

Revision 0.82
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I am a Seventh-day Adventist who believes firmly in the inspiration of the writings of Ellen G. White. I have also been a reader of her works especially the conflict of the ages series. I have been blessed by the words and insights I have received from them.

A few years ago I felt impressed by the Holy Spirit to do something to make my favorite book in the conflict of the ages series more accessible to young people and those with less education. I resisted that huge undertaking at first but eventually went along with the promptings. What I ended up writing is a chapter by chapter rewrite condensing and simplifying the language of the Desire of Ages, ending up with something about 20% of the original length. I know you are probably thinking about how much I left out, but I would suggest looking at it in terms of how much someone might benefit from gleaning 20% of what Mrs. White wrote where they might not get any otherwise. My procedure was to read each chapter and then re-tell it using fewer and simpler words, hopefully in a way that can be understood by a child. I was very careful to try to include major insights by her and never to state ideas that she didn't. Most of the chapter titles are the same but a few were re-worded. Most Bible verses are quoted from the New Living Translation (NLT) or Contemporary English Version (CEV). Bible texts that do not specify a version mean that the verse has been re-worded or just a thought or a phrase was taken from it. I didn't have a good way of checking it out but I tried to target the reading level of the NLT which I believe is a 6th grade reading level.

I hope the reading of these words will help anyone to develop their own personal relationship with Jesus. I also hope that the reading of these words will generate an interest in the unabridged version of the book "Desire of Ages."

Stephen Ing

1

God with us

There are three beings that together we call God. There was never a time that they did not exist. Jesus has always had the job of showing everyone what God is like. He came to this world to show us about God's love. But He also came to show every other world He created about God's love.

In the beginning one of the ways God showed Himself to us was through the beautiful things He created. Even though sin has messed up many of these things, they still show His plan in many ways. Every plant and animal has a part in providing for another. Only people in all God's creation try to get by without helping others.

When Jesus lived on this earth, He showed us how to live unselfish lives. He was always more interested in helping other people than He was in helping Himself. By living this way He was giving us a clear picture of what God is like.

Sin started in Heaven when an angel named Lucifer wanted to be like God. He started telling other angels things that would make them think he was as important as Jesus. He also complained that God was not treating him fairly. Many angels chose to believe his lies about God. When he was finally thrown out of heaven with the angels who followed him, he became known as Satan. Soon after our world was created, Satan was able to get Adam and Eve to believe his lies about God as well.

Because Adam and Eve chose to believe Satan, they and all their children needed to be saved from sin. Before sin came into our world, God had a plan in place to save people from sin if they should be tricked into believing Satan. His plan was for Jesus to come and die for us so that anyone who chooses to believe Him, instead of Satan, can be saved from their sin and go to live with Him forever (John 3:16).

Satan's plan was to make himself like God. God's plan was to make himself like a servant (Philippians 2:7). Because Jesus became like one of us, we know that God understands how hard our lives can be. Satan also said that it was too hard to obey God. Jesus showed us that with His help we can obey God. He was tempted to do all the bad things we are tempted to do but with God's help, He didn't give in (Hebrews 4:15).

When He was in our world Jesus was treated badly because He was taking our place. If we believe and accept Him, we can be treated like royalty because that is the way Jesus should be treated. He took our place by dying for us so that we can be with God even though we don't deserve it.

Since Jesus was able to live without obeying Satan, He proved that Satan's lies about God were not true. Because of the way Jesus was treated, we can see what Satan's plan was all about. After Jesus comes to take us home with Him and re-makes our world, sin will never rise again.

2

The Chosen People

For many years the Jewish (or Israelite) people waited for their Messiah. The Messiah was the one who was supposed to save them. Yet when Jesus came, they didn't recognize Him as the Messiah. God had chosen the Israelites to show other people what He was like. He wanted to make them a great nation and bless them so that all people would notice and want to learn where the blessings came from. God wanted the whole world to learn about Him from the Israelites.

But the Israelites did not stay faithful to God. Because of that they did not maintain the greatness they had when David was King. Eventually they were scattered among the idol worshipping nations. One of these nations was Babylon where Daniel and his three friends were taken. Daniel chose to be faithful and God was able to bless Him so that the King of Babylon could see what God was like. Daniel was also given special messages from God which told when the Messiah would come.

After their return from Babylon, the Israelites were very careful to obey the rules that God had given them but most of them didn't realize the meaning and the reason for the rules. They had learned that they had trouble when they disobeyed God. So, over time the Israelite leaders made more and more rules to keep them from breaking the original rules and pretty soon there were so many rules that nobody could keep them all.

The Israelites were expecting the Messiah but they were not looking for someone to show them God's love and to save them from sin. They were looking for someone to become their King and defeat the Romans who ruled over them at the time.

3

The Fullness of the Time

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they were told that Jesus would come to save them from sin so that they could be with Him again. They thought He would come right away and even hoped their first son Cain would be the Deliverer. But years passed and the promise was passed from parent to child for many generations. After a while parents started to doubt the promise and didn't bother to tell their children.

When the right time had come, Jesus came to our world to show us God's love and to save us from sin (Galatians 4:4,5). At that time most of the nations of the world used the same language. Most people could understand what another person was saying. Idol worship was beginning to lose its hold on the people and many were looking for a religion that could satisfy the heart.

At this time, even though the Jews tried to keep the laws they had set up, they were very far from understanding what God was like. Most of them didn't understand the prophecies telling of the Messiah. But outside the Jewish nation were men who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures and taught that a special teacher would be coming. Some of these people had a better understanding of the mission of the Messiah than the Jews did. Some of them wanted to understand more but because the Jews looked down on them, it made it very difficult for them to learn more.

There were a few faithful Jews who studied the prophecies and understood that the time was near for the Messiah to come. Most didn't understand the true reason for Jesus to come, and were expecting a mighty King to defeat their enemies and restore them as a powerful nation.

Through idol worship Satan had succeeded in giving people a bad picture of God. And now even among the chosen people he had succeeded in getting them confused about God and the true reason for Jesus to come. It was at this time that Jesus was needed to teach people about what God truly was like.

4

Unto You a Savior

This chapter is based on Luke 2:1-20.

Even though it would have been such a big step down for Jesus to come as a King like the Jews expected Him to, He went even farther and became a helpless baby to a very poor family. Instead of being born in a palace and laid in a soft bed, He chose to be born in a stable and laid in a rough manger filled with hay. He didn't want anyone to follow Him for power or money. Even the angels were amazed at the humble beginning chosen by Jesus.

The priest Zacharias had already been told of the coming of the Messiah because his son, John, was to prepare the way. Yet the Israelites were not prepared to welcome Him. Angels carefully watched over Joseph and Mary as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem. As Joseph and Mary arrived at Bethlehem, no one was waiting to honor them as the parents of the Messiah. In fact they could not even find a room and were forced to stay in a stable with the animals. It was here that Jesus, the Savior of the world was born.

In the fields where David had watched his flocks as a boy, shepherds were watching their sheep. In the quiet hours of the evening, they talked and prayed about the coming of the Messiah. Suddenly they were scared by a bright light and then an angel appeared and told them not to be afraid. The angel told them that the Messiah had been born that night and could be found in a stable, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). Then the angels sang,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14 KJV).

As the angels disappeared and the darkness of the night returned, the shepherds said to each other, “Let's go to Bethlehem to find the Baby and worship Him.” On the way they told everyone they met the wonderful news.

Heaven is as close to earth today as it was when the angels sang to the shepherds. Heaven is still as interested in us as in the Bible times. Angels are always close to those who choose to love and obey God.

5

The Dedication

This chapter is based on Luke 2:21-38.

About 40 days after His birth, Jesus was taken to the Temple to be dedicated. The parents were supposed to bring a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove for their offering. Because Mary and Joseph were so poor, they couldn't afford to bring a lamb so they brought two turtledoves or young pigeons. The dedication of the first born pointed forward to the time when God would give Jesus up to save us from sin.

As the priest held Jesus for the dedication and wrote His name on the scroll, he had no idea that he was holding the long looked for Messiah. But there was a man named Simeon in the Temple who did realize who this Baby was. Simeon had been told that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. He came up to Mary and Joseph and asked if he could hold the Baby. He then held up the Child and said; "Now I can die in peace because I have seen the Savior of the world." After that he turned to Mary and said, "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and it will be their undoing. But He will be the greatest joy to many others (Luke 2:34 NLT), and you Mary will suffer as if you had been stabbed by a sword."

After Simeon finished, a prophetess named Anna came up and also thanked God for letting her see the Messiah. These humble worshippers had studied the prophecies and had been expecting the Messiah. But the leaders and teachers in Israel had no idea who this Baby was.

Mary thought about what Simeon had said and also recalled what the shepherds told her about the angels. She thought Jesus would become the King of Israel and sit on David's throne and yet Simeon said something about being the Savior of the world. Why would He be rejected by many and why would she suffer if He was to become King?

At the cross of Calvary, love and selfishness stood face to face. Jesus lived to love and help others. Satan wanted to take God's place on His throne. Now everyone could see the truth of Satan's plan and no one would have to wonder any more if Satan was right in his fight with God.

When everyone is judged in the end, the people who are lost will see that they had their chances but made the wrong choices. At that time both the followers of Jesus and of Satan will say to God, You have been fair (Revelation 15:3-4).

6

We Have Seen His Star

This chapter is based on Matthew 2.

“When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was King. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said ‘Where is the child to be born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the East and have come to worship Him’” (Matthew 2:1-2 CEV).

These men were honored in their country for their honesty, wisdom and their wealth. Even though these men lived in heathen lands, they were searching for truth. God was able to speak to them through the writings of Balaam, and through the Hebrew Scriptures. After the angels appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem, the wise men noticed a new star in the sky. They knew that this was not a normal star or planet and were impressed that it meant something special. In answer to their searching, they were given dreams that told them to go and find a newborn prince.

Traveling at night so they could follow the star, they finally reached Jerusalem. They expected to find the whole city buzzing with excitement about the birth of the Messiah, but they were surprised to find no one who knew anything about a new born King.

When Herod got word that some wise men from the East were looking for a new born King, he became worried about a plot to replace him with a new King. Herod even thought the priests were secretly plotting with the wise men to overthrow him and place a new King on the throne. So he talked to the wise men and pretended to be interested in finding the baby. He acted like he planned to worship the new king, but really wanted to kill Him.

The priests pretended that they knew nothing even though they had heard the reports of the shepherds’ story. If they were to treat the shepherds report, or the wise men seriously, they would be admitting that God had chosen to speak to mere shepherds and heathens instead of them. So instead of helping the wise men, the priests treated them as worthless heathens.

The wise men were not as sure of their mission as they left Jerusalem but they were very happy to find the star ready to guide them again. This time they followed the star to Bethlehem and found the Baby and bowed down

and worshiped Him. They even gave their hearts to Him as their Savior. Then they gave their gifts to Him.

After completing their mission, the wise men were ready to go back to Herod and tell him of their success, but they were warned in a dream not to tell Herod. So they returned to their own country another way. An angel also appeared to Joseph in a dream telling him to take Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt, because Herod was going to try to kill the baby.

Through the wise men, God was calling the attention of the Jewish people to the birth of Jesus. He wanted them to study the prophecies and discover that this child was the long looked for Messiah.

After some time, Herod realized that the wise men were not coming back. He began to believe even more that the wise men and Jewish leaders were plotting to place a new king on the throne. In a rage, he sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all children two years old and under. This was one of the last terrible acts of Herod because soon after, he died a fearful death.

Joseph was then given another dream telling him that Herod had died and to return to the land of Israel. Even though he thought that Jesus should grow up in Bethlehem, he didn't think it was safe because Herod's son might still be looking for Him. So Joseph decided to go back to his home town of Nazareth. Without even realizing it, he fulfilled the prophecy that said, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

What a sad reception for the Savior of the world. God could not even trust His Son with the people He was sent to save. Angels were assigned to watch and protect Him until He could complete His mission.

7

As a Child

This chapter is based on Luke 2:39, 40.

Jesus grew up in the little mountain village of Nazareth. It was not a kind of place that leaders and teachers were expected to come from. Not much is known about Jesus' childhood years. The Bible says, "So Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and He was loved by God and by all who knew Him" (Luke 2:52 NLT). Jesus was always thinking of ways to help others. He always told the truth. He always stood up for what He believed. And He was always polite.

In Israel, it was very important for boys to go to school. God wanted them to learn about His love and greatness through His law, and also from the stories from their Scriptures. The children were to be taught by their parents even before they were old enough for school. In Jesus' time the schools spent most of their time teaching their man-made rules instead of studying the Scriptures. As a result of going to these schools, the students became narrow minded just like their teachers.

Jesus did not go to school but He was taught at home by His mother. He learned from the scrolls, the very words He had spoken to Moses and the prophets. As He grew from childhood to youth, the lessons in nature were also His teachers.

When He was a child, Jesus thought and spoke like a child but never once sinned. Just because He was sinless didn't mean He wasn't tempted to do wrong. In fact Satan tried harder to get Jesus to sin but did not succeed.

Jesus understood what it was like to be poor because His family was poor. From the time He was young, Jesus cheerfully worked to help out the family. This was a blessing for Him because it didn't leave a lot of free time to invite temptation. By His example, Jesus taught that it is a blessing and our duty to work.

All through the years that He lived in Nazareth, Jesus never tried to get people to notice Him. He never performed a miracle, and He never tried to get any important position in town. His quiet, simple life during His early

years is an example for children today. From the time He was young, Jesus had one purpose and that was to bless others.

8

The Passover Visit

This chapter is based on Luke 2:41-51.

When a Jewish boy turned twelve, he was no longer considered a child. At this age he was expected to start attending the yearly feasts in Jerusalem. When Jesus turned twelve, Joseph and Mary took Him to His first Passover. The trip from Nazareth took several days so people traveled together in large groups for friendship and safety. The women and the elderly rode on animals and the men and young people walked.

God told the Israelites to gather for the Passover feast every year to help them remember the wonderful way God freed them from slavery. He said, when your children ask the meaning of the Passover services, you can tell them it is to remind you of the time that the angel passed over the homes of the Israelites when he killed the first born of the Egyptians.

In the temple for the first time, Jesus watched the priests doing their duties. Day by day as He saw the bleeding animals on the altar of sacrifice, He began to have a feeling that this service had something to do with His life.

While Jesus was obedient in every detail to the Word of God, He did not go along with many of the man-made rules that were taught by the teachers or rabbis in Israel. Joseph and Mary hoped that by bringing Jesus in contact with these great teachers, Jesus would be impressed by them and would follow all their rules.

In a room connected with the temple, important teachers and their students were gathered. Jesus sat at the feet of these teachers and listened to them. Eager to learn, He began asking questions about the prophecies of the Messiah. His questions caused them to see new truths that they had not seen before. Jesus asked what Isaiah meant when he talked about the suffering and death of the Messiah.

The teachers started asking Jesus questions and He answered them all by quoting scripture. The teachers knew that Jesus had not been to their schools, yet He understood the prophecies better than they did. They thought He could become a great teacher some day if they could get Him as a student.

By His simple questions, Jesus moved the hearts of these teachers as they had never been moved before. God was trying to speak to them in the only way He could. If He had appeared to be teaching them, they would have closed their minds. But since they claimed to be testing His knowledge by asking Him questions, the Holy Spirit was able to speak to their hearts through Jesus' answers.

Meanwhile Joseph and Mary, after they had already started back home, realized that Jesus was not with them. When they began the trip, they had assumed that He was with His friends in the crowd of travelers. Now, they quickly returned to Jerusalem and started looking for Him. They were very relieved when they finally found Him, still in the temple school asking and answering questions. “‘Son!’ His mother said to Him. ‘Why have You done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for You everywhere’” (Luke 2:48 NLT).

“‘But why did you need to search?’ He asked. ‘You should have known that I would be in My Father’s house’” (Luke 2:49 NLT). In Jesus' answer to His mother He showed for the first time that He understood His true relationship to God. But Jesus did not ignore His relationship with His earthly parents. He returned with them to Nazareth and for eighteen years He performed the duties of a son, a brother, a friend and a citizen.

If Joseph and Mary had kept their mind on God and realized how important their duty was, they would not have lost sight of Jesus. By one day's neglect they lost Jesus and it took three days for them to find Him again. In the same way, by saying bad things or forgetting to pray or just not thinking about Him, we might lose sight of Jesus and it could take days for us to find Him again.

It would be a good idea to spend some time every day reading and thinking about the life of Christ. We should study it in detail and use our imagination as we think about each scene, especially His last days. As we think about His great sacrifice for us, we will love Him more and we will become more like Him.

9

Days of Conflict

From their earliest years a Jewish child was burdened with rules made by the rabbis and leaders in Israel. Jesus chose to ignore many of these rules but was very careful to obey the Scriptures. The people were so busy trying to keep all these man-made rules that they were losing sight of God. In fact they were treating their own rules as more important than God's laws. Jesus wanted to teach the people what God truly wanted.

From a very young age, Jesus began to act for Himself, and not even respect and love for His parents could turn Him from obedience to God's word. His brothers, the sons of Joseph, also tried to get Him to obey the rules of the rabbis. They were annoyed because the reasons given from scripture for His actions made so much sense, they couldn't argue. The brothers knew that Jesus had not gone to school but they could clearly see that He understood God's Word better than anyone else.

Jesus didn't treat people differently because of the amount of money they had or because they were a priest, rabbi or a fisherman. He treated all people with equal respect. Jesus always did what He could to ease the suffering of people He met. Often He would give up His own meal so that He could give it to someone who needed it more. This was very different from the leaders in Israel who would look down on the poor and common people.

Because Jesus was so different, His family, friends and the leaders in Israel were all putting pressure on Him to be like everyone else. When they couldn't get Him to change, they would often make fun of Him and call Him names. If Jesus had responded to all of this with one unkind word or mean act, His plan to save us would have failed and Satan would have been proved right in his claim that God's law was too hard to keep. This is why Satan worked so hard to make Jesus' life as difficult as possible.

Jesus was happy and cheerful and had many friends, but anytime some of them tried to get Him to join them in doing things that were wrong He refused to join in. Because of this He would often be teased and made fun of. From a very early age, Jesus had to learn how to silently bear the teasing and name calling.

Even though Mary knew that Jesus was the Messiah, she didn't openly talk about it. She was often torn between siding with Him and trying to get Him to go along with the rules of the leaders. She was always comforted when He explained from scripture the reasons for His actions.

All through His life, Jesus stood alone. He carried the weight of knowing that He was the Savior of the world. With this purpose in mind, He lived His life and became a light to the whole world.

10

The Voice in the Wilderness

This chapter is based on Luke 1:5-23, 57-80; 3:1-18; Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8.

Zacharias the priest was supposed to go work at the temple two weeks each year. One day when he was burning incense in the Temple, he suddenly noticed an angel standing on the right side of the altar. Standing on the right side meant the angel had good news, but Zacharias was still afraid. The angel said, don't be afraid, your prayer has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will have a son. You will give him the name John and he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He will be filled with the spirit and power of Elijah and he will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

Zacharias said to the angel, "How can I know this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years" (Luke 1:18 NLT). Even though Zacharias was looking and praying for the Redeemer, he was a little slow to believe what the angel had told him. The angel said, "And now since you didn't believe what I said, you won't be able to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly come true at the proper time" (Luke 1:20 NLT).

When Zacharias came out of the temple, he motioned to the people because he couldn't talk. His face was shining with the glory of God and the people guessed he had seen a vision. Zacharias told the people through writing what he had seen and heard. As soon as his week was over, he went back home.

Soon after the birth of the child, Zacharias got his speech back and he praised God. The people were amazed when that happened and wondered what the child would do when he grew up.

As John grew, the spirit of God was upon him. Before he was born, the angel said that he should not drink anything with alcohol in it. This was part of the simple and healthy lifestyle John was to live. At that time, greed for money, doing anything that felt good and feasting and drinking were causing sickness and leading to sinful lifestyles. These things also made people less interested in God.

Because of what the angel had told them, his parents didn't train John to be a priest as his father was. He was not sent to the schools of the rabbis either.

This would not have prepared him for his mission which was to turn people from sin and to prepare them to receive the Messiah. Instead he went to live in the desert where he could learn about nature and the God who created it. John had been taught from childhood about his mission in life and he accepted it completely.

When people started gathering around John, his message to them was serious but also full of hope. He said repent of your sins and be baptized because the kingdom of God is at hand. In his simple clothes made of camel's hair, John reminded the people of the prophet Elijah. With the same power that Elijah had, John spoke against the sins of the nation.

Princes, rabbis, soldiers, tax collectors and peasants all came to hear him preach. Many of them repented and were baptized, in order to prepare for the coming kingdom. Some of the scribes and Pharisees who came to be baptized were not sincere and only hoped to be part of the new kingdom. These leaders of Israel were full of pride, selfishness and cruelty. Like poisonous snakes, they were actually a curse to the people. In God's eyes, they were actually worse than the heathen whom they looked down on.

