is for their good -- how much more will the Heavenly Father answer the prayers of those who seek him. He does not want to give his children anything less than the best. Above all, he wants to give them the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then delivered what is commonly called the "Golden Rule", a guide by which to solve ethical problems. It is superior to all other commandments. It says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." Many view the carrying out of this command as the fulfilment of religious duty. This is true;

yet, its pure expression is a matter of proper motives. Because our heavenly Father has loved us and given us so many good gifts, we should do good to others out of love for him. Our love for our fellow man will be a result of our supreme love for God.

8.24. The Narrow and Wide Gates

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:13-23).

Jesus presents us with two ways through which every individual can pass. The first one is narrow at the beginning but ends in grace and joy. The second is the opposite: wide at the beginning but ending in destruction and damnation. Jesus advises us to choose the narrow way which will be difficult in this world but glorious in the life to come. God does not want us to walk the way the majority of people do, for they choose present ease and forget the eternal destruction which will come later. Jesus reminds us of the relationship between a tree and its fruit. The fruit has to be of the same kind as the tree. A person's actions reflect what is in his heart. Someone may claim that he is a prophet sent by God, and he may speak like a prophet, but the true nature of his character will eventually be revealed in his life. Inevitably, every person who does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. No protests by hypocrites who pride themselves on appearances and neglect God's laws will help them escape being cut down and cast into the fire. Some people will protest, saying, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Jesus will turn them away, saying: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

8.25. The Wise and the Foolish

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Christ presented his listeners with a poignant illustration. The person who knows the will of God and does it is like a wise man who builds his house on rock. The one who knows the will of God and does not do it is like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand, beside a stream of water. As long as the weather is good and the winds are quiet, he is all right. He seems wise. He did not spend any money digging a foundation. He congratulates himself and others compliment him. But when the rains come, and the floods rise, his house will collapse, for the storms will show which one was the wise builder. A person who knows and does not apply his knowledge is foolish. He enjoys the pleasures of this world and avoids the difficulties that befall the righteous. But when the winds of God's judgement blow, and rains of divine anger fall, and streams of a guilty conscience rage, that man's house will give way and be swept away with the rest of the foolish sinners. The first house, however, will be safe and remain steady because it is built on rock.

"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28,29).

When Jesus finished his sayings, the crowd was astonished. He was teaching as one who had authority and not as the scribes. Whoever meditates carefully and sincerely on the law of Christ's spiritual kingdom with its demands, will despair at ever keeping these commandments. This despair is the first step towards salvation. It removes any false reliance the sinner has regarding his own works, and points him to the only Saviour of the world who chose true living faith as the only condition for obtaining this priceless salvation.

9. Healing The Servant of A Centurion

"When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, 'This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.' So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: 'Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.' Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well" (Luke 7:1-10).

Christ said that he had come to serve people, not to be served. He is the only one who always fulfilled his claims completely. His listeners said that he spoke with authority, and not like the scribes. Authoritative deeds followed his authoritative words. When he finished his teachings, he began again with his miracles. He entered Capernaum, surrounded by a large

crowd. A delegation of Jewish leaders met him and asked him eagerly to heal a Roman centurion's servant who was paralysed and approaching death. We can infer that this servant was dear to the centurion, for the words *my servant* here can also be translated as "my boy". In Greek, this title was used for sons. This Roman soldier was an honourable man, for his words and concern showed that he loved his servant while most of his contemporaries despised their servants, and treated them badly.

This Roman centurion thought that Jesus would listen to the request of the elders of the Jews, so he sought their help. From this, we can infer that the relationship between Christ and the Jewish leaders in Capernaum was still good -- not like it was in Judea. The Jewish leaders delivered the centurion's petition because they were not yet opposed to Christ. They went to meet Jesus, leaving the centurion with his servant. When they arrived, they told Jesus that the centurion loved their nation and had built their synagogue; therefore, he deserved to have his servant healed. We do not blame the centurion for thinking that Jesus needed mediators before he would respond. Little did he know that Jesus knew him better than these mediators, and that he loved him far more than they ever could. Thus, their interceding was unnecessary. Even in our day, we have no other mediator than Jesus Christ. Neither angel nor saint can do anything for us, because Christ is the one and only mediator between God and man. This was accomplished through his unique work of Redemption on the Cross. We read the following words in 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Those who seek the intercession of angels or saints are like people asking for a lamp in the middle of the day; they do not realise that the kindness and grace which they possess are not to be compared with the noble character of Jesus. No saint has ever shown more love than Christ. He alone came down from heaven, became incarnate, taught, served, suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is sitting today at the right hand of God as our mediator and intercessor. He did this because of his perfect love. Those who seek help from one, other than Christ, are like a child who has difficulties and turns to a servant instead of his mother who has devoted and sacrificed herself lovingly for him. The mediation of Mary, the earthly mother of Christ, is also futile. In support of this we can cite the example of Jesus at Cana, when he stopped his mother from interfering.