Many people were sincere and they asked John what they should do. He told them, if you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share with someone who doesn't have any. He told the tax collectors not to collect more than they were supposed to. And he told the soldiers not to accuse anyone falsely and to be satisfied with their pay. He told the people if they were truly changed, that they should be kind and honest. They would help the needy and would be generous with their offering to God.

John faithfully delivered his message to the people. Many believed him and followed his instructions. Some hoped that he might be the Messiah but John always pointed them away from himself to the One who would be coming.

11

The Baptism

This chapter is based on Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22.

News spread through all Galilee of the prophet in the desert and his announcement of the coming Messiah. When word reached Nazareth, Jesus knew the time had come for Him to leave the carpenter shop. He said goodbye to His mother and followed the crowds to the Jordan River where John was preaching.

Even though Jesus and John were cousins, they had never gotten to know each other. This was the way it should be so that no body could say they had plotted together. John knew about the things that happened at the time of Jesus' birth. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he didn't understand why He continued to work for so many years in the carpenter shop. John waited patiently believing that God would make everything clear to him at the right time.

When Jesus came to the Jordan River and asked to be baptized, John recognized that he was in the presence of a sinless person. How could he, a sinner, baptize the sinless One? John said, I should be baptized by You. Why have You come to me?" "Jesus answered, 'For now this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do.' Then John agreed. So Jesus was baptized. And as soon as He came out of the water, the sky opened, and He saw the Spirit of God coming down on Him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, 'This is My own dear Son, and I am pleased with Him'" (Matthew 3:15-17 CEV).

Jesus was not baptized to wash away His sin. He was baptized as an example to us. As He came up out of the water, Jesus bowed in prayer on the river bank. A new and important part of His life was starting. He knew that the Kingdom He was going to establish was not what the Jews wanted. He knew that God was with Him but that He would be very lonely on this earth because even His mother, brothers and disciples would not understand his true mission. The Spirit of God in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven were the answer to Jesus' prayer.

As John watched Jesus on the bank of the river, the Holy Spirit came upon him and he said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin

of the world! (John 1:29 NLT) He is the one I was telling you about.” No one including himself understood the true meaning of these words. Most of the people didn’t understand the reason for sacrificing lambs. They looked at it, the way the heathen did, as gifts to the gods. God wanted them to understand that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God was a gift of love from Him.

12

The Temptation

This chapter is based on Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13.

When Jesus left the Jordan River, He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to pray. He went there to be alone and to think about His mission. He stayed in the wilderness for forty days and He fasted, that means He didn't eat anything.

When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan claimed that he had become the Prince of this world. He said that men had chosen him as their king. In becoming a man and not sinning, Jesus would show that Satan did not have complete control of the human race. Satan did not want to be proved wrong, so he worked extra hard to try to get Jesus to sin. In fact, Satan did not even trust his angels with the job of tempting Jesus, he did it himself.

When Satan came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, he decided to start by testing Him in the area of eating. This is where he had succeeded with Adam and Eve. Jesus was very hungry after fasting and praying for forty days. At that time Satan appeared to Him as an angel from heaven with a message from God. He said that he had been sent to end Jesus' fast just like an Angel had been sent to stop Abraham from sacrificing his son. Satan told Jesus that a very powerful angel had been thrown out of heaven and he suggested that maybe Jesus was that angel. After all, he asked why would God leave Him alone and hungry in the desert. He told Jesus that He could prove who He was by performing a miracle and satisfying His hunger at the same time. He said to Jesus, "If you really are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread to satisfy your hunger." Jesus answered, "People need more than just bread to live, they need the Word of God." If Jesus had done as Satan suggested, it would have showed that He didn't trust God to take care of Him. Jesus never performed a miracle for His own benefit. All the miracles He performed were for the benefit of others.

Jesus recognized Satan from the beginning and He didn't carry on a discussion with him. He simply answered Satan with words from Scripture. Satan knows the kind of temptation we are most likely to give in to and he also knows when we are weak to resist him. When we are tempted to do wrong, if we think about it and try to find a reason why it might be ok, we

are giving Satan an advantage over us. When faced with temptation, we should follow the example of Jesus and use God's Word and accept His help to resist the temptation.

The most important lesson to learn from Jesus' first temptation is that with God's help we must be in control of what we eat and want. Satan can weaken us and lead us down a path to more temptation and sin if he can get us to do wrong in the area of appetite.

13

The Victory

This chapter is based on Matthew 4:5-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:5-13.

Satan next took Jesus up to the highest point of the temple. He still appeared as a good angel that had come to test Jesus. He congratulated Jesus on passing the first test and said that He can now give more proof of His faith.

Now in trying to meet Jesus on His own ground, Satan quoted scripture and said, “If You are the Son of God, jump off! For the scriptures say, ‘He orders His angels to protect you. And they will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone.’” Jesus responded, “The scriptures also say, ‘Do not test the Lord your God’” (Matthew 4:6-7 NLT).

The promise that Satan quoted was intended for those who are following God’s plan for their life. Even though Jesus trusted God completely, He would not place himself in a position to force God to rescue Him. The words Jesus used to respond to Satan, “Do not test the Lord your God,” were spoken by Moses to the Israelites when they needed water. Even though God had performed many miracles for them up to that point, when they ran out of water in the desert, they said, “Is the Lord going to take care of us or not?” (Exodus 17:7 NLT).

The Devil can never make us do wrong. He cannot control our mind unless we have given him permission. We must let go of our hold on Jesus before Satan can have power over us.

Jesus resisted the second temptation, and now Satan appeared as himself. He did not appear as a monster with goat’s hooves and bat’s wings. He appeared as the mighty angel that he was, and the leader of the rebellion. Placing Jesus on a high mountain, Satan caused the kingdoms of the world to pass before His view. The vision that Jesus saw was of sunlight on temples, marble palaces and vineyards full of fruit. No traces of evil were seen in this vision. Then Jesus heard the tempter say, “‘I will give it all to You,’ he said, ‘if You will only kneel down and worship me’” (Matthew 4:9 NLT). Now Satan claimed that he would give back the world and Jesus wouldn’t even need to suffer and die. But in worshiping him, Jesus would be giving Satan exactly what he wanted, which was to be greater than the Son of God.

“Jesus answered, ‘Go away Satan! The Scriptures say: Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him’” (Matthew 4:10 CEV). Satan had no power to resist this command and was forced to leave. We can resist temptation and force Satan to leave the same way Jesus did. “Surrender to God! Resist the devil, and he will run from you” (James 4:7 CEV).

After Satan left, Jesus fell to the ground and looked like He was almost dead. Angels from heaven, who had been watching, now came to strengthen Him with food and to comfort Him with the message of God’s love. They told Him that all heaven was happy with His victory.

14

We Have Found the Messiah

This chapter is based on John 1:19-51.

Because there was so much interest in the preaching of John, the Jewish leaders decided that they had better check it out. They knew the Romans watched every public gathering carefully to make sure it wasn't for the purpose of stirring up the people against them. John had not been taught by the Jewish leaders and he did not ask their permission to teach. He reproved the common people and rulers alike for their sins. But since John was a public teacher and preacher, these leaders, known as the Sanhedrin, thought he should be under their control.

The Sanhedrin was made up of Jewish priests, teachers and rulers. The high priest was usually the president. All the members were to be old enough to be respected for their age but not too old. They were to be educated not only in Jewish religion and history but in general knowledge as well. They were supposed to be married with children because having been a father would hopefully make them kinder and more merciful. The Sanhedrin was the government of the Jewish people, but they still had to answer to the Roman governors.

John's preaching was a direct announcement of the Messiah. It was well known that Daniel's prophecy about the Messiah was nearly due. Many were looking for the Messiah to defeat the Romans and to sit on David's throne and restore Israel to glory. The Sanhedrin would soon be forced to accept or reject John's teaching. The question was how to keep their position of leadership since John wasn't one of them. They decided to send a group to hear and talk to John at the Jordan River.

These proud rulers in their rich robes approached the crowd which parted to let them through. "Who are you?" they demanded. John knew what they were thinking so he answered, "I am not the Messiah." "Then they asked him if he were Elijah, and he said 'No, I am not!' Finally, they said, 'Who are you then? We have to give an answer to the ones who sent us. Tell us who you are!' John answered in the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'I am only someone shouting in the desert, Get the road ready for the Lord!'" (John 1:19-23 CEV).

In those times, when a King traveled to a part of his kingdom that he didn't visit very often, a group of men would be sent ahead to work on the road. They were to level the bumps and fill the holes so the king could travel safely and without delay. This was an example of the role John played in the coming of the Messiah.

The men were in the middle of asking John why he baptized people, when suddenly he lifted his hands and shouted, "I use water to baptize people. But here with you is someone you don't know. Even though I came first, I am not good enough to untie His sandals" (John 1:26-27 CEV). In amazement, the priests and rulers looked around but couldn't see who John was talking about.

When John baptized Him, he had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Since that day, John had studied the scriptures and could not clearly understand how Jesus' role of suffering Lamb of God and conquering king fit together. He had come to realize that Jesus' coming had a deeper meaning than the priests or people realized. John eagerly waited for Jesus to make a public announcement, but none was given.

The people looked at Jesus and wondered if He could be the Messiah. They had been very impressed with John but here was one greater than John. Yet in the way He was dressed, they didn't recognize anything special, in fact He was dressed in simple clothes just like they were. What they did realize as they looked at Him was a face that showed both kindness and power.

One day, after John again announced Jesus as the Lamb of God, two of his disciples, Andrew and John, followed Him. Jesus turned to them and asked, "What do you want?" They told Him that they wanted to spend some time with Him. After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew wanted to share his happiness so he went and found his brother Simon. He told him, "We have found the Messiah." When Jesus saw him, He said your name is Simon but I will call you Peter.

The next day Jesus called Phillip to follow Him and Phillip called his friend Nathanael. Because Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Phillip just said come and see. Jesus gave Nathanael a sign by telling him that He had seen him praying under a fig tree and he believed.

This was how the Christian church started. John pointed two of his disciples to Jesus, and one called a brother. Jesus called Phillip and he called a friend. This example should teach us the importance of sharing Jesus with our family and friends. There are some who claim to be Christians but never

make an effort to bring even one person to Christ. There are people who will not be saved that could have been saved if friends and neighbors had reached out to them. As Christians, we should love the work of telling others about Jesus. We have been given this work to help us develop a character like Christ.

15

At the Marriage Feast

This chapter is based on John 2:1-11.

Jesus did not perform His first miracle in front of the leaders of Israel. His miraculous power was first seen at a wedding feast in a small village in Galilee. The families involved were relatives of Joseph and Mary, so Jesus and His first disciples were invited. This was the first time Jesus had seen His mother since leaving home to start His ministry. She had heard about the things that had happened when He was baptized by John. She had also heard about His disappearance into the desert for forty days. In her heart, Mary carried the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, but at times she had doubts and disappointments as she waited for Him to become King. Joseph had died so now she had no one left who knew about the miracles surrounding His birth. Now she was happy and hopeful as she heard the disciples telling her what they had seen and heard. They also told her, we have found the One whom Moses and the prophets wrote about.

Marriage feasts usually went on for days but at this wedding the wine was used up before the feast had come to an end. Not having anymore wine to serve might make the guests think they weren't wanted there anymore. Mary saw this as an opportunity for Jesus to perform a miracle, so she went and told Him that they had run out of wine. Jesus said to Mary, "My time has not yet come." Jesus knew that Mary hoped He would perform a miracle and declare Himself the Messiah, so His answer was to her unspoken wish. Mary turned to the servers and told them to do whatever Jesus asked them to do.

Jesus pointed to six large stone water jars and asked the servants to fill them up with water. When that was done, He simply said pour some out and give it to the person in charge of the feast. The person in charge and the guests did not even know the wine had run out. When he tasted the wine, it was so good that he asked the bride groom why he had not served the best wine first.

The wine that Jesus provided was pure fresh grape juice. He would not have provided wine that He warned us about through Solomon saying, "It isn't smart to get drunk! Drinking makes a fool of you and leads to fights" (Proverbs 20:1 CEV).

When the guests tasted how good the new juice was, they started asking about it. The servants explained how it all happened, and when they looked for Jesus He wasn't there. This gave His disciples an opportunity to tell everyone about their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

Through His life, Jesus gave us an example of how we should reach out to people. The leaders of that time would have nothing to do with the poor and uneducated. But Jesus accepted invitations to the homes of the rich, the poor, the teachers, and the uneducated. Whenever He came in contact with someone, He would try to lift their thoughts from daily worries and point them to God. It is by first being friendly to people that we will then be able to teach them about Christ. We should never let the world think that Christians are sad or unhappy people.

16

In His Temple

This chapter is based on John 2:12-22.

At Passover time, Jesus joined one of the large groups of people traveling to Jerusalem. He had still not made any public announcement about His mission, so He was able to mingle in the crowd without being recognized. Because of the preaching of John, the Messiah was the subject of many conversations. Jesus knew that the people would be disappointed since their hopes were based on a wrong understanding of the Scriptures. He spent His time explaining the Scriptures and tried to interest them in more study of God's Word.

At the Passover, since people came from far away, many were unable to bring an animal for their sacrifice. For their convenience, animals were sold in the outer court of the temple. In addition to the sacrifice, once a year the Jews were required to pay a certain amount of money to support the temple. All offerings had to be paid in temple money, so all other money had to be exchanged for the temple money. The people were doing things that they were told they had to do but they had no idea why. Most didn't even understand the reason for the animal sacrifices.

The money changers cheated the people and made lots of money which they shared with the priests. The animal sellers also made lots of money by charging very high prices because the people had been taught by the priests that they wouldn't get God's blessing if they didn't offer the sacrifice. All of this made the temple sound like a noisy market rather than the house of God. It was so noisy that the actual worship could hardly be heard.

When Jesus came to the temple, He saw that something had to be done. As He looked over the scene, He was upset and power began to show in His face. People started noticing Him and one by one became silent as they watched Him. Pretty soon the whole temple was silent with all eyes on Jesus. As He looked over the whole scene, His Godly power was showing through His human body. When He finally spoke, His voice was clear and powerful, like the voice He used from Mount Sinai. He said: "Get these things out of here. Don't turn My Father's house into a marketplace!" (John 2:16 NLT). Slowly He moved into the crowd with some rope He had picked

up and held like a whip. He started tipping over the tables of the money changers. No one even thought to ask why they should obey Him. Even though some would lose a lot of money, they didn't even try to pick it up from the floor. All they could think about was getting out of the way. Animals were getting loose and running with their owners from the temple. Jesus never hit anyone with the ropes in His hand, but they appeared as a sword to those who were trying to get away from Him. The disciples were shocked by Jesus' actions which were so different from what they were used to seeing from Him. The Scriptures say, "My love for Your house burns in Me like a fire" (Psalms 69:9 CEV).

By clearing out the temple, Jesus was announcing His mission as the Messiah. Since our bodies are to be temples for God, Jesus was also showing that His mission was to clear the body temple of sin.

The priests who fled in terror when Jesus cleared the temple were not just running from a simple carpenter. They felt they were running from someone who knew all their thoughts. They began to realize how wrong they were in turning the temple courtyard into a marketplace. Some even began to believe that maybe Jesus was the Messiah, but they refused to accept it. As they slowly returned to the temple, there was hate in their hearts. When they arrived, they were amazed at the scene that greeted them.

People were crowding around Jesus and were being blessed by Him, and all who were sick were healed of whatever disease or sickness they had. Everyone was telling anyone they met what Jesus had done for them. The voices of children, young people, fathers and mothers were all giving thanks and praise to Jesus.

When the priests and rulers finally came back, they asked Jesus, "What right do You have to do these things?" the Jewish leaders demanded. 'If You have this authority from God, show us a miraculous sign to prove it'" (John 2:18 CEV). Jesus didn't answer them directly but answered them in words that would only be understood later. In fact Jesus knew His words would be misunderstood and used against Him. He answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19 CEV). Jesus was referring to His body as a temple which He would raise after being dead for three days. But His answer also meant that when the Jews killed Him, they were rejecting Him who was the whole reason for the temple sacrifices. When Moses built the first temple or tabernacle, the animal sacrifices were to remind them that one day Jesus would be sacrificed to save them from their

sin. After Jesus died, the whole system of priests and temple sacrifices would be ended, which in a way would be destroying their temple as well.

From that time on, Jesus Himself would be our priest in heaven. “So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help” (Hebrews 4:16 CEV).

17

Nicodemus

This chapter is based on John 3:1-17.

Nicodemus was an honored member of the Sanhedrin. He was highly educated, very talented and rich. He had been moved by the teaching of Jesus and he wanted to learn more.

Many of the priests and rulers hated Jesus because of His boldness in clearing the temple. They were afraid of His power with the people and decided that He must be stopped. But not everyone in the council agreed. Nicodemus and a few others feared that by putting a stop to Jesus, they would be following in the footsteps of their fathers who had killed the prophets. He suggested that they be careful because if Jesus really was from God, it would be dangerous to reject His warnings.

Nicodemus really wanted to talk to Jesus personally, but for someone in his position, it would be embarrassing to be seen talking Jesus. He decided to meet Jesus in secret and at night.

Even though he was an important ruler, Nicodemus felt strangely shy when he was with Jesus. He said, "Sir, we know that God has sent You to teach us. You could not work these miracles, unless God were with You." Jesus could read his heart and He knew that Nicodemus was really looking for truth. So instead of responding to Nicodemus' first statement, Jesus simply said, "I tell you that you must be born again before you can see God's kingdom!" Nicodemus was a strict Pharisee and was proud of his good works. He was well known for his kindness as well as his generous offerings to the temple. He was surprised that Jesus would suggest that he must be changed before he could go to heaven.

Not knowing what to say, Nicodemus answered, "How can a grown man ever be born a second time?" Jesus said, people can give birth to children, but only God's Spirit can change you into a child of God. As humans, it is natural for us to do bad things. As children of God, it is not natural to do bad things because God is good. Since Nicodemus was still confused, Jesus went on by saying, when the wind blows, you may not see where it comes from or where it's going but you can see what it does. So when the Holy Spirit

works on your heart, you may not know exactly what He's doing but you should be able to see a change in your life.

To help him understand it better, Jesus put it another way. "Moses placed a metal serpent on a cross and lifted it up in the wilderness, so that all who looked at it would not die from the snake bites (Numbers 21:4-9). In the same way I, the Son of Man, will be placed on a cross, and whoever believes in Me will have eternal life." "For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NLT). "Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone" (Acts 4:12 CEV).

In His talk with Nicodemus, Jesus laid out His plan to save the world. Nicodemus took all this to heart but didn't publicly accept Jesus as the Messiah. There were times when he was able to use his position on the council to protect Jesus. When Jesus was finally placed on the cross, Nicodemus remembered this conversation. After Jesus had gone back to heaven, when the disciples were being persecuted, Nicodemus boldly came forward and generously used his wealth to help the young church.

18

He Must Increase

This chapter is based on John 3:22-36.

For a period of time John the Baptist had even more influence over the nation of Israel than the priests and rulers did. If he had declared himself the Messiah, and led a revolt against Rome, the Israelite leaders and people would have flocked to his cause. But, even though John could see how much power he had, he refused the temptation.

Gradually now, he saw the attention of the people shift from him to Jesus. As the days went by, the crowds that came to hear him became smaller and smaller, and the crowds of people flocking to Jesus grew bigger and bigger. Some of the disciples that stayed with John became jealous with the growing popularity of Jesus. They even started arguing with the disciples of Jesus about the proper words to use when baptizing and whether they even had a right to be baptizing at all.

John's disciples came to him and complained that Jesus was also baptizing and so now everyone was going to Jesus instead. Satan was using these complaints to tempt John to feel sorry for himself. He was trying to get John to do something, which would have slowed down the work of Jesus. Not giving into the temptation, John reminded his disciples, I am not the Messiah. This is like a marriage where Jesus is the groom and I am the best man. The bride goes to the groom and the best man is happy for him. That is why I am happy that Jesus is becoming more popular than me.

Those who want to be true workers for God will not try to get honor for themselves. The leaders of Israel who had been jealous of John's popularity with the people were not willing, like John, to see their influence go to Jesus. They decided that they must do something to stop the work of Jesus which was drawing the people away from them.

John had been called by God to do a job. When that job was finished, he was happy to step aside and let Jesus come in and carry on the work. But when his disciples saw Jesus coming in to carry on the work, they were jealous. The same thing can happen today. Sometimes God calls someone to start a job but when he has done all he can, he must step aside and let someone else finish the job.

19

At Jacob's Well

This chapter is based on John 4:1-42.

On His way to Galilee one day, Jesus and His disciples passed through Samaria. When they came to Jacob's well, He sat down to rest while His disciples went to buy some food. The Jews and Samaritans hated each other so much that they would not even think of accepting a small favor such as a drink of water from each other. If it was absolutely necessary, it was ok to buy something, which was what the disciples were going to do.

As Jesus sat by the well, He was tired and thirsty. The fact that He couldn't get a drink even though the water was so close didn't make matters any better.