Sick people were generally taken to Jesus. In this case, however, Jesus went to the sick servant of the centurion, possibly because he was foreign. As soon as the centurion knew that Jesus was coming to his home, he sent some of his friends to meet him on the way to express his great respect for and faith in Christ's power. He wished to tell Jesus that he was not worthy to have him come under his roof. He just wanted Jesus to say the word, and he knew his servant would be healed. What great humility! This was the best proof that he became worthy of Christ's help. The realisation of one's unworthiness is an essential requirement for all who seek Christ's help and salvation.

Perhaps this man thought that Jesus would repeat what he had done with another centurion one and a half years earlier, healing from afar by his word. He believed that Jesus had the same authority over nature and sickness which he, as a Roman official, had over his soldiers and servants.

Jesus was astonished at the great faith, wisdom, and humility of this Gentile. He looked around him and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel!" Christ did not care about the reaction of his Jewish audience, and he made it clear that God accepts people regardless of their race. He said that many will come from the east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:11,12). Jesus also gave clear proof that he was not a typical religious teacher, nor a mere human for that matter. His thoughts were completely independent from those of his contemporaries. In fact, they were completely opposite. Here he refuted the idea that belonging to the Jewish race is a condition for acceptance by God.

Christ sent his reply to the centurion without going to his home, saying, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour" (Matthew 8:13). The servant was healed at that very moment. When the messengers returned to the house, they found the servant healed. Jesus rejoiced to see, in that centurion, the firstfruits of the Gentiles who would believe. His own people had refused him. They did this not only during his earthly life in Palestine, but they continue to do so even in our own day!

Dear Reader,

Do you feel you are unworthy of obtaining God's forgiveness? Blessed are you! This is the beginning of the way to receiving pardon. Ask God to forgive you on the basis of what Jesus has done for you on the Cross. Ask him to make you a believer in the full authority of Christ.

10. Jesus Raises A Young Man From Death

"Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us', they said. 'God has come to help his people.' This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country" (Luke 7:11-17).

Jesus travelled from Nazareth to the city of Nain. It was a one-day journey on foot. The Lord of life and the crowd behind him met another procession carrying a corpse in a coffin, led by the angel of death. The dead boy was the only son of his mother, a widow. The sadness of the mother was great, and sharing this sorrow, the townspeople escorted her to bury her only son. But suddenly, they met Christ, the Resurrection and the Life, from whom not only death but also the prince of death must flee.

We can visualise Satan sitting on the coffin, invisible and proud of his victory over this youth. We can imagine his anger at seeing the crowd led by Christ, his enemy, who had defeated him in every battle so far. Did he not grit his teeth with pure rage in the past, every time Christ cast out a devil from those who were possessed? Maybe Satan consoled himself with the thought that Christ had not yet snatched a victim of death from him. He had still been the unchallenged victor in that arena.

The Jews considered it a very important and sacred duty to console the mourners during a funeral, esteeming it worthy of a divine reward. According to the custom of the day, Jesus and his followers were supposed to step aside to let the funeral procession pass; they too were then expected to join it. In Galilee, the women sometimes walked in front of a coffin, acting out their belief of Sin and death entering through the female gender. But Christ confronted the procession and stopped it.

Weeping usually increased when others joined a group such as this; so, when these two crowds met, there was more sadness and louder wailing. When Jesus saw the poor widow, he was moved with compassion and told her, "Don't cry." He did not say this because weeping was wrong, for tears are a gift from God. Crying can be a blessing, because it gives vent to the pain of sadness. How noble are the tears which are shed for the love of others, and how wonderful are those of remorse, which are shed as a result of one's iniquities and sins. We should even weep for a person who cannot -- when the occasion calls for it. Jesus told the widow to stop crying, and he gave her good reason to believe his words. He moved forward and touched the coffin, and the bearers halted. The reverence of Christ gripped them all, both old and young, and they stopped the procession and waited for his orders.

A trumpet had announced the death of this youth in Nain. Now, however, everyone on the road would hear the voice which had proclaimed a profound reality in front of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." (John 5:25). Christ would prove his words by a miraculous act. He called the dead man, and said, "Young man, I say to you, get up." This voice fell on them like a thunderbolt! It is true that those gathered had previously heard of this great teacher casting out devils, ordering sickness to leave, and rebuking a storm, but they never thought or dreamed that the same voice could order a soul to return after death. Restoring a soul to its body would mean that the very life, which had left the corpse, would return. Yes, they had read in the Torah about great prophets who had

raised the dead, after much struggle with God in prayer. These men had used difficult methods, which indicates that such a miracle was not trivial. They also did this in secret, as if they were afraid of failure. Moreover, nine hundred years had passed since a resurrection took place, in the days of Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 17:17-24). The crowd never dreamed that this could happen again -- right in front of them. But here was a man who confronted death with authority He did not plead humbly like the prophets. What great power!