A Samaritan woman came to the well to get some water and as expected, she completely ignored Jesus. She filled her pitcher and was about to leave when Jesus asked if He could have a drink of water. Because of the hatred between their people, she would never have thought of offering a drink to a Jew, but He was asking instead.

She was so surprised that she forgot to give Him any water and asked why He was even willing to ask her for water. Jesus said, "If you knew who I was, you would be asking Me for water and I would give you living water." She replied, "But Sir you have nothing to get the water with and the well is deep. How would You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob who dug this well?" He responded, "Whoever drinks water from this well will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give will never get thirsty again." She said, "Give me this water Sir, so that I won't get thirsty again and have to keep coming to this well for water."

Jesus wanted the woman to recognize the sin in her life, so He said, "Go call your husband and bring him here." She replied, "I don't have a husband." Jesus said, "You are right because you have had five husbands and the one you are with now is not your husband." Now, she was shocked because a stranger knew secrets about her life. So she asked, "Are you a prophet? You Jews say that the temple in Jerusalem is the only true place to worship God, but our fathers built a temple here on mount Gerizim. Where should we worship?" Jesus answered, "The day is coming soon when you won't need

to go to Jerusalem or mount Gerizim to worship God.” Jesus wanted her to realize that worshiping God was not about the place but about having her heart and life changed by God’s Spirit. The woman continued asking questions, “I know the Messiah is coming. Will He be able to answer all our questions?” Then Jesus said to her, “I am the Messiah.”

When the disciples came back, they were very surprised to see Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. After she left, they offered Him some of the food they had bought. But Jesus said, “I have been refreshed by doing My fathers work.”

The woman’s heart had been filled to overflowing by her time with Jesus, and she had to share it with others. Leaving her pitcher behind, she ran back to town to share the news that she had met the Messiah. She told everyone she met, “Come see a man who could tell me everything I’ve ever done.” Then the whole town followed her out to the well to meet Jesus. They all crowded around Him and asked questions and eagerly listened to His answers. They were so anxious to hear more that they invited Him back to the city. Jesus stayed there for two days and many people believed in Him. Then they told the woman, “We no longer have faith in Jesus just because of what you told us. We have heard Him ourselves, and we are certain that He is the Savior of the world!” (John 4:42 CEV).

Being Jews, the disciples had learned to hate the Samaritans. In addition to that, they believed the Messiah was only sent to the Jews. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that He came to save the whole world and that He loved all people, no matter who they were.

20

“Except You See Signs and Wonders”

This chapter is based on John 4:43-54.

The people returning to Galilee from the Passover brought news of the things that Jesus had done. Many people were not happy with the way they were taken advantage of at the temple. Many were also tired of the way the priests looked down on the common people. They hoped that this Man who had stood up to the priests and rulers in clearing out the temple might be the Messiah.

News quickly spread though all Galilee when Jesus arrived at Cana. A Jewish nobleman who lived in Capernaum had a son who was sick and was expected to die. The doctors had done all they could and had given up on him. When he heard the stories of Jesus healing people, he felt it was his son's last hope. Even though he was afraid his son might not live until he got back, he set out to find Jesus.

When the nobleman reached Cana and saw that Jesus was only dressed in simple clothes, he started to doubt. The man decided that if Jesus could heal his son, he would believe He was the Messiah. Jesus knew what the nobleman had decided before he had even made his request. So Jesus said to him, you have already decided that you won't believe unless you see a miracle.

The nobleman realized that Jesus knew what he was thinking. He also realized that his doubt could keep his son from getting healed. At that moment, his faith kicked in and he said Lord, please come before my son dies. Jesus said, you can go on home, your son will live.

At the same time that Jesus had said your son will live, the people watching the child saw a sudden change. The fever left, his color returned to normal and his strength started to return.

Capernaum was close enough that the nobleman could have reached home that evening. But he was so sure his son was healed, that he didn't feel he needed to rush home. He took his time going home and didn't get there until the next day. His servants meanwhile were sure that he was worried and went and found him before he even got home. After they told him his son

was well, he asked, what time did he start to get better? They said the fever left him at one o'clock in the afternoon. The nobleman realized that was the exact time when his faith took hold and when Jesus said your son will live.

He hurried on home to see his son and thanked God for the miracle of his son's healing. After that, he and all the people living in his house became followers of Jesus.

21

Bethesda and the Sanhedrin

This chapter is based on John 5.

In Jerusalem, there was a well known pool called Bethesda. Every now and then, the water in the pool would stir and it was believed that the first person into the pool would then be healed. Because of this, many sick people could be found around the pool day and night. Shelters were even built to protect them from the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

Jesus was walking along one day and came to the Pool. He saw all the sick and suffering people and wished He could have healed them all but it was the Sabbath. He knew that doing so would cause so much trouble with the priests and Pharisees that it would hinder His work. Jesus saw one man that He felt especially sorry for. The man had been unable to walk for thirty eight years. His sickness was partly the result of things he had done, but the people looked at it as a punishment from God. He had seen the water stir but he had never been able to be the first into the water.

Jesus stopped and said to the man “Would you like to be healed?” The man answered, “Sir, there is no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred, so someone always gets in before me.” Jesus said, “Pick up your mat and walk.” Without question he obeyed and he found he was able to use his legs. He might have doubted and lost his chance of being healed, but instead he chose to believe.

The man leaped up, then picked up his mat and when he looked around, Jesus was lost in the crowd. As he walked along, he came to some Pharisees and happily told them that he had just been healed. He was surprised that they didn't care to hear his story. Interrupting him, they asked why he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The man answered them by saying “The Man who healed me said to pick up my mat and walk.” Even though they knew that there was only one who could perform a miracle like this, they asked the man who healed him so they could have proof that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath.

The scribes and Pharisees had made so many senseless rules for keeping the Sabbath that it had become a terrible burden. For example, the Jews were not even allowed to light a candle on the Sabbath. There were so many things

they were not allowed to do, they had to depend on people who were not Jews to do things for them. They figured that since God was only going to save the Jews, these people didn't have to keep the Sabbath. But they didn't realize that if they made someone do something wrong, they were just as guilty as if they had done it themselves.

The man didn't realize that the rulers hated Jesus, so when he saw Jesus in the temple, he pointed Him out as his healer. The rulers took Jesus to court and accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. The court was the Sanhedrin which had been given some power by the Romans but they did not have the power to punish with death. They knew they couldn't punish Him the way wanted to but they hoped to reduce His popularity with the people by accusing Him of breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus wanted to free the Sabbath of the burden of all these man-made rules. That is why He chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. He wanted to make the people stop and think about what was really right and wrong to do on the Sabbath day. Jesus also wanted to show them that it was good and right to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. He also said to them, "My Father never stops working, so why should I?" Now they wanted to kill Him not only for breaking the Sabbath but for calling God His Father.

Jesus responded to them saying, I have a right to do the things I do because I am the Son of God. The Son doesn't just do anything He wants, but He does exactly what the Father wants. If God wants to give life back to a dead person, the Son can do it. As a matter of fact, God doesn't even judge anyone because He gave that job to the Son. God wants everyone to honor the Son the same way they honor Him.

The life of Jesus is an example to us. We should choose to follow Gods plan for our lives. If we only depend on our own wisdom, we are separating ourselves from God.

22

The Imprisonment and Death of John

This chapter is based on Matthew 11:1-11; 14:1-11; Mark 6:17-28; Luke 7:19-28.

John the Baptist had been the first to announce Christ's kingdom and he was also the first to suffer for it by being placed in Herod's prison.

Herod had actually liked listening to the preaching of John, and had been moved to repent. He also believed that John was a good man. John had even been bold enough to tell him that he should not be married to Herodias, his brother's wife. But Herodias hated John and got Herod to throw him in prison.

As the weeks passed and John still remained in prison, he started to get discouraged. His remaining disciples did not abandon him, and they brought news about Jesus. These disciples asked John why Jesus didn't get him out of prison if He really was the Messiah. Satan was happy to see these questions cause doubt in John's heart.

Like the disciples of Jesus, John still expected the Messiah to take the throne of David. As time passed and Jesus didn't show any signs that He was planning to declare Himself king, John started to wonder if the Messiah had not appeared yet. John was confused that Jesus seemed to be content to gather disciples around Him and to teach and heal the people.

John was also disappointed in the result of his work. He had expected to see the nation repent and turn away from sin as they had in the days of Josiah and Ezra (2 Chronicles 34; Nehemiah 8,9). He had given his whole life to this mission and now he wondered if he had been a failure.

Even though John had some doubts, he did not discuss them with his disciples. It made him sad to see his disciples doubting that Jesus was the Messiah. He decided to send a couple of his disciples to Jesus with the question, "Are you really the Messiah we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?" (Matthew 11:3 NLT).

Jesus didn't give them an answer right away, and as they waited, the sick continued coming to Him to be healed. They watched all day as He healed the blind, the deaf and the dying. The poor and common people, whom the Rabbis called unclean, crowded around Him and He told them about eternal

life. As the day was coming to a close, Jesus told the disciples of John to go tell him what they had seen.

When John received the report from his disciples, it made him feel better. He remembered the prophecy about the Messiah, “The Spirit of the LORD God has taken control of Me! The LORD has chosen and sent Me to tell the oppressed the good news, to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives” (Isaiah 61:1 CEV). In this answer to his question, John could see and believed that Jesus truly was the Messiah. He also understood that Jesus was not going to lead armies and overthrow earthly kingdoms, but that His work would be to reach people’s hearts by living a life of loving and healing and giving to others. John was now happy to accept God’s plan for him even if it meant dying in prison.

After John’s disciples had left, Jesus said to the people, what kind of person did you go out to the desert to see? Did you think he was a prophet? I tell you he was more than a prophet. The Scriptures said about him, “I am sending My messenger ahead of You to get things ready for You.” In fact I will tell you that no person born on this earth was greater than John.

When the angel announced John’s birth to Zacharias, he said, “He will be great in the eyes of the Lord” (Luke 1:15 NLT). John was great in the eyes of the Lord when refused any honor for himself, but pointed everyone to Jesus. His unselfish happiness in the success of Jesus’ work is the most important kind of greatness.

One day Herod threw a huge party with feasting and drinking. Herodias sent her daughter Salome, in to dance for Herod and his guests. Ladies of the court did not usually appear at these types of feasts and the drunken men let Herod know how pleased they were. Herod also was drunk and wanting to show his power and generosity, offered to give to Salome anything she wanted, even up to half of his Kingdom.

When she told her mother of the offer, Herodias was ready with her request. Even though the girl didn’t want to make this horrible request, her mother eventually won out. Salome went back to Herod and asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod and all his guests were shocked by the request but in order to not look bad in front of his guests, he felt he had to keep his promise. He paused and waited and would gladly have turned down Salome’s request if one of his guests would have asked him to spare John’s life. Even though many believed John was a servant of God and not deserving of death, they were too drunk to do the right thing. Finally Herod

gave the order to go cut off John's head and deliver it to Herodias, and so the careless partying of one night, cost the life of the greatest prophet.

After his death, the people said, "John didn't perform any miracles but everything he said about Jesus was true" (John 10:41).

Many people wonder why John was left to suffer and die in prison. We cannot understand all of God's reasons but we do know that John was not asked to suffer anything that Jesus didn't go through. In fact any who choose to follow Christ may be asked to suffer as well. Jesus would gladly have come to comfort John in prison but it was not God's will for Him to place Himself in enemy hands at that time. Jesus knew that John would be able to handle the suffering without losing his faith. By allowing John to suffer and die in this way, God gave an example to many after him. Because of this example, faithful followers of God should not feel that He has left them, if they go through hard times.

23

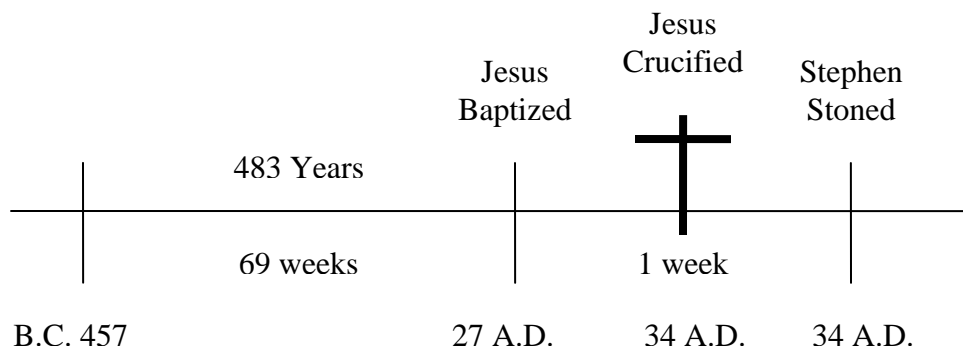
“The Kingdom of God Is at Hand”

“Jesus went to Galilee to preach God’s Good News. ‘At last the time has come!’ He announced. ‘The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe this Good News!’” (Mark 1:14-15 NLT).

If the leaders in Israel had accepted Jesus, they would have become His messengers to carry the good news to the whole world. But the Sanhedrin had rejected Jesus and were plotting to kill Him. Because of this, Jesus turned His attention away from the religious leaders to the common people in Galilee.

The people of Galilee were looked down on by the Jewish leaders as rude and uneducated but they were more open to the teaching of Jesus. Their minds were more open to receiving new truth. As Jesus traveled through Galilee, teaching and healing, crowds of people flocked to Him. Sometimes He even had to hide from the people, so the Romans wouldn’t get worried about a rebellion from the huge crowds.

The “time” that had come, was referring to Daniel’s prophecy, “You need to realize that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Chosen Leader, it will be seven weeks and another 62 weeks” (Daniel 9:25 CEV). That adds up to 69 weeks. In prophecy, one day represents a year of real time (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). So, 69 weeks is $69 \times 7 = 483$ prophetic days or 483 real years. The command to rebuild Jerusalem took effect in B.C. 457.



It was shortly after Jesus was baptized in 27 A.D. that He began his public ministry. In the B.C. to A.D. calendar, it goes from B.C. 1 to 1 A.D. with no year zero. Since the B.C. years are counting down, if we subtract 457 from 483, that leaves us with 26 years but because there is no zero year we have to add a year which brings us to 27 A.D. So, the coming of the Chosen Leader spoken of in Daniel happened right on time.

During the one week or seven years between 27 and 34 A.D., the good news was mainly offered to the Jews. In the middle of that week three and a half years after He started His public ministry, Jesus was crucified. At the end of the seven years when Stephen was stoned to death, the Jews finally sealed their rejection of Jesus. After that time, the good news was then preached to the entire world.

Just like the prophecies that pointed to Christ's first coming so the Jews could be ready, we have prophecies pointing to His second coming so that we can be ready. We cannot know the exact time when He will come but we can know when it is near.

24

“Isn’t This the Carpenter’s Son?”

This chapter is based on Luke 4:16-30.

One shadow lay across the bright days of Christ’s ministry in Galilee. The people of His home town, Nazareth, rejected Him. They said, “Isn’t this the Carpenter’s son?”

This was the first time Jesus visited Nazareth since He had started His ministry. The people of Nazareth had heard about the things that had happened, and they eagerly watched to see what would happen next.

On Sabbath, He went to the synagogue with everyone else to worship. The elder leading out read from the prophecies and encouraged the people to keep their hopes up for the coming king. He described how it would be when the Messiah would lead the armies of Israel to victory.

Whenever a rabbi or teacher was visiting a synagogue, he was expected to have something to say. On this day, Jesus had been asked to have a part in the service. When He stood up to read, the writings of Isaiah were handed to Him and He read; “The Lord’s Spirit has come to Me, because He has chosen Me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent Me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen’” (Luke 4:18-19 CEV).

Then He closed the scroll and handed it back and began to explain the words He had just read. Everyone was thrilled and amazed by His words. Then Jesus said, “What you have just heard Me read has come true today.” Suddenly the people realized that Jesus was talking about them and He was talking about delivering them from Sin, not from the Romans.

Now they started changing their minds about Him. Who is this Jesus anyway that He should talk to them this way, claiming to be the Messiah? He was just the son of a carpenter. They knew His mother and brothers and they had known Him as He grew up. How could He be any different from them?

Jesus knew what they were thinking so He said, “You are thinking, why don’t You perform some miracles here in Your own home town. But I’m telling you that no prophet is ever accepted in his own home town.” Jesus

went on to remind them how God's blessings had been given to Gentiles or people who are not Jews, when the Jews had rejected His prophets.

By their doubt, the people of Nazareth had opened themselves to Satan's temptations and now they were ashamed that they had first found the words of Jesus thrilling. They refused to admit that Jesus was any different from themselves. At the thought of God's blessings being given to the Gentiles, the people went crazy. They grabbed Jesus and dragged Him up to a cliff where they intended to throw Him off. They were shouting at Him and some were even throwing stones at Him when suddenly He disappeared.

Near the end of His time on earth, Jesus went back to Nazareth once more. At that time no one could deny that He had more than human power. They knew about all the people He had healed. As they listened to Him again, they were moved, but they still refused to believe that someone who grew up among them was any greater than themselves.

In the same way that Jesus was rejected by the people of his own home town, He was rejected by the leaders of His own nation. They would not accept the kind of kingdom He had come to setup. They refused to accept One who was so poor and humble as their Messiah. But they also rejected Him because His pure sinless life was so different from theirs that it made them uncomfortable.

25

The Call by the Sea

This chapter is based on Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11.

Jesus had come to the beach to spend some quiet time as day was breaking over the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were just coming to shore after a long night of fishing. Jesus had hoped for a rest from the crowds that followed Him every day but the people began to gather around Him once again. Soon, there were so many people that Jesus was being crowded on every side, so He stepped into Peter's boat and asked him to anchor it just off shore. From there, Jesus taught the people.

Angels watched as their commander sat in a fishing boat, in the open air, teaching the common people about the kingdom of heaven. There was really no better classroom than being out in nature because that is where many of His lessons came from.

As Jesus taught the people by the shores of Gennesaret, He knew He was not only speaking to them, but to all who would read His words until the close of time. Looking forward in time, He saw His faithful followers in prison, and suffering loneliness and hardship for His name. He planned that His words would bring hope and comfort to all who would need it both then and in the future.

After Jesus finished talking to the people, He asked Peter to take the boat out and throw out his net for a catch. Any fisherman knew that in the clear waters of the lake, it was useless to try to fish during the day. Peter was also discouraged from fishing all night without catching anything, but he did as Jesus asked. When they started trying to pull the net back in, they were shocked to find it so full of fish that it began to break. They had to call another boat to come and help them pull in the catch. After the catch was pulled in, both boats were so full that they were close to sinking.

Peter now realized that Jesus had all nature under His control. Feeling his unworthiness, he knelt at Jesus' feet and said "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm too much of a sinner to be around You" (Luke 5:8 NLT). Jesus said to Peter, from now on you will catch men instead of fish.

Before this time, none of the disciples had left their jobs to work with Jesus full time. Now Jesus asked Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing behind and follow Him. Before asking them to leave their jobs, Jesus had shown them that God could take care of their needs.

When the disciples were fishing on the lake without Jesus, they had been discouraged and tempted to doubt. But when Jesus was with them, their faith was stronger and they were successful. This is a lesson for us as well. If we stay close to Jesus, we will be more inspired to do His work and we will be more successful as well.

God does not need people to be well educated or respected to do His work. It is the Holy Spirit that is responsible for the success of the work. God is able to take humble teachable people and do great things through them.

26

At Capernaum

Jesus spent so much time in Capernaum that it became known as His own city. It was one of the many towns that surrounded the Sea of Galilee. It had a comfortable climate and was green from palm trees, olive trees, orchards and vineyards.

Capernaum was a perfect place to be the center of the Savior's work. People from many countries passed through the city, some staying for a rest. From here the news and the lessons of Jesus could be carried to many different countries and people, causing them to study the prophecies about the Messiah.

On Sabbaths when Jesus was there, people crowded to the synagogue in such great numbers that many had to be turned away because it was full. All who heard Jesus were amazed because He taught like one who really knew what He was talking about. When the Jewish teachers spoke, they mostly repeated words that had been memorized and many times it was their own words rather than words from scripture.

Jesus spoke to the people in ways they could understand. Because He lived like them, He could relate to them as one who was familiar with their daily troubles. Jesus also used stories and examples that the people could easily understand to explain deep truths from the scriptures. Never before had the people understood the Word of God like they did when Jesus taught.

Jesus was very good at understanding His audience and speaking words that were appropriate for them. Somehow He was always able to speak in ways that would challenge the educated and deep thinkers, but at the same time thrill the simple mind. Even the heathen felt He had a message for them.

On one occasion when Jesus was in the synagogue, He was suddenly interrupted by a terrible shriek. A madman rushed forward and shouted out, "Go away! Why are You bothering us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One sent from God" (Luke 4:34 NLT).

Even though the man was under the control of Satan, he felt he was in the presence of one who could set him free. When he spoke, Satan put words in

his mouth, but “Jesus ordered the evil spirit to be quiet and come out. The demon threw the man to the ground in front of everyone and left without harming him” (Luke 4:35 CEV). After this the people were totally shocked that Jesus even had power over evil spirits.

The religious leaders at that time had no power over Satan because they neglected the Word of God. They taught their own ideas and only used the Scriptures to support what they made up. In fact they twisted the words of Scripture to say things that were completely wrong.

The same thing happens today when religious leaders twist the words from the Bible to support their own teachings. They create their own rules and beliefs and lift them up above the Bible. It is when Satan can get people to loose faith in the Bible, that he has power over them.

Jesus now went to Peter’s home for a rest. Peter’s mother in law was sick with a bad fever at the time and when Jesus got to the house, He healed her. News of the miracles of Jesus spread like wild fire but because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, the people didn’t come for healing on the Sabbath. As soon as the sun set, crowds started streaming to Peter’s home. They kept coming until late into the night because no one knew whether Jesus would be there the next day. Jesus didn’t stop for rest until the last person had been healed.

“Very early the next morning, Jesus got up and went to a place where He could be alone and pray” (Mark 1:35 CEV). When the people started looking for Him the next day, Peter and his friends came and found Jesus and told Him the people were looking for Him.

The disciples had been disappointed that the leaders in Israel had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. In fact the leaders were trying to kill Him. The people from His own home town of Nazareth had also tried to kill Him. So, the disciples thought that maybe they could build up a large following for Jesus from among the people of Galilee.

Jesus didn’t want people following Him just because He could work miracles or because they thought He would declare Himself king. He wanted them to follow Him because He was their Savior from sin.

27

“You Can Make Me Clean”

This chapter is based on Matthew 8:2-4; 9:1-8; 32-34; Mark 1:40-45; 2:1-12; Luke 5:12-28.

Of all the diseases at that time, leprosy was the one people feared the most. There was no hope of a cure and eventually it had a terrible effect on the body. It was considered very contagious which means it was easy to catch leprosy from someone who had it. As if that wasn't enough, it was considered a punishment from God for some terrible sin. So anyone who had leprosy was considered a sinner and cursed by God.

Lepers were required to leave their homes and could only live and associate with other lepers. Anywhere they went, if there were people around, they had to shout “Unclean! Unclean!” and keep their distance. Even kings and rulers who got the disease were treated the same way.

At the time of Christ, there were many lepers. One of them started to believe that Jesus had the power to heal him if He wanted to. But how could he get to Jesus when he was supposed to stay away from everyone. Would Jesus choose to heal him, or would He tell him to stay away reminding him that he had been cursed by God.

One day as Jesus was teaching and healing people, the leper watched from a distance. As his faith and hope grew, he moved closer and closer, even forgetting that he was not supposed to get so close to other people. When the people saw him, they fell back in fear. Some even dared to try to stop him from getting to Jesus but nothing could stop him now. He threw himself at the feet of Jesus and said “Lord if You want to, You can make me well again.”

“Jesus touched him. ‘I want to,’ He said. ‘Be healed!’ And instantly the leprosy disappeared. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go right over to the priest and let him examine you. Don't talk to anyone along the way’” (Matthew 8:3-4 NLT).

Thinking that Jesus was just being humble, the man told everyone he met that he had been healed of his leprosy by Jesus. Unfortunately, disobeying this command caused so many people to flock to Jesus that He was forced to stop His ministry for a time.

Jesus was holding up the law He gave to Moses by telling the man to go present himself to the priests and offer a sacrifice. But He was also giving the priests proof of His power. They were convinced of His power and even though most didn't follow Him during His life, many accepted Him after He was resurrected and went to heaven.

The healing of the leper gives an example of how Jesus is willing to forgive us of our sins. Sometimes when we pray for things, the answer is no, or not now, but when we ask to be forgiven, the answer is always yes.

On another occasion, Jesus was teaching in Peter's house. The disciples sat next to Jesus, but right behind them sat some Pharisees and religious teachers. The Pharisees and teachers were there as spies, looking for things to use against Jesus. After the spies, the house was filled to overflowing with all kinds of people.

There was a man who was paralyzed, which means he couldn't move, and he had given up all hope of getting well. Like the leper, he was looked upon as being cursed by God. Unlike, the leper though, he could not get to Jesus on his own.

He knew his sickness was the result of a sinful life and he was afraid that Jesus would not heal him because he was such a sinner. In fact, if he had been given a choice of being healed or of being sure that his sins were forgiven, he would have chosen the forgiveness.

The paralyzed man had some good friends who decided that one way or another they were going to take their friend to Jesus. When they got to Peter's house, they found it packed with people and there was no way they could get in. They finally decided that they would climb up on the roof and break a hole so they could lower their friend by ropes directly in front of Jesus.

Jesus knew that the man had repented of his sins but had been unsure if God would forgive such a terrible sinner. He looked down at the man and said, "My friend, don't worry! Your sins are forgiven." Some teachers of the Law of Moses said to themselves, "Jesus must think He is God!" (Matthew 9:2-3 CEV).

Jesus knew what they were thinking so He asked them, "Is it easier to tell this man that his sins are forgiven or to actually heal him of his sickness. I will prove that I have the right to forgive sin by actually healing him as well." Then Jesus turned to the man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat and go home, because you are healed!"

There are many people suffering today who would like to be assured that their sins are forgiven. The only way this can happen is for them to come to Christ and to learn of His love and His eagerness to forgive.

28

Levi-Matthew

This chapter is based on Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:14-22; Luke 5:27-39.

Of all the people that worked for Rome, none were more hated than the publicans, or tax collectors. The tax collectors were a continual reminder to the Jews that they were under the control of the Roman Empire. Rome allowed the tax collectors to collect as much money as they wanted as long as the required amount was turned over to them. Anything left, the tax collectors were free to keep for themselves. Any Jew that accepted this job was looked on as a traitor.

Even though Levi-Matthew was a publican and despised by the Jews, Jesus saw that he was open to receiving truth. Matthew had been touched by the words of Jesus but he didn't think Jesus would have anything to do with him. When Jesus said to Matthew, "Come, be My disciple," he immediately left everything behind and followed Jesus. He didn't stop to think of the money he would lose by giving up his job. He didn't worry about what kind of life he would have as a follower of Jesus. As it was with Peter, Andrew, James and John, his main desire was to be with Jesus. We also will be tested to see whether our desire for money or worldly things is greater than our desire to follow Jesus.

The Jewish leaders were very upset that Jesus, who was considered a religious teacher, would choose a publican as one of His disciples. But because of this, many publicans became interested in the teachings of Jesus. Matthew wanted to introduce his friends and co-workers to Jesus, so he invited them all to a feast at his house to meet Jesus.

The rabbis chose this occasion to attack Jesus through His disciples. They asked, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" (Matthew 9:11 NLT). Jesus didn't wait for the disciples to answer and He replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do.' Then he added, 'Now go and learn the meaning of this scripture: 'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.' For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough'" (Matthew 9:12-13 NLT).

Having failed miserably, the rabbis tried another approach. They went to the disciples of John who at that time were very sad that their master was in prison and were wondering why Jesus wasn't doing anything to free him.

At that time fasting which means going without food, was considered an act that showed how good or religious a person was. So the rabbis said to the disciples of John, why do we and your master fast but this Jesus and His disciples do not. John's disciples went to Jesus with their question and He answered, "The wedding guests should not fast while the groom is still with them, but the time will come when the groom will leave and then they will fast."

Jesus continued His answer with a parable which is a story or illustration with a meaning. He said, "Who would patch an old garment with unshrunk cloth? For the patch shrinks and pulls away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger hole than before. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. That way both the wine and the wineskins are preserved" (Matthew 9:16-17 NLT). Wine was often stored in leather bottles which after a while became dry and brittle. Jesus wanted the disciples of John to realize that the teachings of John did not fit together with man-made rules and traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. Their religion was like dried up wine skins, but the teachings of John and Jesus were like fresh truth from heaven.

Finally Jesus said, "But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. 'The old is better,' they say" (Luke 5:39 NLT). In the same way, it is hard for us to give up doing things our own way, but until we do, we cannot be filled with the love of Jesus.

29

The Sabbath

The Sabbath had its beginning when the world was created. “God looked at what He had done. All of it was very good! Evening came and then morning—that was the sixth day. So the heavens and the earth and everything else were created. By the seventh day God had finished His work, and so He rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it special because on that day He rested from His work” (Genesis 1:31-2:3 CEV).

The Sabbath was mentioned in the Ten Commandments that were given to the Israelites, but it existed before that. Because the Sabbath was made when the world was created, it was made for all people. One of the reasons we were given the Sabbath was to help us remember that Jesus created the world. The Sabbath should also remind us of how much God loves us and that He will save us from sin.

Keeping the Sabbath was the one thing which made the Jews most different from other nations. God wanted people to notice them because of it and to notice that they didn’t worship idols, and that they worshiped the one true God.

As the Jews wandered away from God, the Sabbath lost its meaning to them. Eventually leaders made so many rules to help the people keep the Sabbath Holy that it became a burden. It led the people to think of God as being mean and unloving. Jesus wanted to teach people how the Sabbath was really meant to be kept. He started by ignoring many of the man-made rules that the leaders taught, but He obeyed everything that was written in the Scriptures.

One Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grain field. They had been busy all day and now the disciples were hungry, so they picked some grain and rubbed it between their hands to get the husk off and then popped it in their mouths. They were not stealing because the law said that a person traveling through a field or orchard could eat to satisfy their hunger (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). As usual the Pharisees who were always looking to accuse Jesus said, “Your disciples shouldn’t be doing that! It’s against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:2 NLT).

Jesus said to them, haven't you read in the scriptures how David broke the law by eating the bread that only the priests were supposed to eat. And when the priests do all that work in the temple, they are not guilty of breaking the Sabbath. The disciples were doing God's work, and if it was necessary for them to prepare their food that way, it was ok to do it on the Sabbath.

Then Jesus added, "The Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath." In other words, Jesus was saying, I made the Sabbath so I would know what is right and what is wrong to do on that day. Jesus was not saying that the law He gave to the prophets did not need to be kept. He was trying to correct their wrong ideas about how these laws were really to be kept.

On another Sabbath, Jesus saw a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. The Pharisees were watching Him to see what He would do. Jesus knew they were watching and what they were thinking. He was still trying to get them to understand how the Sabbath was meant to be kept, so He asked the man to stand up where everyone could see him. Then He asked the Pharisees, "On the Sabbath should we do good deeds or evil deeds? Should we save someone's life or destroy it?" (Mark 3:4 CEV). Jesus went on, "If you had a sheep that fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, wouldn't you lift it out? People are worth much more than sheep, and so it is right to do good on the Sabbath." Then Jesus told the man, "Hold out your hand." The man did, and it became as healthy as the other one. The Pharisees left and started making plans to kill Jesus.

The Pharisees wouldn't answer Jesus because their answer would have made them look bad. They would leave a person to suffer on the Sabbath rather than break their rules, but they would relieve the suffering of an animal because if the animal died, the owner would lose some money. This is the end result of all false religions. They start out with the idea that man can be like God or above God but they end up placing more value on an animal than on a human being.

When Jesus asked the Pharisees about doing evil deeds on the Sabbath, He knew they were planning to kill Him. They were trying to make the people think they were very religious by upholding all their rules for the Sabbath, but at the same time they were actually breaking the sixth commandment by planning to kill Jesus.

The Lord says; respect the Sabbath as a joyful day of worship. Don't choose to do things just for your own pleasure on that day. Then you will call the Sabbath a delight and I will bless you (Isaiah 58:13-14).

30

“He Ordained Twelve”

This chapter is based on Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16.

Jesus went up to a mountain, and took some of His followers with Him. Then He chose twelve of them and made them apostles, so that He could send them out to preach and cast out demons.

Jesus liked teaching the people out in the fields, by the water and on the mountainsides. The synagogues would never have been able to hold the large numbers of people that came to hear Him. In addition to that, many of the lessons and parables that Jesus taught were taken from nature.

Jesus was going to choose the people who would be the leaders of the Church, and spread the good news of the Gospel, after He went back to heaven. He was also choosing the people who would work together with Him while He was on earth.

Jesus knew the strengths and weaknesses of each of the disciples He was going to choose, and He spent the whole night praying for them. John, James, Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Nathanael and Matthew had been with Him more and had seen more of His miracles than the rest of the twelve. Peter, James and John were almost constantly with Jesus and were even closer in their relationship with Him. Of the three John was the one who was known as the disciple who Jesus loved. He was younger than the others and probably opened his heart to Jesus in a way the others didn't.

Phillip was the first disciple to whom Jesus said, “Follow Me.” He had heard the preaching of John the Baptist and had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah but his faith was a little slow. When Jesus asked the disciples to feed the 5000, Phillip showed his lack of faith by saying, “It would take almost a year's wages just to buy only a little bread for each of these people?” (John 6:7 CEV). But after Jesus went to heaven and the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples, Phillip became a strong and confident leader and teacher.

While Jesus was choosing the apostles, Judas tried to work his way into the group. Judas believed Jesus was the Messiah and he hoped to get a high position in the new kingdom. The other disciples were very impressed by Judas and wanted Jesus to pick him. They were very disappointed because

Jesus didn't try to work with the Israelite leaders and would have seriously questioned His wisdom if he had not allowed Judas to join them.

Judas had gifts and abilities that could have been a blessing to the early church if he had been willing to accept Jesus' way. He felt the love and influence of Jesus pulling him to surrender his life to God, but he chose his own selfish ways instead.

All the disciples had serious faults when Jesus called them. James and John had a temper and were known as "the sons of thunder." Peter was used to acting or speaking before thinking. Simon the zealot hated the Roman government. Thomas was afraid and Phillip was slow to believe. But by sticking with Jesus and watching and learning from Him, they became more like Him.

Jesus became a man to show God's love to men and to save them from sin. And He chooses human beings rather than angels, to show His love to the human race. Even though it is God's power that works through us, other people can relate to us because we are human beings like them. Because we are like them, we can also have compassion for them and their difficulties.

31

The Sermon on the Mount

This chapter is based on Matthew 5; 6; 7.

A crowd of people from all the surrounding area started gathering around Jesus. Wanting to find a good location for such a large crowd, He led them to a mountainside and sat down on the grass. His disciples understood that even though the people pressed close around Him, they were not to be crowded away from His presence. They sat next to Him and the rest of the people sat down as well.

The disciples felt that maybe Jesus was planning to make an important announcement. The crowd also felt that something important was going to happen. There were thoughts of future glory, when the riches and power of the Roman Empire would be theirs. The poor and the working class were hoping to hear that their poverty and hard work would be exchanged for a life of luxury and ease.

Jesus knew that their hopes of worldly greatness were going to be disappointed. In fact He wanted to try to correct the wrong ideas the people had about His mission.

His first words to the people were words of blessing. “God blesses those who realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them” (Matthew 5:3 NLT). People who are proud try to earn the right to go to heaven, but the only way we can get there is to realize we are weak on our own and need a Savior.

“God blesses those who cry, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). Jesus was not saying that just being sad for doing something wrong would make it all right. But when we are truly sad that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins, we will want to stop sinning. He is also saying that there would eventually be comfort for those who have hard times. We should also take comfort in knowing that God can use hard times to prepare us for heaven.

“God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them” (Matthew 5:5 NLT). If we can learn to be humble like Jesus, the bad things that happen to us each day won’t bother us as much. By keeping

our cool when people are mean to us, we are letting people see God through us.

God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, for they will receive it in full (Matthew 5:6). Every single person who wants to be like Jesus will receive all the help they will need. As long as our attention stays fixed on Jesus, the Holy Spirit will not stop working with us until we are changed to be like Him.

People who show mercy to others will receive mercy from God. Those who keep their hearts pure will see God (Matthew 5:7-8). Impure thoughts and bad words keep us from being near to God. A selfish person does not see God clearly because without even realizing it, they see God as being selfish like themselves.

“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9 NLT). The world is not in harmony with God, and as a result people are not in harmony with each other. Only Jesus can give true peace.

The people were amazed at the words of Jesus. They were so different from the teachings and the example of the Pharisees and teachers in Israel. The people thought that happiness would come from being rich, or being important. Jesus told them that those things would be the only reward for people who thought that way.

“God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right. They belong to the kingdom of heaven. God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of Me. Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did these same things to the prophets who lived long ago” (Matthew 5:10-12 CEV).

Because the world is not in harmony with God, His true followers will also not be in harmony with the world. For this reason, they may be treated badly, or called names, and even be accused of doing things they didn't do. Everyone who suffers these things for Jesus' sake should be happy because those trials will help to make them ready for heaven.

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor?” (Matthew 5:13 NLT). As Christians, we should mingle with people who are not Christians, so that they will be able to see Jesus through us. Just as salt can be used to preserve food, so we should have a part in preserving the world from wickedness. If a person claims to be a Christian, but doesn't really act like one, they are not a good influence for the world and are like

salt that has lost its flavor. In fact, by claiming to be a Christian but not acting like one, they give a bad picture of God to the world.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see” (Matthew 5:14 NLT). The Jews did not want to share God with anyone who wasn’t a Jew, but Jesus showed them that He came to save all nations. By living a consistent life, with pure language, honesty and kindness, we can be a light to the world.

The Pharisees were proud of how much they knew about the religious laws and how well they were able to keep them. But what they really knew was their man-made laws, and they hardly recognized the things Jesus taught. They whispered to each other that he was not keeping the laws of Moses and the prophets.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and He said, “I did not come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am here because they wrote that I would come.” If the law of God could have been changed, Jesus would not have had to suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen” (Matthew 5:18 CEV).

When a person sins, often there are bad things that will naturally happen as a result of that sin. God gave us the Law because He loves us and wanted to keep us from having to suffer the bad things that would happen if we sinned. The law was also given to help us know right from wrong. By pointing out the things we do that are wrong, the law also shows us that we need someone to save us.

It is not simply knowing and keeping the law that will save us. The rabbis and Pharisees in Jesus’ day thought they were the most religious people in the world because of how strictly they kept the law, but they ended up killing the Son of God. If we are not kind, patient and loving, we have not received the power from God to change us. It is only by keeping a continuous connection with God that we can become like Jesus.

God’s plan for His children is higher than we can ever imagine. Jesus said, “But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48 NLT). This is not just a command, it is a promise that God will make it possible for us to be perfect. As Jesus was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life. Jesus is reaching out to us and asks us to have faith that He will make it possible for us to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Jesus taught that we should not do good things so that people will tell us how good we are. He said, “Do your good deeds secretly and God will reward you in front of everyone” (Matthew 6:1-4).

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24 NLT). We must give ourselves completely to God, because if we don’t then we are choosing Satan’s side.

“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34 NLT). We will receive help from God to live each day, but He doesn’t promise to give that help before we need it. If He showed us too much about the future of our life, we might become discouraged.

“Stop judging others and you will not be judged.” We should not think we are better than other people. Since we don’t really know why people do what they do, we are really not able to judge them. In fact if we criticize people, we are following Satan’s example, because he is always accusing us of doing wrong.

“A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit” (Matthew 7:18 NLT). By our actions, we show what is truly in our heart. We can never earn the right to go to heaven by doing good things, because heaven is a gift from God. But doing good things shows that we have given our heart to Him.

“Anyone who listens to My teaching and obeys Me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse, because it is built on rock. But anyone who hears My teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash” (Matthew 7:24-27 NLT).

32

The Centurion

This chapter is based on Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-17.

The Jewish nobleman who came to Jesus to ask for his son's healing wanted to see a miracle before he would believe in Jesus. Jesus was sad that there was such a lack of belief from the people of His own nation. On the other hand, Jesus was very happy to see the faith of the Roman Centurion who came to ask for his servant's healing. He said, "Lord, don't trouble Yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honor. I am not even worthy to come and meet You. Just say the word from where You are, and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:6-7 NLT).

Among the Romans, servants were slaves that were bought and sold in markets, and treated with cruelty. A centurion was an officer that had one hundred soldiers under his command. The fact that this centurion cared so much about his servant, said a lot about his character. He had heard reports of the miracles of Jesus and he believed that Jesus could heal his servant if He wanted to.

The centurion believed that the Jewish religion was better than his own and had shown his respect by being kind to the Jew and by building a synagogue for them. He had even broken through the barriers of hatred between the Jews and Romans and had earned the respect of the Jewish leaders.

Feeling unworthy to approach the great teacher himself, he asked some of the Jewish elders if they would ask Jesus to heal his servant. When Jesus entered Capernaum, He was met by the Jews who told Him about the request of the centurion. They added that he was worthy even though he was a Roman because he was kind to the Jews.

Jesus immediately headed for the officer's home. When the centurion heard that Jesus was headed his way, he sent another message saying, "Lord, don't trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honor." But, Jesus kept coming. Finally, before Jesus reached his house, the centurion came out himself and said to Jesus, "I am not even worthy to come and meet You. Just say the word from where You are, and my servant will be healed. I know because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go,

or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this or that,’ they do it” (Luke 6:7-8 NLT). “In the same way I believe You can command the disease to leave my servant and it will obey You.”