We can judge the effectiveness of Christ's miracle by its results. The youth sat up and began to speak. How amazed he must have been when he opened his eyes and saw that he was being carried in a coffin, surrounded by mourners. He saw the great sadness of his mother and heard the wailing of the crowd. He was even more astonished when he saw a stranger standing beside him touching the coffin. In this man's face, he saw great intelligence, heavenly purity, and kindness flowing out like a river.

What would Jesus' expression have been like when the son of the widow of Nain saw him? Ancient writers have tried to tell us something about the external appearance of Jesus, but we cannot be sure of any of these descriptions. Did he have physical beauty? In the prophecies concerning him, we read some verses that suggest that Christ's countenance had no beauty in it. Isaiah said: "...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). On the other hand, we read other verses that describe him as beautiful. The Psalmist said: "You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever" (Psalm 45:2). In the Song of Solomon, it is written: "My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand... he is altogether lovely" (Song of Solomon 5:10,16).

We prefer to think that Christ had striking physical attractiveness. God is beautiful and loves beauty. This is in harmony with what the Psalmist said: "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple" (Psalm 27:4). There is no doubt whatever that God created everything lovely. Whatever is not appealing is of Sin or its results. Taking care of one's appearance is important, and all who seek to maintain and encourage beauty through their life's work render mankind a good service which should be remembered and commanded.

Some of the ancients, especially the Greeks, went to such extremes in glorifying external beauty that they made it the subject of their worship. This, like all other false religions, led to corruption. But their interest in beauty helped elevate their civilisation, and it immortalised their fame among the nations.

Jesus most likely had an attractive countenance and form because he was the only one to be conceived by the Holy Spirit in a virgin. God chose Mary from among thousands of virgins in Israel to bear the body in which the Godhead would dwell. Our view of Christ being

attractive is strengthened by the knowledge that inner beauty is reflected externally. Jesus, a sinless man, must have had great personal beauty and charisma which influenced many people in a positive sense -- even his enemies.

Christ did not remove death from the world. This divine sentence could not be abolished, though it was occasionally suspended. Jesus did not want to dazzle people with his great power when he raised the dead youth; his motive was compassion for the widow. The Devil delights in subjecting mankind to death, and to remove compassion and pity from peoples' hearts. Christ's sympathy towards that widow was a way to overcome the work of the Devil. As soon as the young man returned to life, Jesus returned him to his mother, as though telling her, "You can understand now why I asked you not to weep." Kindness and compassion are united in the heart of every follower of Christ. This is in obedience to the commandment which says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15).

No doubt, the widow of Nain and her son believed in Christ the Saviour. We can visualise them as two loyal followers of Jesus. The germ of faith had been planted in Nain -- that humble town which Jesus made famous. This great miracle caused the fame of Jesus to spread widely throughout the land. The result was that they were all filled with awe and glorified God. A great prophet had appeared among them.

11. Quiz

If you have studied this book, you can answer the questions easily. Mail them to us. Please do not forget to write your full name and address clearly.

1. What is the significance of Christ accepting the worship of the leper?
2. Why did Jesus touch the leper?
3. What harm was caused by the leper's disobedience to Jesus when he told everyone about his healing?
4. Why did Peter ask Jesus to depart from him?
5. What was the new job that Jesus gave to Peter?
6. Mention three ways in which the four men helped their paralytic friend.
7. Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic. What is the meaning of this forgiveness?
8. Mention three lessons you have learned from the invitation Jesus gave to Matthew the tax collector.
9. What was the honour Jesus gave to Matthew after his repentance?
10. List the four steps to repentance.
11. How can despair push us towards God?

12. Why did Jesus choose to heal the man who was sick for 38 years?
13. Why did Jesus ask the sick man by the pool, "Do you want to be healed"?
14. What are the five witnesses of Jesus being the Son of God?
15. From Isaiah 58:3-7, what is the fasting that God accepts?
16. What is the condition of the heart that is able to receive the new teaching of Jesus? What must one do to obtain this condition of heart?
17. What did Jesus see in his disciples after he had chosen them as his apostles?
18. What is the meaning of the word "Blessed"?
19. Jesus mentioned eight kinds of people who are blessed. List them.
20. Why should we not swear when testifying?
21. Why did Jesus begin the Lord's prayer with "Our Father"?
22. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the wide and narrow door?
23. What are the characteristics of the person whom Jesus called wise?
24. Why is it that we do not need another mediator when we come to Jesus?
25. What do you learn from the miracle of the raising of the widow's son of Nain?

If you have any questions about the Christian faith, we will be happy to answer them for you. Do not forget to write your full name and address inside the letter as well as on the envelope.

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