“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd, He said, ‘I tell you, I haven’t seen faith like this in all the land of Israel!’” (Luke 7:9 NLT). “Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, ‘Go on home. What you have believed has happened.’ And the servant was healed that same hour” (Matthew 8:13 NLT).

By telling Jesus that the centurion was worthy, the Jewish elders showed that they thought God’s gifts are earned through good works. The centurion had a better understanding of the gospel, because he came to Jesus and said, “I am not worthy.” “He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5 NLT).

When Jesus left Capernaum, He headed toward the village of Nain. A large crowd of people were following Him and many people were bringing the sick to be healed by Him.

As they came near to the village, they saw a funeral procession coming out through the city gates. The funeral was for the only son of a widow, who was now left with no one to support her. Jesus was sorry for her, “‘Don’t cry!’ He said. Then He walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. ‘Young man,’ He said, ‘Get up.’ Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk to those around him! And Jesus gave him back to his mother” (Luke 7:13-15 NLT).

Satan cannot keep people dead if Jesus calls them to life. In the same way he cannot keep us sinning, when we ask for God’s power for victory over sin.

33

Who Are My Brothers?

This chapter is based on Matthew 12:22-50; Mark 3:20-35.

The sons of Joseph who were step brothers of Jesus had heard about His work. They had heard about His miracles but they also heard about all the arguments He had with the scribes and Pharisees. Instead of believing He was the Messiah like the disciples did, there were actually concerned with what people might think of them because they were related to Him. They finally convinced Mary that they should go to Jesus and try to talk Him into not making so much trouble.

Jesus had just cast a devil out of a man who was blind and couldn't speak, and the Pharisees again accused Him of using Satan's power to cast out demons. Jesus warned them that by continually claiming that the work of the Holy Spirit was Satan's doing, they were making it so that they wouldn't be able to hear the Holy Spirit speak to them.

Actually, the Pharisees didn't believe this accusation themselves. They had felt the Holy Spirit calling to their heart through Jesus' teachings but having already opposed Him it would be too humiliating to now accept Him as the Messiah. By continually hearing themselves say things about Jesus that they didn't really believe at first, they eventually started to believe what they were saying.

The same thing can happen to us when we tell lies, or say bad things, we will eventually start to believe what we are saying. One of the ways we learn things is by hearing, so we must not only be careful of what we listen to, but we should also be careful of what we say because we will hear it as well. Jesus said, "I promise you that on the Day of Judgment, everyone will have to account for every careless word they have spoken. On that day they will be told that they are either innocent or guilty because of the things they have said" (Matthew 12:36-37 CEV).

Many people are thrilled when they hear about God and leave their life of sin. But if they don't completely give their life to Him, when the temptations come they will end up being worse off than they were at first.

While Jesus was still teaching, His disciples came and told Him that His mother and brothers had come to see Him. “Jesus asked, ‘Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?’ Then He pointed to His disciples and said, ‘These are My mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother!’” (Matthew 12:48-50 NLT).

Jesus wanted His family to know that they would not be automatically saved just because they were related to Him. In fact, any of us can be closer to Him than a brother, sister or parent, if we would invite Him into our heart and do His will.

34

The Invitation

This chapter is based on Matthew 11:28-30.

Jesus said, “Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 NLT).

Jesus offered this invitation to anyone who would accept it. He knows the burden of guilt and sin is very heavy, so He offered to carry it for us. But, unless we come to Him and give it to Him, He cannot carry it for us. Jesus wants to take our burden from us even as a big brother might offer to carry a heavy backpack for a younger brother or sister.

“Take My yoke upon you,” Jesus says, “For My yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light” (Matthew 11:30 NLT). A yoke is a wooden collar which makes it easier for a pair of horses or cows to pull something together. The yoke helps each to carry the load but it also makes it easier for the pair to work together. So when Jesus says to take His yoke, He doesn’t mean for us to do nothing while He carries our burden. He knows it is best for us to keep busy, so He asks us to work beside Him, while He pulls the heavy load.

The yoke also represents the law of God which was given to us for our own protection. God gave us the law because He knew that if we didn’t have anything to guide us, we would end up following Satan and would become like him.

“Let Me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29 NLT). If we can learn to be humble and gentle like Jesus, we will not have the stress of trying to become rich or important. We will also not be upset when people are cruel to us. If we can learn from Jesus’ example to trust in God, we will find peace and rest.

35

“Peace, Be Still”

This chapter is based on Matthew 8:23-34; Mark 4:35-41; 5:1-20; Luke 8:22-39.

It had been a busy day in the life of Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee. He had been teaching and healing for days, and had hardly even taken time to eat or rest. The constant attempts by the Pharisees to accuse Him made His work even more difficult. Jesus was so tired that He decided to find a quiet place to rest.

There were less people living on the eastern shore of the lake and even fewer of them were Jews. After He sent the people home, He asked His disciples to take Him across the lake. When He was finally able to relax in the boat, He laid down and fell asleep.

The evening started out calm but suddenly a storm swept over the lake. Some of the disciples were fishermen and had survived many storms, but this storm was so bad, they felt helpless to keep the boat from sinking. They had been so busy trying to save themselves that they had forgotten about Jesus.

When they had given up all hope, they remembered Jesus and called out to Him. Their voices could hardly be heard above the noise of the storm and there was no response. Suddenly, there was a flash of lightning and they saw Jesus sleeping peacefully at the back of the boat. They woke Him up and asked, “Teacher, don’t You care that we’re about to drown?” Then they said, “Lord, save us!”

Jesus always hears the cry to be saved, and He stood up in the boat as it was being tossed about by the waves. He raised His arms and said “Peace, be still.” Immediately the storm disappeared and the lake was completely calm. Jesus then turned to His disciples and asked, “Why were you so afraid?”

The disciples were speechless. Even Peter couldn’t think of anything to say. There were other boats that had followed them and they had been close enough to see what had happened. Everyone was amazed and said, “Who is this Man, that even the winds and the waves obey Him?”

The Bible tells us that if we reject God, our lives will be like a stormy sea (Isaiah 57:20). As long as we reject God, we cannot bring calm to our own

lives. But Jesus can calm the storm in our lives just as easily as He calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee if we will only ask.

In the morning when they stepped onto shore, they were met by something that frightened them even more than the storm. Two men, who were possessed by demons, had come out of their hiding places in the cemetery and were running towards them. These men almost looked like wild animals and the disciples turned to run. Suddenly they noticed that Jesus was not running with them and when they looked back, He was standing calmly to meet the men.

When the men got near, Jesus raised his hand to stop them and they could come no closer. Then He ordered the demons to come out of them. They began screaming at Him, “Why are You bothering us Son of God?” (Matthew 8:29 NLT). Then the demons asked Jesus if they could go into the herd of pigs that were nearby and He gave them permission. At that instant, the pigs went crazy and ran off a cliff into the water and drowned.

The men who were now free of the demons were peacefully sitting at the feet of Jesus. News reached town very quickly and soon the people gathered about Jesus both in fear and amazement. Instead of being happy about not having to worry about being attacked by the wild men, they were more concerned with the money they lost from the drowned herd of pigs. The people who had crossed the lake the night before, tried to tell how Jesus had calmed the storm, but the owners didn't want to hear it and asked Jesus to leave.

Jesus never stays where He is not wanted, and prepared to leave. The two men He had just delivered, wanted to go with Him, but He told them to go home and tell everyone what God had done for them. They obeyed Jesus and not only did they spread the word in their own home town of Gergesa, but throughout the whole area.

Even though these men had never been trained as missionaries, Jesus sent them out as the first missionaries to the region of Decapolis. They had hardly spent any time with Jesus but they could tell other people what they knew. They could show and tell people what Jesus had done for them which is what Jesus wants us to do for Him now.

Satan wanted to use the loss of the pigs to turn the people away from Jesus, but all the excitement surrounding the whole event caused more people to be aware of Jesus. Because of that and the missionary work of the two men, when Jesus returned to Decapolis, the people flocked to Him to from all the

surrounding towns. This should help us to realize that even though Satan makes bad things happen sometimes, God can turn it into good in the end.

36

The Touch of Faith

This chapter is based on Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56.

When Jesus returned from Gergesa back to the other side of the lake, He was met by a crowd of people. He stayed at the seaside for a while teaching and healing, and then went to Matthew's home.

A synagogue ruler named Jairus came to Jesus, and he looked very worried. He knelt at the feet of Jesus and begged Him to come heal his daughter before she died. Jesus immediately set out to follow Jairus to his home. The house was not far from where they were but they couldn't move very fast because the people were crowding in on Jesus from every side. Jairus stood by impatiently as every now and then Jesus would stop to heal or comfort someone.

In the crowd, there was a woman who had been sick for twelve years. She had spent all her money on doctors and no one could find a cure for her. She decided in her mind that Jesus could heal her she would just touch Him. She struggled through the crowd trying to reach Him and was just barely able to touch His clothes, and she immediately knew she was healed.

Jesus suddenly stopped and asked, "Who touched Me?" The disciples said, "The crowd is pushing You from all sides, how can You ask who touched You?" Jesus said, "Someone purposely touched Me and I felt healing power go out from Me." Jairus stood by impatiently as Jesus waited for an answer. Finally the woman came forward and told her story. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

Not everyone who crowded in on Jesus received His healing power, but the woman believed she would be made well and she was. We can talk about Jesus but if we don't truly accept Him as our Savior, we are like the crowd who receive no healing power from Jesus. And, just as He wanted the woman to tell everyone how she had been healed, He also wants us to tell others about the blessings we receive from Him.

As they continued on their way again, they were met by a servant who told Jairus that it was too late because his daughter had died. Jesus heard the message and told Jairus, "Don't worry, just trust Me and she will be ok."

When they reached the house, it was filled with people who were crying. Jesus said, "Why are you crying? The little girl is just sleeping." Some were angry at Him and some laughed at Him because they knew she was dead. Jesus took the parents, Peter, James and John and went into the room where the little girl was laying. He leaned over her and said, "Get up My child," and immediately she was alive.

When we receive blessings from God, we should tell other people about them because this is one of the ways that people can see what God is like. Talking about God's blessings also keeps them fresh in our memory, which helps us to have more faith to receive even more blessings from God.

37

The First Evangelists

This chapter is based on Matthew 10; Mark 6:7-11; Luke 9:1-6.

The twelve disciples or apostles were like family to Jesus. They were with Him almost all the time. They did whatever He asked them to do and they were always looking for ways to help. They organized the people, helped the sick to reach Jesus, answered questions, and they were always ready to tell people about their experiences with Jesus. But Jesus wanted them too have a chance to work without Him so that they could gain some experience while He was still there to teach them.

The most important part of the disciples' training was the example of Jesus. Many times when they didn't know what to say, they would just repeat words that Jesus had used in similar situations and they were amazed at how well it worked.

So, Jesus sent the disciples out to towns and villages by twos. In going out in pairs, they could help and encourage each other. One's strengths could make up for the other's weaknesses. Our own work of sharing the gospel would be more successful if we would follow this example.

During Jesus' ministry, He spent more time healing the sick than He did preaching. As followers of Jesus, we should spend more time feeding the hungry, giving clothes to those who need them and comforting the suffering than we do preaching. This kind of ministry will be much more successful in getting people to change for the better than threats or punishment.

On this first missionary outing, the disciples were to go only to the Jews. Jesus knew that if the gospel were offered to non-Jews, the Jews would reject it. If the Jews would accept Him, He wanted them to be the ones to carry the gospel to the whole world. The disciples were also not to preach to the people at the synagogues but they were to meet people in their homes.

Jesus said, "I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. So be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16 CEV). Looking forward into the future, Jesus could see that His messengers would encounter many dangers and that people would always be trying to harm them. He also wanted them to be careful with their words and to be kind and

gentle, following His example. Being gentle doesn't mean only telling people what they want to hear. Jesus never backed down from doing what was right just to avoid trouble. And He loved people too much to remain silent when He saw them making bad choices.

“And you must stand trial before governors and kings because you are My followers. This will be your opportunity to tell them about Me—yes, to witness to the world” (Matthew 10:18 NLT). Many great men, judges and leaders will have been told lies about Christians, and this will be an opportunity for them to hear the truth. It is their job to ask questions and listen to the answers given by the Christians who have been brought to them for trial.

“But when someone arrests you, don't worry about what you will say or how you will say it. At that time you will be given the words to say. But you will not really be the one speaking. The Spirit from your Father will tell you what to say” (Matthew 10:19-20 CEV). We are not supposed to memorize a speech to give in court. The Holy Spirit will give us the right words to speak at the time. What we should do to prepare is to study the Bible and learn the truth about what we believe.

“Brothers and sisters will betray one another and have each other put to death. Parents will betray their own children, and children will turn against their parents and have them killed” (Matthew 10:21 CEV). Sadly, in some cases it will even be our friends or family who will have us arrested because we are Christians.

“If you tell others that you belong to Me, I will tell My Father in heaven that you are My followers. But if you reject Me, I will tell My Father in heaven that you don't belong to Me” (Matthew 10:32-33 CEV). If we belong to Jesus, when the Father looks at us, He will see Jesus' perfect life rather than our sinful life. On the other hand, by telling lies, saying unkind things, never admitting we're wrong and in many other ways, we reject Him.

Jesus warned His disciples that they shouldn't expect everyone to accept the gospel. In fact He said there would always be people who would be against it. “If you love your father or mother or even your sons and daughters more than Me, you are not fit to be My disciples” (Matthew 10:37 CEV). It will be very hard if our family and friends do not believe in Jesus but He said if we choose to please them rather than obey Him, we are not His disciples.

With these instructions, Jesus sent the disciples out preach, teach and heal as He had done.

38

Come Rest Awhile

This chapter is based on Matthew 14:1,2,12,13; Mark 6:30-32; Luke 9:7-10.

When the disciples returned from their missionary trip, they started telling Jesus all about their experiences. But there were so many people coming and going where they were, that they couldn't even find time to eat. Jesus said, "Let's go find a quiet place to rest from our work."

The rest that Jesus and His disciples were looking for was not for their own pleasure. They spent time together talking about the work of God and how they could do a better job. Quiet time spent together with Jesus gave the disciples new energy, hope and courage to carry on.

When Jesus sent the disciples out, they had been given power to perform miracles. Now they needed to be careful to not get too proud about the power they had been given. Even though many things went well, while the disciples had not been with Jesus, there were times when they didn't know what to do or say. Now that they had some time with Jesus they could learn how they should have handled those difficult times.

About this time, news arrived that John the Baptist had been killed. Jesus could see that shortly He would be suffering the same fate. The Jewish leaders who wanted Him out of the way seemed to gather around Him like dark clouds on a stormy day, looking for anything they could use against Him. The disciples of John had come to Jesus for comfort and they were in need of some rest.

The fact that Jesus suggested a rest shows that even though the work of God is important, we need to take care of ourselves and not work too much. If we work until we are exhausted, Satan may be able to take advantage of us in our weakness and get us to do something that will harm the work of God. If we get too busy working, we may also not spend the time we need with God. As a result, we may end up doing things our own way instead of God's way. Even though things may appear to go well, it is only by prayer and study of God's word that we can truly be successful at His work.

There were so many people wanting Jesus' time, but He always took time each day to pray. He would usually wake up before daylight and find a quiet

place to pray. It was this time spent with God that would give Jesus the strength to bear the struggles of the day. During this time in prayer He could also unload the burdens that were resting on Him like a heavy weight. Jesus gained comfort and joy from His quiet time with God.

39

“Give Them Some Food to Eat”

This chapter is based on Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13.

Jesus and the disciples had headed for a remote wilderness area across the lake. Not long after He had gone, people started asking for Him and before long, a crowd of people were making their way around and across the lake to find Him. Before He even reached the shore a crowd of five thousand men plus women and children were waiting to meet Him. Jesus and the disciples came ashore unnoticed and had a little time together before going to meet the people.

As Jesus looked at the people, He felt sorry for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd to lead them. The religious leaders did nothing to lead or help the common people; in fact they did their best to avoid them.

Jesus went out to the people and they listened to Him all day. His words, so simple and easy to understand, filled them up like a good meal when one is hungry. He also healed all who were sick from whatever disease or sickness they had.

Jesus had spent almost the whole day with the people and neither had taken time to eat. The disciples asked Him to tell the people to leave while there was still time for them to go buy some food. But Jesus said, “Where can we get some food to feed them?” Phillip said, “It would take a small fortune to buy enough food to give each one just a little.” Then Andrew said, “There is a little boy here who brought a lunch of five pieces of bread and two little fish, but what good would that do?” Jesus accepted the boy’s lunch and asked the disciples to have the people sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred.

Jesus was aware of the needs of the people. He knew that many had been without food since morning. He knew there were mothers with babies and little children. The people had been standing all day and needed to be able to sit down and rest.

When everyone was organized and sitting down, Jesus had the blessing on the food and then started handing it out to the disciples to give to the people. To everyone’s amazement, Jesus never ran out of food and everyone had

enough to satisfy their hunger. When He asked for the extra food to be gathered together, there were twelve baskets full of food. The extra food was passed out to those who wanted to show and tell their friends and neighbors about the miracle. Jesus did not want to attract people to Him by giving them mansions and riches. But He wanted them to know that He cared about their daily needs.

Christ tells us through Isaiah, “I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help” (Isaiah 58:7 NLT). He also told us, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere” (Mark 16:15 NLT). Like Andrew, we may think, there is so much to do and so few people to do it. Or there are so many hungry and we have so little food to give. But when Jesus gives us a command, He will always make it possible to obey that command. It may not seem possible at first but if we step out in faith, God will show the way.

We should not rely on our own talents and abilities to do God’s work. God is the one who will supply all that is needed. If God calls us to do something for Him, we should not try to find someone who we think is more qualified to do the job.

When Jesus fed the crowd of people, He received power from God; He gave the food to the disciples; they handed it out to the people; and the people shared it with each other. If we are willing to work with God, we will pass on to others what He gives to us. And if we do not share His blessings with others, we will not receive more.

40

A Night on the Lake

This chapter is based on Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:14-21.

Among the crowd that had been fed by Jesus, many people had been blessed by His words. Many had also been healed of their diseases. But the miracle of feeding five thousand men plus women and children from only five pieces of bread and two fish had affected every single one of them. The people said, “He must be the prophet Moses said would come to deliver us.”

They started daydreaming of all the things He could do for them. He could turn Judea into a paradise flowing with milk and honey. He could give them anything they could imagine. He could free them from the power of the Romans. He could heal soldiers that were wounded on the battle field. He could feed entire armies. He could make Israel the greatest nation on earth.

The people were ready to make Jesus king at once. They could see that He didn't try to get any honor for Himself. They decided that because of His humility He would never claim the throne that is rightfully His. Along with the twelve disciples, the people decided to take Him by force and make Him king. They said, let the proud priests and rulers be forced to honor Him as their king.

Jesus knew what was going on and could see what would happen if the people carried out their plan. A lot of fighting and killing would happen and that would get in the way of His true mission. So He told His disciples to get in the boat immediately and go back to Capernaum while He dismissed the crowd. They had never had such a hard time obeying Jesus. This was the opportunity they had been looking for to place Him on the throne. They tried to argue with Him but soon realized that He had no intention of letting the people carry out their plan.

Jesus now turned to the crowd and told them to go home. He spoke with such authority that no one dared to disobey. After that Jesus went up the mountain to pray. He prayed that people would understand that He did not come to set up a kingdom on earth. He also prayed that His disciples would be able to bear the disappointment when they realized that He was not going to become king and was crucified instead.

The disciples did not leave right away but waited to see if Jesus would come. When He didn't, they finally pushed off in their boat and headed for the other side of the lake. They complained to each other that they had let Jesus stop them from carrying out their plan. Satan took this opportunity to suggest questions to them. Why did Jesus refuse to become king? If Jesus had so much power, why didn't He use it to make their life a little easier? Why didn't He save John the Baptist? Finally, they even wondered if Jesus was really not the Messiah as the Pharisees claimed.

In their doubting, complaining state of mind, they had not noticed the storm that was coming upon them. Suddenly it hit them and they were afraid for their lives. They immediately forgot their complaints and doubts and started trying to save themselves. They struggled for hours but the storm kept driving them farther from shore. Finally when they saw that they were helpless to save themselves, they gave up, and wished that Jesus were there to help them.

Jesus had not forgotten them and was keeping an eye on them from the shore. When their hearts were softened from their doubting and complaining, they prayed for help, and it was given to them. After they gave up trying to save themselves, they looked and saw what they thought was a ghost walking on the water. Then Jesus called out to them, "I am here! Don't be afraid."

Peter was almost beside himself with joy, but just to be sure, he answered, "Lord, if it's really You, tell me to come to You by walking on water." "All right, come," Jesus said. Peter stepped out of the boat and started walking on the water towards Jesus. With a little pride, Peter turned to look back at the disciples in the boat. At that time, a wave came up between him and Jesus and when he looked back, he didn't see Jesus. When he started to lose faith he began to sink then and cried out, "Lord, save me." Instantly Jesus was there and pulled Peter back to the surface of the water.

The instant Jesus and Peter step into the boat, they were at the shore where they were headed. The disciples worshipped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God."

Jesus promises that He will always be there for us, "Don't be afraid. I have rescued you. I have called you by name; now you belong to Me. When you cross deep rivers, I will be with you, and you won't drown. When you walk through fire, you won't be burned or scorched by the flames. I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, the God who saves you" (Isaiah 43:1-3 CEV).

We must depend on Jesus every moment of the day to keep from giving into temptation. It is only by realizing our weakness and relying completely on Him that we can resist temptation.

41

The Trouble in Galilee

This chapter is based on John 6:22-71.

When Jesus wouldn't let the people make Him king, He knew that things would be different from then on. He knew that many of the people who wanted to crown Him king would turn against Him because He wouldn't go along with their plan. Even some of His true followers had joined Him with hopes of a worldly kingdom. These needed to learn the truth about His mission.

The people who had been fed by the miracle of the bread and fish had spread the story everywhere. The next day the crowds flocked to Bethsaida to find Jesus. Those who had left Him the night before knew there were no boats so they expected to find Him still there.

When the people finally found Him in Gennesaret, they were told by the disciples about the storm, Jesus and Peter walking on the water, the calming of the storm and the immediate landing of the boat. The people then asked Jesus, how He got across the lake because they wanted to hear how He would describe the miracle. Jesus said, "You're only looking for Me now because I gave you food yesterday." He knew they were only following Him because they hoped to benefit from some more miracles.

Jesus then said, "Don't work only for things of the world that won't last, but work for things that matter for everlasting life." "What exactly does God want us to do?" the people asked. Jesus answered, "God wants you to have faith in the One He sent" (John 6:28-29 CEV).

But the people were not interested in just believing in Him. If He had such power, why wouldn't He give them all mansions and riches and free them from the Romans? Why did He refuse to be King and give their nation power and glory? They decided that maybe He refused to become King because He wasn't sure He was the Messiah.

Now a rabbi half jokingly said, "What sign will You give us to prove You are who You say You are? For example, Moses gave manna to our fathers in the desert." "Jesus said, 'I assure you, Moses didn't give them bread from heaven. My Father did. And now He offers you the true bread from heaven.

The true bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33 NLT).

Still thinking Jesus was talking about food, they said, give us this bread to eat and keep giving it to us everyday. “Jesus replied, ‘I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in Me will never thirst. But you haven’t believed in Me even though you have seen Me” (John 6:35-36 NLT).

“The people started grumbling because Jesus had said He was the bread that had come down from heaven. They were asking each other, ‘Isn’t He Jesus, the son of Joseph? Don’t we know His father and mother? How can He say that He has come down from heaven?’” (John 6:41-42 CEV).

Jesus replied, “Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, and later they died. But the bread from heaven has come down, so that no one who eats it will ever die. I am that bread from heaven! Everyone who eats it will live forever. My flesh is the life-giving bread that I give to the people of this world.” They started arguing with each other and asked, ‘How can He give us His flesh to eat?’” (John 6:49-52 CEV).

Eating His flesh and drinking His blood is to accept Jesus into our life as our Savior. Just as the body needs food, the soul needs Jesus. We can know about food, but unless we eat the food, it won’t do our body any good. In the same way, just knowing about Jesus won’t save us. By studying about His love for us, by thinking about Him all the time, by turning our lives over to Him, we are eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In doing this, Jesus will become part of us and we will become like Him.

Now that the people understood what Jesus was all about, most of them wanted nothing to do with Him. In their mind, He was confirming to them that He was not the Messiah. They didn’t care about any spiritual kingdom. They were looking for a kingdom to defeat the Romans. They were sorry they had wasted their time on Him and turned their backs and left.

We have the same choice to make today. Either we can accept Jesus into our life as our Savior and make Him part of us, or we can turn our backs on Him.

As most of the crowd was leaving, Jesus asked His disciples, “Are you going to leave as well?” Peter said, “Lord, there’s no one else we can go to. We are sure You are the Messiah and the Son of the living God.”

When Jesus presented the truth about His mission in this way, He knew most of His follower would turn away and not follow Him anymore. But He knew

that those who turned away from Him would have turned their backs on Him when He was crucified on the cross. If that had happened, His true disciples would have been hurt even more than they were. He wanted to separate His true disciples from those who were only following Him in hopes of gaining something for themselves. So, even though His disciples were disappointed, He was still there to comfort and encourage them.

Jesus knew that His disciples would finally be faced with the trial of His crucifixion and death, and wanted to do everything He could to strengthen and prepare them for it.

42

Tradition

This chapter is based on Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23.

The scribes and Pharisees were continually trying to trap Jesus into saying or doing something they could use against Him. They wanted to either get Him in trouble with the Romans, or to turn the people against Him.

Many Jewish traditions had been set up to protect the people from breaking the Law of God. But over time, these traditions had become more important to the religious leaders than the Law of God. In fact, if there was a conflict between God's Law and their tradition, they would keep tradition over the Law.

One tradition the Jewish leaders were very strict about was about cleanness and uncleanness. If they touched certain things, they were considered unclean and would have to go through a series washing steps so that they could be considered clean again. The cleanness they were concerned about didn't actually have much to do with actual dirtiness, but about being called clean or unclean. If they were unclean, they couldn't participate in other important traditions, so they tried to stay clean as much as possible.

There were so many rules about how one could become unclean and there were also so many steps to take to become clean again, that a person could hardly learn or remember them all. And if someone tried to keep all these traditions, it would take all their time and attention, which left no time to study and keep God's true laws.

Jesus and His disciples didn't pay much attention to the laws that required strict steps to washing their hands before eating. So the spies came to Jesus in front of all the people and asked, "Why do Your disciples disobey our tradition by not washing their hands before eating?"

Jesus didn't even bother answering their questions because He wanted them to understand the real problem with their thinking. He accused them of treating their tradition as more important than God's law, and gave them this example. Moses said to honor your father and mother. But you have a tradition that if someone says the word "Corban", they don't have to give any money or support to their parents. They can do whatever they want with

their money or property and when they die, it all goes to the support of the temple. In this way, Jesus said, you allow people to break the fifth commandment to keep your tradition.

The spies were defeated again because they saw they could not accuse Jesus of breaking God's law that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Jesus then explained to everyone that uncleanness comes from within, not from touching something. Thinking bad thoughts, saying bad words, doing bad things all start with your thoughts.

There are traditions in every church which are not based on God's Law. We must be careful that we do not hold these traditions above God's Law. Jesus warned us, "It is useless for you to worship Me, when you teach rules made up by humans" (Mark 7:7 CEV).

43

Barriers Broken Down

This chapter is based on Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

After His discussion with the Pharisees about tradition, Jesus left Capernaum and crossed the lake to the hills bordering Phoenicia. A heathen woman from the town of Phoenicia started following them, begging Jesus to heal her daughter. She said, “Lord and Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is full of demons” (Matthew 15:22 CEV). Her people were idol worshippers that were left from the Canaanite nations that Israel had not driven out in the time of Joshua. The Jews had never tried to tell these people about God because they figured He didn’t care about them and wasn’t going to save them anyway.

Jesus wanted His disciples to see how unkind it was to treat her the way a Jew would normally treat her. So He ignored her and continued walking along. When they saw Jesus treating her the way they would have, they said to Him, “Can you please tell her to leave us alone; she’s getting kind of annoying.” Playing along with the disciples, Jesus stopped and said to the woman, “‘The children must first be fed! It isn’t right to take away their food and feed it to dogs.’ The woman replied, ‘Lord, even dogs eat the crumbs that children drop from the table’” (Mark 7:27-28 CEV). The children Jesus was referring to were the children of Israel or the Jews and He referred to her as a dog. The woman was willing to be treated as a dog if she could have the crumbs that fell from the table.

Jesus was testing the woman’s faith and at the same time He was giving the disciples a lesson. Now with a smile and a look of love, “Jesus answered, ‘Dear woman, you really do have a lot of faith, and you will be given what you want.’ At that moment her daughter was healed” (Matthew 15:28 CEV).

This was the only miracle Jesus performed in that place. He went there just to heal the woman’s daughter and to teach the disciples a lesson. The lesson was that God loves all people, not just the Jews, and that they should get used to the idea of sharing the gospel with Gentiles. Gentile was a name that referred to all people who weren’t Jews.

Today, there are still walls that stand between God’s people and those they should be reaching out to. By healing the Gentile woman’s daughter, Jesus

wanted people through all time to know that He loves all people no matter who they are or where they come from. “The Scriptures say that no one who has faith will be disappointed, no matter if that person is a Jew or a Gentile. There is only one Lord, and He is generous to everyone who asks for His help. All who call out to the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:11-13 CEV).

44

The True Sign

This chapter is based on Matthew 15:29-39; 16:1-12; Mark 7:31-37; 8:1-21.

When Jesus returned to Gergesa where He had healed the two demon possessed men, a crowd gathered around to meet Him. The two men had told many people about what Jesus had done for them and this time the people wanted Jesus to stay. A deaf man was brought to Him for healing, and Jesus took him away from the crowd. He put His fingers in the man's ears, then touched his tongue and said, "Be opened." Right away the man could both hear and speak properly.

Then Jesus went up to a mountainside and the people followed Him, bringing all the sick people to be healed by Him. Jesus healed everyone who was brought to Him and He stayed there teaching and healing. After three days most everyone's food had run out, so as He had done before, Jesus asked His disciples to feed the people. The situation was very similar to when Jesus had fed the five thousand men plus women and children, except that these people were not Jews. The disciples figured that Jesus wouldn't repeat His miracle to feed these heathens, so they said, "Where would we get enough food to feed all these people out here in the wilderness?"

Jesus asked the disciples bring all the food they had to Him, and then have all the people sit down. They had seven pieces of bread and a few small fish. Jesus multiplied the food and fed four thousand men plus women and children. And when they picked up the food that was left, they had seven baskets full.

After sending the people home, Jesus and the disciples got in the boat and crossed the lake to Magdala. Jesus had been refreshed by the faith of the woman from Phoenicia as well as the faith of the people from the region of Decapolis.

Now as He stepped ashore He was met by a group of Pharisees and Sadducees who asked Him for a sign that He was the Messiah. The priests, rabbis and other Jewish leaders usually belonged to one of these two groups. The Pharisees were very strict about keeping their religious traditions. They hated the Romans and they longed for the day when they would be an independent nation again. The Sadducees were usually wealthier, not as

religious, and their power came from cooperation with the Romans. These two groups which were usually fighting against each other were now working together to bring Jesus down.

Many signs had already been given, like the announcement and song of the angels to the shepherds, the star that guided the wise men, the dove and voice at His baptism. His miracles and the way Jesus spoke to their hearts were also signs of who He was. Jesus said, the only sign I will give you is the sign of Jonah, then He turned and walked away.

As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, Jesus was going to be buried for three days. And as Jonah came out of the whale, Jesus would be resurrected and come out of the tomb.

Many today ask for signs before they will believe in Jesus, but as He said in a parable, “If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31 NLT). Just because a sign is not given to satisfy unbelief, doesn’t mean signs are not available. One of the most powerful signs is the change in the life of someone who has given their heart to Jesus.

Jesus and the disciples now got in their boat to go across the lake. As they reached the other side, Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. When yeast is mixed with the flour, it works so slowly that you can’t watch its effect, but over time it changes the whole lump of dough. Jesus was warning His disciples not to let the hypocrisy and unbelief of the Pharisees and Sadducees affect their belief in Him.

Hypocrisy or being a hypocrite is when a person says one thing but does another, or leads people to believe something about them that is not true.

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was a result of their pride and their desire to be important. They did or taught whatever was needed to get the people to treat them as important leaders. They would even twist the meaning of scriptures to get what they wanted.

The spirit of pride is wide spread even among the followers of Jesus today. Often the work of God and our relationships with each other are hurt by our desire to be important. It is the love of self, and wanting an easy way that leads us to replace God’s ways with our own. The example Jesus gave us was to give all the glory to God. It is only with the help of the Holy Spirit that we can follow the example of Jesus.

45

The Foreshadowing of the Cross

This chapter is based on Matthew 16:13-28; Mark 8:27-38; Luke 9:18-27.

The work of Jesus on this earth was soon coming to a close. He knew what He had to go through to save the people of our world from sin. Before He even became a man, He knew the suffering, the pain and the insults He would have to endure. But the twelve disciples still did not realize that their Master would soon be crucified on a cross. Jesus also knew He would soon be leaving them and He wanted to prepare them for the hard times ahead.

Before telling His disciples about what was coming, Jesus went off alone to pray that they would be prepared to hear it. When He was with them again, He asked them, “Who do people say I am?” The disciples were sad to admit that most of Israel did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. “‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say You are one of the other prophets’” (Mark 8:28 NLT).

“Then He asked them, ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:15-16 NLT). From the beginning, Peter believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Even though many of Jesus’ early followers had turned their backs on Him, the twelve disciples had not wavered from their belief in Him.

“Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed, Simon son of John, because My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you lock on earth will be locked in heaven, and whatever you open on earth will be opened in heaven’” (Matthew 16:17-19 NLT).

The name Peter means a stone, like a rolling stone. Peter was not the rock the church was built on. The powers of hell did conquer him when he denied Jesus with cursing and swearing. The apostle Paul later wrote, “For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have—Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT). Finally, if Jesus had chosen Peter to be the head or foundation of the church, the disciples would not have continued arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom.

Since Peter was the one to answer Jesus' question, Jesus honored him as the speaker for the group. The keys Jesus handed to Peter were His words, the Bible.

Even though the leaders of Israel had not accepted Him, the thought that Jesus wouldn't become king had never entered the minds of the disciples. Jesus now for the first time told them that He would have to suffer and be killed by the leaders of Israel and that He would be raised on the third day. "Peter took Jesus aside and told Him to stop talking like that. He said, 'God would never let this happen to You, Lord!' Jesus turned to Peter and said, 'Satan, get away from Me! You're in My way because you think like everyone else and not like God'" (Matthew 16:22-23 CEV).

Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to not go through with His death on the cross, and he used Peter to put it into words. Jesus wanted Satan out of the way so that He could help Peter to understand.

"Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'If any of you wants to be My follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow Me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for Me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?'" (Matthew 16:24-26 NLT).

To shoulder our cross means that we should be willing to go through hard times, be treated unfairly, be made fun of, or even to die for our belief in Jesus. And when He comes again to take us to heaven, we will be rewarded.

The disciples had many questions going through their heads. Could it be that Jesus would not become king of Israel as they expected? Is it possible that He was meant to live a humble life, teaching and healing, and finally being killed on a cross? Maybe they could do something to avoid the death on the cross for Jesus. If He did die, how was His kingdom to be setup so that the powers of hell would not conquer it? For six long days the disciples depressed themselves by talking about these things.

46

He Was Transfigured

This chapter is based on Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36.

As the day was coming to a close, Jesus called Peter, James and John and led them up a mountain trail. They were tired from traveling and teaching all day, so the disciples wondered why Jesus was leading them up this steep mountain path. Finally, Jesus told them to stop and He found a place to pray.

Jesus prayed for strength for the hard times ahead. He also prayed for His disciples that they would be able to bear the sorrow they would face in the coming days. Jesus knew the disciples had all been depressed since He told them about His death. Now He wanted to give them a sign to strengthen their faith, that He was indeed the Son of God.

When they stopped, the disciples started praying along with Jesus, but soon their tiredness took over and they fell asleep. Suddenly, they were woken by a light and they saw their Master shining as bright as the sun. Beside Him were Moses and Elijah, who had come down from heaven to encourage Him. Jesus looked like He will when He comes in glory to take us back to heaven. Moses, who died and was resurrected and taken to heaven, represented those who would die before going to heaven. Elijah represented those who would be living and taken to heaven without dying.

The disciples did not fully understand what they saw, but they were happy that their humble Master was being honored from heaven. They even hoped that Elijah had come to announce the Messiah's reign as King. Maybe Moses and Elijah had been sent to protect Jesus from the death that He told them was coming. Peter as usual, had to say something, "Master, let's build shelters for You and Moses and Elijah."

The messengers God had sent were not angels, but men who could understand the hard times Jesus was going through and could encourage Him. Moses had offered to give his life to save the lives of the Israelites and Elijah had stood alone for God on Mount Carmel.

While the disciples were watching, a bright cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, and I am fully pleased

with Him. Listen to Him.’ The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground” (Matthew 17:5-6 NLT).

A little later Jesus came to the disciples and touched them and said, “Don’t be afraid, get up.” When they got up, they saw that the glory was gone and they were alone with their Master again.

47

Ministry

This chapter is based on Matthew 17:9-21; Mark 9:9-29; Luke 9:37-45.

Jesus and the three disciples had been on the mountain all night. As they came down the mountain, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until He had risen from the dead. Even the other nine disciples would not understand it until after He had risen. They also wondered what He meant by the ‘the rising from the dead’ but they didn’t want to ask Him about something they hoped wouldn’t happen.

At the foot of the mountain, a crowd of people had already gathered looking for Jesus. A man had brought his son to have an evil spirit cast out, but the disciples were humbled and embarrassed because they couldn’t do it. As usual there were people in the crowd who were always trying to make Jesus look bad. They came to the disciples and started asking them all kinds of questions, even suggesting that maybe this was an evil spirit Jesus couldn’t cast out.

As soon as Jesus showed up the people welcomed Him, but the scribes and rabbis that were questioning the disciples backed off. Jesus looked directly at the scribes and asked them “What are you bothering them about?” Only moments before they were proud and confident, but now they kept quiet.

The father came forward and said, “I brought my son to have an evil spirit cast out but Your disciples couldn’t do it, can You?” Jesus said, bring your son. As soon as the boy was brought to Jesus, he started thrashing about on the ground. Jesus asked, “How long has he been like this?” The father answered, “Since he was very small, the evil spirit would throw him in fire or water, trying to kill him.” Getting a little desperate because Jesus was just asking questions while his son was thrashing about, he said, “Please do something if you can.” Jesus said, “If I can? Anything is possible if you believe.” Then the father said, “Lord, I believe, but help me to believe more if it’s not enough.”

Jesus then turned to the suffering boy and said, “You dumb and deaf spirit, come out, and never enter him again.” There was a terrible struggle and when the boy finally lay still, it looked like he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, lifted him up and presented him to his father in perfect health.

When the nine disciples were alone with Jesus, they asked, “Why couldn’t we cast out that demon?” Jesus said, because of your unbelief, “I assure you, even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible” (Matthew 17:20 NLT).

The nine disciples had been jealous because Jesus had taken Peter, James and John and left them behind. They had also been upset by His words referring to His death. Instead of praying and asking for their belief to be stronger, they had been doubting and complaining.

“Anything is possible if you believe,” is a promise for each one of us. We do not need perfect faith to come to Jesus with our requests. We can, like the father did, throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and say, help me to believe. We can claim this power to help us overcome sin in our lives. Jesus said, “I will never turn away anyone who comes to Me” (John 6:37).

48

Who Is the Greatest?

This chapter is based on Matthew 17:22-27; 18:1-20; Mark 9:30-50; Luke 9:46-48.

Jesus wanted to spend the rest of His time in Galilee teaching the disciples rather than the crowds of people. He was trying to prepare them for His soon coming death and resurrection, but the disciples were so set on Jesus becoming king that they didn't understand what He was telling them. In fact, they were arguing about which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom next to Jesus. They tried to hide these arguments from Jesus by falling behind while He walked ahead, but He read their thoughts as an open book.

When they reached town, a temple tax collector came to Peter and asked if Jesus paid the temple tax. This was really a trap laid by the spies who were continually trying to find fault with Jesus. This was not a tax to the government, but a religious tax to support the temple. There were certain classes of people such as Levites, prophets and religious teachers, who did not have to pay this tax. If Jesus refused to pay the tax, they would accuse Him of being disloyal to the temple. If He agreed to pay the tax, they would say that He wasn't a prophet or religious teacher. Peter only saw one side of the trap, so without asking Jesus, he said that Jesus would pay the tax.

When they reached the house where they were staying, Jesus explained to Peter that He was not required to pay the tax. But, just so we don't cause any trouble, go catch a fish and in its mouth you will find enough money to pay the tax for you and Me. If Jesus had just paid the tax without explaining why He wasn't required to, He would have been agreeing that He wasn't a religious teacher.

While Peter was fishing for the money to pay the tax, Jesus asked the eleven disciples what they were discussing on the way. When Jesus asked, they were ashamed to admit what they were discussing so they didn't say anything. After Peter returned, they finally got the courage to go to Jesus and ask, "Which one of us will have the highest position in Your kingdom?"

Jesus answered, "Anyone who wants to be the first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else" (Mark 9:35 NLT). Jesus called a small child over to Him and put the child in front of them. "Then he said, 'I assure you,

unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on My behalf is welcoming Me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who trusts in Me to lose faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck” (Matthew 18:2-6 NLT).

The spirit behind their desire to be first came from Satan. Lucifer had said, “I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14 NLT). But Lucifer didn’t really want to be like God, because to be like God is to be willing to be a servant. He wanted God’s power but not His character.

To fill positions of leadership on earth, God chooses people who are humble, and realize their need of His help. But if men get proud and think the work of God cannot move forward without them, then God will not use them and then His work will go forward with greater power without them.

The simple love and trust of a small child are what God considers great. We must become humble as a little child to be considered great in the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples started feeling guilty so they told Jesus they had met someone who was casting out demons in His name, and they made him stop. Jesus said, “Don’t stop him! No one who works miracles in My name will soon turn and say something bad about Me” (Mark 9:39 CEV).

We should not try to stop someone from working for Christ, just because they don’t go to our church or believe the same way we do. If we did, we might discourage that person from continuing their work for God. Then we might be guilty blocking God’s love from flowing through that person to the world. Jesus said it would be better for us to drown in the sea than to be responsible for causing someone to be lost.

We may also cause people to be lost by claiming to be Christians, then doing things that Christ would not do. When people see us, they might say, if that’s what a Christian is like, I don’t want anything to do with them. So we should ask God for help to stop doing anything that would give people a wrong picture of Him.

As salt was added to sacrifices, we need the goodness of Jesus to be added to our lives. If we have His goodness in our lives, we will not always be trying to get the best for ourselves, but we will want the best for others. As salt can be used to preserve food, a Christian salted with the goodness of Jesus, can help to preserve the world from evil. And, just as salt which has lost is

saltiness is useless to season food, so it is useless to say we are Christians without really having the goodness of Jesus in our lives. But by constantly keeping our eyes on Jesus, we will become changed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. “And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT).

Jesus taught that if a shepherd had one hundred sheep and one was missing, he would leave the ninety-nine at home and go searching for the one that was lost. After he finds it, he will be happier about finding the lost sheep than he was that the ninety-nine didn't run away. God is happy in a similar way when someone who is lost comes back to Him.

Since God cares so much for one lost person, we should do all we can to keep people from getting lost. If we are with someone who believes it is wrong to do something, but we believe it is ok to do it, we shouldn't do it. If we did, they might think we are sinning, then they might go out and do something that really is wrong.

If someone does something really bad to you, you shouldn't start telling everyone else about it, trying to make that person look bad. You should go directly to them and talk to them about it and try to get them to make things right. If they will not listen, then you should bring a couple people with you so that hopefully together you can convince them to make things right. If that doesn't work, only then should you bring it to the whole church so that everyone can pray for that person. Your whole purpose should be to save that person, not to criticize them or gossip about them.

Then Jesus made this promise, “Whenever two or three of you come together in My name, I am there with you” (Matthew 18:20 CEV). Jesus wanted us to know that it was not only at church that we would find His presence. Wherever there are believers, no matter how few, He will be there with them.

49

At the Feast of Tabernacles

This chapter is based on John 7:1-15, 37-39.

There were three events each year that the Jews were supposed to travel to Jerusalem for. The Feast of Tabernacles was the final one and lasted seven days. The harvests were all in, and it was a time to be thankful for God's goodness and mercy. Since this feast was also a time to remember God's protection when the Israelites lived in the wilderness, the people were to stay in shelters made out of branches with green leaves.

The temple was the center of the celebration, with sacrifices and temple choirs singing while the people waved palm branches. At night, the temple and its court blazed with light, while the ceremonies and singing continued. The most impressive ceremony was the one that reminded them of how God gave their ancestors water out of a rock.

As Jesus' step brothers prepared to go to the feast, they noticed that He was not preparing to go with them. Since He healed the man by the pool of Bethesda, He had not been attending the major feasts at Jerusalem. This was so He would have less conflict and not put Himself in so much danger with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The brothers had been impressed with the Miracles of Jesus and even though they didn't consider themselves disciples, they secretly hoped that He was the Messiah and would eventually become king. So they asked Him, "Why don't You go to Jerusalem so that more people can see Your miracles?"

Jesus answered, "You can go anytime because the people of the world don't hate you but they hate Me because I point out the evil things they do. This is not the right time for Me to go." Because of the hatred of the Jewish leaders against Him, if He showed up in Jerusalem, He would be putting His life in danger. Jesus did not choose to put His life in danger unless it was a part of God's plan.

News of the miracles of Jesus had been carried far and wide and now many people had come to Jerusalem hoping to see Him. Everyone was thinking about Jesus and wondering where He was. But the people were afraid to admit He was the Messiah for fear of what the priests and rulers would do to them.

Meanwhile Jesus had arrived at Jerusalem without being noticed. When interest and excitement about Him was at its peak, He stepped into the temple in front of all the people. Jesus then began to teach the people as they had never been taught before. The people were amazed and asked, “How does this man know so much when He didn’t go to the schools of the Rabbis?”

Jesus continued teaching the people in the temple everyday and on the last day of the feast He said, “If you are thirsty, come to Me! If you believe in Me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within” (John 7:37-38 NLT). All week long, the people had been taking part in one ceremony after another but none of them had fed their spirit like the teaching of Jesus. Many were ready like the woman from Samaria to say, “Give me some of that water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again” (John 4:15 NLT).

The invitation to drink the living water that Jesus offered still stands today. “Let the thirsty ones come—anyone who wants to. Let them come and drink the water of life without charge” (Revelation 22:17 NLT).

50

Among Snares

This chapter is based on John 7:16-36, 40-53; 8:1-11.

The whole time Jesus was in Jerusalem, the priests and rulers were planning not only to kill Him, but they also wanted to make Him look bad in front of the people. On the first day of the feast, they came to Jesus and asked, “What gives You the right to teach the people?” They knew Jesus hadn’t gone to their schools, so they asked, “Whose ideas are You teaching?” “So Jesus told them, ‘I’m not teaching My own ideas, but those of God who sent Me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether My teaching is from God or is merely My own. Those who present their own ideas are looking for praise for themselves, but those who seek to honor the one who sent them are good and genuine’” (John 7:16-18 NLT).

Jesus next went on to show the priests and rulers that He knew what they were thinking. He said, “You are breaking the law of Moses, by planning to kill Me.” “The crowd replied, ‘You’re demon possessed! Who’s trying to kill You?’” (John 7:20 NLT). Not only did they deny the truth, but they claimed the miracles of Jesus were done through Satan’s power.

When the leaders of the Pharisees saw how much the people liked everything Jesus said and did, they planned to arrest Him. But they decided to do it when He was alone because they were afraid the people wouldn’t like it.

There were many people who believed Jesus was the Son of God, but they were confused by the teaching of the priests and rabbis which said that no one would know where the Messiah came from, and that He would become king of the Jews and set up a kingdom in Jerusalem. If the people had studied the book of Isaiah for themselves, they would have seen that the sixty-first chapter described the exact work that Jesus was doing.

On the last day of the feast, some soldiers who were sent to arrest Jesus returned without Him. When asked why they had come back without Him, they said, “We’ve never heard anyone who could teach like He does.” Hardened soldiers had been so touched by the teaching of Jesus, that they had forgotten their mission.

Real truth is no more popular today than it was in Christ's day. Many will judge truth by how many people accept it. Others will wait until their leaders accept it before accepting something as truth.

Still determined to find some way to get Jesus in trouble, the Pharisees and scribes caught a woman in the act of being unfaithful to her husband. They dragged her up to Jesus and said, "In the law given to us by Moses, it says that women such as this should be stoned to death. What do You say?" If Jesus would not say she should be stoned, they planned to say that He was disobeying the Law of Moses. If Jesus said she should be stoned, they would go to the Romans and accuse Him of passing the death penalty on someone which would be breaking Roman law.

Jesus took a moment to look over the scene. He knew the thoughts of everyone in the crowd and He knew they were trying to trap Him. Ignoring their question, Jesus stooped over and started writing on the ground.

Unhappy that Jesus was ignoring them, the accusers came closer to see what He was doing. What they saw written on the ground were the secret sins of their own lives. As each one came closer and saw what was going on, they quietly backed off and left. Finally, Jesus stood up and said, "Whoever is not guilty of any sin, can throw the first stone," then He bent over and continued writing on the ground. After a while, Jesus stood up again and looked at the woman and asked, "Where are your accusers? Is no one trying to punish you anymore?" She said, "No Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither am I, go and don't keep making the same mistake."

This was the start of a new life for this woman. She was so thankful for His forgiveness that she became one of Jesus' most faithful followers. While He did not excuse her sin or say it wasn't that bad, Jesus did forgive her rather than condemn her to death. As true followers of Jesus, we should have a spirit of forgiveness rather than one of accusation and punishment. Like Christ, we should hate the sin but love the sinner.

51

“The Light of Life”

This chapter is based on John 8:12-59; 9.

On one of the days Jesus was teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles, He stood up and said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (John 8:12 NLT).

Throughout the history of the world, light has always been a symbol of God’s presence. God had been with the Israelites as a pillar of fire by night. Light filled the temple that Solomon built at its dedication. Light shone on the hills of Bethlehem when the birth of Jesus was announced. In the temple shortly after His birth, Simeon had said, “He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and He is the glory of Your people Israel!” (Luke 2:32 NLT). In saying that He was the light of the world, Jesus was saying that He was God.

To the Pharisees who thought Jesus was just a man, this was a pretty bold claim. They thought if they could get Him to actually say He was the Messiah, the people who thought He was just a prophet or a teacher would reject Him as being crazy. So, ignoring what Jesus had just said, they said, “Tell us who You really are.” Jesus did not directly answer their question but said, “I am the one I have always claimed to be” (John 8:25 NLT). He went on to say, “I don’t do whatever I want to do, I do whatever My Father wants Me to do.” If the Pharisees had really been open to God, they would have accepted Jesus.

“Jesus said to the people who believed in him, ‘You are truly My disciples if you keep obeying My teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32 NLT). But the Pharisees didn’t like these words. They said, “We are Abraham’s children and have never been slaves to anyone, so why would we need to be set free?” Jesus said, “Anyone who sins is a slave to sin, but if I set you free, you will truly be free.”

Everyone who doesn’t give their life to God, is under the control of Satan. They may tell themselves they are their own boss and do whatever they want but they are really doing the will of Satan. On the other hand, when we choose Jesus’ offer to free us from sin, we are completely free to choose

whether we will continue with that life or whether we will return to the life of sin.

The Jewish leaders claimed to be children of Abraham but they weren't true children of Abraham based on their actions. Their actions showed that they were children and slaves of Satan. Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and that he was glad when he got a glimpse of it. Then they said to Jesus, "You aren't even fifty years old, how can You say You've seen Abraham?" "Jesus answered, 'The truth is, I existed before Abraham was even born!' At that point they picked up stones to kill Him. But Jesus hid Himself from them and left the Temple" (John 8:58-59 NLT).

As Jesus and the disciples were walking along, they saw a man who had been born blind. The disciples asked Jesus, whether the man was blind because of his own sin or because of the sins of his parents. Jesus answered, "He is not blind because of his own sin or the sins of his parents, but you will see the power of God in his healing." Jesus spit on the ground and made some clay which He put on the man's eyes, and then He told him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed and he could see.

The Jews believed that God caused people to have diseases or physical handicaps, such as blindness, being deaf or not being able to walk, as punishment for sin. It is true that all suffering is a result of sin and that sometimes disease is a natural result of sin in our life, but God does not just cause people to be sick to punish them for some specific sin. This idea caused people who had become sick or handicapped to be thought of as terrible sinners.

The Pharisees were amazed by the Power of Jesus but because of their hatred, they chose to find fault with Jesus for healing the man on the Sabbath. The man was brought in front a group of Pharisees who were trying to confuse him and get him to say something they could use to prove the miracle did not happen. If they couldn't prove the miracle didn't happen, then they wanted to prove that Jesus was a sinner for performing miracles on the Sabbath.

Finally the man said, "Why do you keep asking me the same questions over and over, do you want to become His disciples?" God helped the man know how to answer the Pharisees' questions so they wouldn't have anything to use. They became so frustrated, that all they could do was to try to insult him, so they said, "We are disciples of Moses, but we don't know anything about this Jesus." "Why, that's very strange!" the man replied. "He healed

my eyes, and yet you don't know anything about Him! Well, God doesn't listen to sinners, but He is ready to hear those who worship Him and do His will. Never since the world began has anyone been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, He couldn't do it.' 'You were born in sin!' they answered. 'Are you trying to teach us?' And they threw him out of the synagogue" (John 9:30-34 NLT).

Later when he was found by Jesus, the man knelt down and worshipped Him as the Son of God. The miracle had given the man his sight but it had also helped him to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. If a person had never been told about Jesus, they would not be guilty for not accepting Him. But the Pharisees were guilty because they had seen so much evidence that Jesus was the Son of God, but they still refused to accept Him.

52

The Divine Shepherd

This chapter is based on John 10:1-30.

Jesus usually taught the people with stories or illustrations that they could relate to. Now He used something very familiar to describe His relationship with them. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11 NLT). “I am the good shepherd; I know My own sheep, and they know Me” (John 10:14 NLT). “I am the gate for the sheep. Those who come in through Me will be saved” (John 10:7,9).

The disciples were familiar with shepherds, and from then on, every time they saw a shepherd watching his flock they would think of the way Jesus takes care of them. How different this was from the Pharisees who would shut out anyone who didn't agree with them, just as they did to the man who had been healed of blindness.

Jesus is the doorway to God and anyone who comes to God through Him will be saved. People who claim to be shepherds or leaders of God's people but don't believe in Jesus are like thieves or robbers who climb over the wall instead of going through the gate. They are there to steal from God who owns us first because He created us and secondly because He died for us.

Throughout the history of the world, many people have started false religions which give the wrong idea about God. Not only do they turn people away from the true God, but they also end up making them slaves to false gods. On the other hand, the good news about God's love and forgiveness will lift us up and make us free.

The way a good shepherd knows each one of his sheep is an example of how Jesus knows each one of us. He knows our name, where we live, how we are feeling and the hard times we go through. He knows each one of us as if we were the only person He died for. Every single person is so precious to God that He would have died on the cross just to save one of us. He knows what we're going through because He lived as one of us and He does not leave us to struggle with sin and temptation alone, but offers to help us if we will only ask.

“I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice; and there will be one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16 NLT). This is a promise that even though many people have been led astray by false religions, they will eventually hear Jesus calling and will become part of His true flock.

53

The Last Journey From Galilee

This chapter is based on Luke 9:51-56; 10:1-24.

As Jesus' time on earth was coming to an end, He started behaving differently. Earlier in His ministry, He had tried not to draw too much attention to Himself. He refused to let the people make Him King. He told people not to call Him Christ. He even told some people not to tell anyone that they had been healed by Him. Now as He started making His way to Jerusalem, He seemed to be drawing attention to Himself. Jesus knew He was going to die at Jerusalem this time and He wanted everyone to notice.

It was very hard for Jesus knowing how unprepared His disciples were for what was coming. In fact Satan was tempting Him not to go to Jerusalem by making Him feel His disciples weren't ready yet. He was also tempting Jesus by telling Him how many people still needed to be healed and how many people were still hungering for the message He taught. In fact why not have the joy Himself of spreading the Gospel to the whole world. If Jesus had given in to the temptation to save His life, He would not have been able to save us.

As Jesus traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem, He passed through a Samaritan village. Because, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, the Samaritans refused to let Him stay in their village overnight. James and John became so angry at this insult to their Master that they asked Jesus, "Shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy this little village?" They were surprised to see the hurt look on the face of Jesus because of their question. He said, "I have not come to destroy lives but to save them." Jesus never forces Himself on anyone, so He went on to the next village and stayed there.

Much of the closing months of Christ's ministry on earth were spent in Perea, a province across the Jordan River from Judea. Many of the same teachings that He presented in Galilee were now repeated here. In further training for when He would no longer be with them, He chose seventy people to send out the way he sent the twelve earlier in His ministry. The seventy were chosen from people who had followed Him for most of His ministry. Jesus now gave them the same instructions He had given the

twelve except that this time they were to include the cities of Samaria. He also reminded them not to stay where they were not wanted.

When they returned, they were very pleased because even the demons obeyed them when they used the name of Jesus. Jesus told them, “Don’t be so pleased with yourselves because of that, you should be more pleased about having your name written in heaven.” Some Christians think and speak too much about Satan and how powerful he is. We should be talking about Jesus and His power instead; after all He has already defeated Satan. We should also not get too proud of our own abilities or we may begin to start thinking that we are the reason for the success of the work rather than God.

In the last few months of His ministry, Jesus used many parables in His teaching. Some were the same parables that He had used in Galilee. Some of the parables were about the Jewish leaders which made them even more desperate to stop Him, yet they couldn’t find anything they could use against Him. Jesus repeated the parable of the lost sheep but He added the stories of the lost coin and the prodigal son. After He went back to heaven and the disciples started sharing the gospel with the Gentiles, they could see how the Jewish leaders were like the jealous brother of the prodigal son.

In the future, whenever the disciples faced hardship and persecution, they would remember the words of Jesus, “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven have no holes in them. Your treasure will be safe—no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be” (Luke 12:32-34 NLT).

54

The Good Samaritan

This chapter is based on Luke 10:25-37.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to show that true religion is not just about beliefs and ceremonies. If someone has true religion they will love and treat others the way they would treat Jesus.

One day as Jesus was teaching, a lawyer stood up and asked, “Teacher, what can I do get eternal life?” If Jesus’ answer didn’t have something to do with the law given to Moses, the Pharisees were going to accuse Him of saying the law wasn’t important. Jesus knew what they were thinking and didn’t argue with them. He simply asked the man, “What does the law of Moses say?” “The man answered, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And, Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27 NLT). Jesus said, “Good answer!” But the Lawyer was not satisfied, so he asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

Even though he was being used by the Pharisees, the lawyer was honestly searching for what was missing in his life. His answer showed that he understood that religion was not just about beliefs, ceremonies and following rules as the Pharisees taught. He did a good job of reducing the Ten Commandments down to two simple rules, love God and love others. So he asked another question, “Who is my neighbor?”

To all Jews, there was no question that the heathen and Samaritans were enemies and not neighbors. But the Pharisees wanted to know where they could draw the line among their own people. Contact with the common people would make them unclean and it would take a lot of time and effort to make themselves clean again.

Jesus answered with a story. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers, who beat him up and took his clothes and everything he had. They left him on the side of the road, barely alive. That day a priest was also traveling the same road. When he saw the man, he pretended not to see and kept on going. A Levite was also traveling the same road and when he came to the man, he stopped to look. He felt sorry for the man and hoped someone would come by and help him but it was too messy and dangerous for him to stop and help, so he kept on going.

A Samaritan was also traveling that road and when he came to the dying man, he felt sorry for him and stopped to help him. He washed his wounds, then put him on his own donkey, and took him to the nearest inn and took care of him. When he had to leave the next day, he paid the inn keeper to take care of him and said, if you need more money, I will pay you when I come by next time. Jesus looked at the lawyer and asked, "Which of the three men was a neighbor to the wounded man?" Not wanting to even say the word Samaritan, he answered Jesus by saying, "The one who helped him." Then Jesus said, go follow his example.

Jesus didn't make up this story; in fact the priest and Levite in the story were actually in the crowd listening. These men were supposed to be the religious leaders and teachers of the people. Because of their position, they should have been more willing than the ordinary person to help someone in need. But when they looked at the man lying there, they could not tell if he was a Jew or Samaritan or even a heathen. They might be going through a lot of trouble or putting themselves in danger to help someone who was not worth helping.

Many people who say they are Christians forget that they are to show the world what Christ is like. But if they are not willing to trouble themselves to help others, they are not real Christians. When we see people in trouble, it doesn't matter if they are hungry or homeless or if we find they are in trouble because of sins they have committed, we should never say this is not my problem. If we fail to show love to our fellow man, we are actually guilty of breaking God's law.

55

Not With Outward Show

This chapter is based on Luke 17:20-22.

A group of Pharisees came to Jesus and asked, “When will the kingdom of God be set up?” It had been three years since John had said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). To the Pharisees, it didn’t seem like Jesus was making much progress in setting up His kingdom, so they saw Him as a failure.

Jesus answered, “The kingdom of God is not the kind of kingdom you are expecting. You will not be able to point at it and say, ‘that’s the kingdom of the Messiah.’ The kingdom of God is found in people’s hearts. Some day you will have really important questions for Me but you won’t be able to ask them.” Even the disciples of Jesus, didn’t fully understand His true mission until after He went back to heaven and they received the Holy Spirit. When they thought back on the things He said and did, and studied the prophecies, their minds were opened and it was like they were just waking up from a dream. Someone greater than Moses and wiser than Solomon had been with them but they felt like they had missed so much because they didn’t fully realize it at the time. Jesus had said, “Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now” (John 16:12 NLT).

There are religions and religious people who believe they are doing God’s work by trying to setup His kingdom on earth. They would like Him to make laws and punish people if they don’t obey them. And since He is not here, they go ahead with their ideas and say they are doing God’s work. But Jesus clearly said, “My Kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

The government Jesus lived under when He was here was not fair, but Jesus did not try to change it. He did not interfere with the authority of any government leader. He chose to work by changing people’s hearts. The apostle Paul also followed this example in his missionary work. He said, “For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and His death on the cross” (1 Corinthians 2:2 NLT). In our work for God, we should also follow this example.

56

Blessing the Children

This chapter is based on Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

Jesus loved children and He was always happy to receive their love. Their childlike kindness and praise were like cool refreshing water to Him. Wherever He went, children were attracted to Him because of the way He received them and loved them.

It was customary to bring children to a rabbi to have him lay his hands on their head and bless them. On one occasion, the disciples thought Jesus was too busy to be bothered by some children, so they sent them away. When Jesus saw what they did, He was not happy with them and said, “Let the children come to Me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14 NLT). Then the children came to Him and He spent some time with them and blessed them.

Jesus understood the concerns of mothers who were trying to train their children to follow God. It was He that impressed the mothers to bring their children to Him. If we as parents maintain our connection with God, we can expect the Spirit of God to have an influence on our children from the time they are born.

Children are more open to accepting Jesus than adults are, so we should teach them about Him while they are young. We should not look for big changes in feelings or emotions as a sign that they have accepted Jesus. Neither should we expect every child to know the exact time when they first accepted Jesus for themselves.

When mothers teach their children to obey them out of love, they are teaching the first lesson of being a Christian. A mother’s love for her children will be a picture of God’s love for them. Jesus was also an example to fathers when He spoke with authority but with kindness.

When Jesus told His disciples to let the children come to Him, He was also speaking to all church leaders, teachers and all Christians. We should never give a wrong picture of Jesus to children by being unkind or harsh to them. Never give them reason to feel that they wouldn’t want to be in heaven if people like you are there. Don’t teach them that religion is just about rules

and things they can't do. Use gentleness and kindness and repeat the lessons over and over, the way a gardener would train a delicate plant.

Jesus loves every child, not just the good ones. He wants Christian workers to bring children to Him and to teach them that He loves them. If they will let Him, Jesus will give them a new heart so that it can be said, "For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these."

57

“One Thing You Lack”

This chapter is based on Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23.

A young ruler came running up to Jesus and knelt down and asked, “Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?” (Mark 10:17 NLT). He had seen Jesus take the children in His arms and talk to them and treat them with tenderness. He felt love for Jesus and a desire to become His disciple. As a ruler, he knew the laws and he felt pretty good about how well he had kept them all. He thought he was pretty good, but he still felt something was missing in his life. Maybe if Jesus blessed him the way He blessed the children, it would satisfy the need he felt.

First, Jesus wanted the young ruler to think about why he called Him Good Teacher. Was he calling Jesus good just because he felt He was a good teacher or because he thought he was the Son of God? “‘Why do you call Me good?’ Jesus asked. ‘Only God is truly good’” (Mark 10:18 NLT).

In answering the ruler’s question Jesus went on to mention some of the commandments, “Don’t kill, be faithful to your wife, don’t steal, lie or cheat, honor your father and mother.” “The man replied, ‘I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was a child.’ ‘There is still one thing you lack,’ Jesus said. ‘Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.’ But when the man heard this, he became sad because he was very rich” (Luke 18:21-23 NLT).

In this young ruler, Jesus saw qualities that He could use to make a great leader and worker for Him. But Jesus could also see that his riches, power and all the things he owned were very important to him and that he loved these things more than he loved God. If he was not willing to give them up to follow Jesus, they would eventually lead him on a path away from God.

God doesn’t ask everyone to give up everything they own, and He has blessed some with money and talents which they should use to help the poor and suffering. God asks each person who wants to become His disciple to be willing to give up all for Him. Those who love God more than their riches and the things they own, and are willing to spend their money for the good of others are working together with Jesus. When we give our money and time to do God’s work, we are putting our treasure in heaven and will hear

the words, “You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in My happiness!” (Matthew 25:23 CEV)

58

“Lazarus, Come Out”

This chapter is based on Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44.

Lazarus was one of Christ’s most faithful followers. It was at the home of Lazarus and his two sisters Mary and Martha in Bethany that Jesus often rested from His work. It was a place where He could get away from the jealous Priests and Pharisees and rest in the company of friends. Here He could speak knowing His words would be appreciated and not used against Him.

One day Martha was hurrying around preparing a meal for Jesus and some guests while Mary sat at His feet listening to Him. Martha came to Jesus and said, “‘Lord, doesn’t it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.’ But the Lord said to her, ‘My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it—and I won’t take it away from her’” (Luke 10:40-42 NLT).

Martha needed to learn that no matter how many important things there were to do, spending time with Jesus is the most important of them all. Christ needs people like Martha to do His work here on earth, but they must first learn to spend time with Him, then they can be a great power for good.

One day Lazarus became very sick, so his sisters sent a message to Jesus letting Him know that His good friend was sick. They knew that Jesus had the power to heal Lazarus and they figured He would quickly come and do so. But Jesus simply sent a message back saying, “The sickness will not end in death, and people will be amazed by My power when it’s all over.”

The disciples were surprised that Jesus did not immediately go to Lazarus, but just continued what He was doing for a few more days. With His power to perform miracles, they had wondered why He had left John the Baptist to die in prison, and now left His good friend to suffer in sickness. Even though Jesus had warned them that they should be willing to suffer and die for His sake, they wondered if He would forsake them if they were in trouble.

After a couple days, Jesus said “Let’s go to Judea.” “‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Only a few days ago the Jewish leaders in Judea were trying to kill You.

Are You going there again?” (John 11:8 NLT). Jesus said, “As long as I follow God’s plan for My life, anything that happens to Me is His will. In this case, I know that My work is not done yet, so I know the Jews will not harm Me.”

Then Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus is sleeping and I’m going to wake him up.” The disciples said, “If he’s sleeping, he’ll get better right?” Jesus answered, “That’s not the kind of sleep I was talking about. Lazarus is dead, but just wait and you will see something that will strengthen your belief in Me.”

If Jesus had been there, Lazarus could not have died because death could have no power over him in the presence of the creator of life. To Jesus, death is like sleep because He can wake us from death as easily as someone can wake us from sleep. The raising of Lazarus back to life was meant to be a sign that would prove once and for all that He was who He claimed to be, the Son of God.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, He sent a message to the sisters that He had come. Martha got the message and went to see Jesus right away. Even though the sisters had felt sure that their brother would not have died if Jesus had been there, they had not lost confidence in Jesus. Martha now hoped that Jesus might do something to comfort them in their sorrow. When she saw Jesus she said, “‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask.’” Jesus told her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ ‘Yes,’ Martha said, ‘When everyone else rises, on resurrection day.’ Jesus told her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again’” (John 11:21-25 NLT). Martha answered, “I believe You are the Messiah and the Son of God,” then she sent word to Mary that Jesus had come.

When Mary got the message, she got up right away to go to Jesus. When she saw Him she knelt at His feet and in sadness said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus asked, “Where did you bury him?” They said, “Come and see.” When they got to the tomb, Jesus looked at the crowd of mourners and had pity on them and He cried. Some of the people looked at Him and said, see how much He loved Lazarus, but some said couldn’t He have kept him from dying?

Jesus was not crying because He was sad that Lazarus had died. He was going to bring him back to life in a few minutes. Yes, He was sad because

Mary and Martha were sad, but it was more than that. Jesus was sad for all the people who would reject Him and die without the hope of a resurrection.

Bringing Himself back to the present, Jesus asked that the stone be moved from the entrance to the tomb. Then Martha said, “Lord, there’s going to be a bad smell because he’s been dead for four days now.” With a gentle voice, Jesus reminded her, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see the power of God if you believe.”

Jesus stepped a little closer, then started to pray, “‘Father, thank You for hearing Me. You always hear Me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so they will believe You sent Me.’” Then Jesus shouted, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” (John 11:41-43 NLT). The people were hardly breathing as they waited to see what would happen next. Shortly, Lazarus still bound in the burial cloths, made his way to the entrance of the tomb. Jesus then said, “Take the burial cloths off him.”

At first, the people were speechless with amazement. This was followed by a scene of rejoicing and thankfulness. Amid all the excitement and happiness, Jesus quietly slipped away, giving His disciples and the family an opportunity to share their belief in Him with others in the crowd.

59

Priestly Plottings

This chapter is based on John 11:47-54.

Bethany was close to Jerusalem and word of the resurrection of Lazarus had been quickly carried to the Jewish rulers there. They quickly called a meeting of the Sanhedrin to decide what should be done. The Priests and Pharisees had been asking for a sign to prove that Jesus was who He claimed to be. To the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection, this miracle was a sign to prove beyond any doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. But their minds were so clouded with hatred, that rather than accepting the evidence before their eyes, they were angry that this powerful new sign would make Jesus more popular with the people.

Before this time the Sadducees had not been against Jesus as much as the Pharisees had been. They had claimed that it was impossible for a person to be resurrected from the dead but with a few words Jesus had just proved them wrong. Jesus was making them look like they didn't know what they were talking about. Because of that, the Sadducees were now fully united with the Pharisees in their desire to kill Jesus.

Now the Sadducees and Pharisees worked together to figure out a way to get rid of Jesus. Nicodemus and Joseph who had spoken up to defend Jesus in the past were not invited to this meeting. But the council could not completely agree on a reason for putting Christ to death. They had to be careful because if they did anything to stir up the people, the Romans might blame them and take away what little power they had.

Finally, Caiphas the high priest was able to unite most of the council with this reasoning. He said, even if Jesus was not guilty of doing anything wrong, He was drawing the people to Himself and reducing their authority over the people. He explained that the followers of Jesus would probably rise up against the government, then the Romans would step in and destroy them as a nation. They would be doing God's will in killing this one Man in order to preserve the nation of Israel.

The Holy Spirit was working on the hearts of the men at this council. It was not hard for them to see that Jesus was more than a mere man. But Satan was also working on them by reminding them how the people were flocking to

Jesus and away from them. He reminded them that Jesus did not recognize their schools or obey their traditions and had greatly hurt their popularity as leaders. Satan led them to believe that it was either them or Jesus and if they wanted to keep their authority, they would have to put Him to death. All but a few were now agreed on what they must do. They had put themselves completely under the control of Satan and they were so deceived that they were pleased with their decision and felt they were doing a good thing for the nation.

Jesus had worked and taught publicly for about three years and that was about as much as the world could endure. He had been rejected and condemned to death by the very people He had come to save. Even though He had the power to heal all kinds of sickness, cast out demons, calm storms and raise the dead, He was not able to reach the hearts of people who were blinded by pride and hatred.

60

The Law of the New Kingdom

This chapter is based on Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:32-45; Luke 18:31-34.

It was Passover time again and Jesus headed towards Jerusalem. Even though He knew He was going to die there, He was perfectly at peace with the plan. Jesus told His disciples again that He was going to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed and killed as the prophets had written. He also told them that on the third day He would come back to life. None of this went along with what they had believed about the Messiah, so they probably thought He was speaking to them using parables or symbols but they didn't understand.

The disciples' faith in Jesus was still strong and they still believed that as the Messiah, He would become king. Even up to this point, the disciples were still all hoping for the highest position in the kingdom next to Jesus. John had been one of the first two disciples to follow Jesus and his brother James was in the first group that had been asked to leave their jobs to follow Jesus. Their mother was also a follower of Jesus and had done what she could to help with the work. Wanting the best for her sons, she came to ask Jesus if her sons could be next to Him in power in His new kingdom.

Even though it was a selfish request, Jesus knew their heart and He knew how much they loved Him. He asked, will you keep following Me even if it means going through hard times and suffering? James and John both answered confidently, "We will." Jesus said, "You will go through some of the same suffering that I go through, but it is up to My Father to decide who will sit next to Me in My kingdom.

When the other ten disciples heard the request made by the mother of James and John, they were furious. That was what each one of them wanted for themselves and now it appeared that James and John might have an advantage over them because they had asked first. When it looked like this argument was going to flare up between the disciples again, Jesus called them to Him and said, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give My life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28 NLT).

Years later, towards the end of his life, the disciple John understood better what it took to sit near Christ in the kingdom of heaven. He wrote these words of Christ, “I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with Me on My throne” (Revelation 3:21 NLT). Those who are closest to Christ on this earth will be the most like Him which means they will be the most willing to serve others. They will be kind, loving and will always think of the needs of others before their own. They will show the kind of love Paul wrote about, “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5 NLT). These are the kind of people who will sit closest to Christ in His kingdom, not those who want power and authority for themselves.

61

Zacchaeus

This chapter is based on Luke 19:1-10.

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through the city of Jericho. Since many travelers and caravans passed through the city, there were many taxes to be collected. Because of this many tax collectors also known as publicans lived there and Zacchaeus was the chief over all of them.

Zacchaeus had become very wealthy because of his job. The Romans allowed tax collectors to collect more than was required by the government and anything over the required amount could be kept by them. But in the sight of God, it was simply stealing. This was how the publicans became rich but it was also one of the reasons they were hated so much.

The Holy Spirit had been working on Zacchaeus' heart and he felt guilty for what he was doing. He had listened to the teachings of John the Baptist who had said, "Make sure you collect no more taxes than the Roman government requires you to" (Luke 3:13 NLT). After hearing some of the teachings of Jesus, he was convinced he was doing wrong and he immediately started trying to make things right. He had already started paying back people that he had overtaxed when he learned that Jesus was going to be passing through Jericho. He didn't even feel he was worthy to talk to Jesus but he hoped that he could at least see Him.

When the day came, Jesus was surrounded by such a large crowd of people that Zacchaeus couldn't get anywhere near Him. He was also a very short man which made it hopeless for him to try to see anything over the top of the crowd. Suddenly an idea came to him and he ran to a sycamore or fig tree which had branches hanging out over where Jesus and the crowd would pass. He climbed up the tree and found a good place to sit and watch.

Zacchaeus finally spotted Jesus and watched Him as He came closer and closer. When Jesus was directly under the tree, He suddenly stopped and looked up in the tree and said, "Zacchaeus, come down, I have the rest of the day to spend at your house." Zacchaeus could hardly believe it as he led the way to his house, but the rabbis were whispering to each other, "He's going to be the guest of a sinner!" While all the attention was on him, Zacchaeus decided to make a confession, so in front of Jesus and all the people he said,

“Lord, I’m going to give half of what I own to the poor; and if I’ve taken anything from anyone unfairly, I will repay him four times what I took.”
“Jesus responded, ‘Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham’” (Luke 19:9 NLT).

Anyone who truly repents will show it by the changes they allow God to make in their life. God commanded us in the Bible to take care of the poor among us, and even said that if we loaned them money, not to charge them interest (Leviticus 25:35-37). In response to the love of Jesus for him, one of the first changes in Zacchaeus’ life was to show compassion to the poor.

When it came to making things right with the people he had stolen from, Zacchaeus returned four times he as much as he took. He understood that he was responsible not only for repaying the original amount, but what it could have become if used or invested wisely.

It is only when we accept Christ as our personal Savior and not just as a guest to our house that we will truly be saved. Zacchaeus received Jesus as a guest but his actions showed that he had also accepted Jesus as his personal Savior.

62

The Feast at Simon's House

This chapter is based on Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 7:36-50; John 11:55-57; 12:1-11.

Simon of Bethany was one of the few Pharisees who had openly become a follower of Jesus. One of the main reasons Simon was a follower was because Jesus had healed him of leprosy. He recognized Jesus as a religious teacher and hoped that He was the Messiah. Simon wanted to thank Jesus for his healing by having a feast in His honor.

Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover and as usual, He stayed at the home of Lazarus. There was a lot of excitement about Jesus especially since He had raised Lazarus from the dead. Some believed He was the Messiah, some were hoping He was the Messiah and some were simply curious. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders were growing more desperate in their attempts to put an end to this Man who was attracting so much attention.

The crowds were eager to see Jesus and they wondered if He would travel to Jerusalem together with Lazarus. It seemed like all the excitement was building up to something and the people wondered if Jesus would be crowned king at the Passover.

As the priests and Pharisees planned how they could be rid of Jesus, they decided that they would also have to be rid of Lazarus. They figured as long as Lazarus was around, he would be a reminder of the power of Jesus. They had become so blinded by their jealousy and hatred that they would even murder an innocent man to accomplish their purpose.

At the feast, Simon sat on one side of Jesus and Lazarus sat on the other. Martha as usual was cooking and serving while Mary eagerly took in every word from Jesus. Mary's heart was full of thankfulness to Jesus for forgiving her sins and also for raising her brother back to life. She had heard Jesus talking about his coming death, so she spent her savings to buy a special box of perfume to anoint His body. But now that so many people were talking about Him becoming king, she decided to honor Him by anointing Him with her perfume. She broke the box open and poured it on His head and feet and with tears of thankfulness, she moistened His feet and wiped them with her hair.

Mary was not trying to attract attention to herself but there was no way the fragrance of her perfume would not be noticed. When Judas saw what she was doing, he recognized the value of the ointment and started whispering to those around him, “That perfume was worth a small fortune. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor” (John 12:5 NLT). Jesus and His disciples had a money bag that they would use to help the poor. Judas didn’t really care about the poor, but since he kept the money for the group, the more he had control of the better. Sometimes he would even steal money from the bag for his own use and tell himself that he was just paying himself a little for all his hard work.

Mary could hear what people were saying and was about to sneak away before Jesus or her sister directly criticized her. Then she heard Jesus say, “Leave her alone. She did it in preparation for My burial. You will always have the poor among you, but I will not be here with you much longer” (John 12:7-8 NLT). Mary anointed Jesus’ body while He was still alive to appreciate her gift. Jesus went on to say, “I assure you, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be talked about in her memory” (Matthew 26:13 NLT).

The other eleven disciples were not like Judas. They loved Jesus but even they did not truly appreciate Him the way they should have. Mary and the wise men at His birth showed that they felt Jesus was worthy to receive gifts fit for a King. It was not until Jesus was gone that the disciples began to understand what they had lost. It was then that they realized that there was nothing they could have given or sacrificed for Him that would have been too great.

How often do we bring gifts and speak kind words about someone at their funeral. Just think about how much joy those words could have brought if they had been spoken while the person was still alive to hear them.

In addition to agreeing with Judas, Simon also thought to himself that if Jesus were a prophet, He would not let that woman touch Him because she was a sinner. If Christ knew the woman was a sinner, He should have reminded her of her sins or told her to stay away and definitely not to touch Him.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, and He also knew that it was Simon who had led Mary into sin. Wanting to let Simon know that He knew his thoughts without embarrassing him said, Jesus told Him a story. ““A man loaned money to two people—five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly

forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?' Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt'" (Luke 7:41-43 NLT). "Good answer," Jesus said. Then looking at Mary, He said to Simon, "You didn't have someone wash My feet when I arrived, but Mary washed My feet with her tears. You didn't greet Me with a kiss but she kissed My feet. Yes, she was a great sinner, but her many sins have been forgiven, so she loves Me a lot. Someone who thinks they don't need much forgiveness wouldn't feel as much love."

Simon was very thankful that Jesus didn't publicly mention his sins in front of his guests. He now realized the kindness of Jesus in not treating him the way he wanted Mary to be treated. Simon's heart was touched, and after receiving forgiveness for his sins, he became a humble disciple of Jesus.

63

“Your King is Coming”

This chapter is based on Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19.

“Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet He is humble, riding on a donkey—even on a donkey’s colt” (Zechariah 9:9 NLT). Jesus was about to fulfill this prophecy written by the prophet Zechariah Five hundred years before He was born. He sent His disciples to borrow a colt for Him to ride into Jerusalem on. They went eagerly, thinking that the day had finally come when Jesus would take the throne of David as king.

The disciples and the crowd that was quickly gathering believed their deliverance from Rome was near. Up to this time, Jesus had discouraged any attempts to make Him king, but now He appeared to be choosing to enter Jerusalem as royalty. The common people didn’t have any costly gifts to offer Him, but they spread their coats on the road in front of Him and cut down olive and palm branches to use in the celebration. The procession started with shouts of hosanna and waving of palm branches. As the procession made its way to Jerusalem, more and more people got caught up in the excitement of the moment and joined the crowd.

It was the beginning of Passover and when the priests blew the trumpet to start the evening service, hardly anyone was there. The Pharisees were burning with jealousy because of all the attention Jesus was getting. In fact they were afraid that there might be enough people in this procession that they might actually succeed in placing Jesus on the throne. So a group of them came to Jesus and pretending to show concern for their nation, asked Him to quiet the crowd. They claimed that He was breaking the law by leading this large noisy crowd into Jerusalem, and that He might even cause the Romans to crack down on them because of it. Jesus replied, “If the people became quiet, the stones along the road would cry out in their place.”

Jesus had never allowed the people to treat Him as a king and He knew that it would lead to His death. But everyone in Jerusalem would be watching Him and after He was killed on the cross, many people would study the prophecies and become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.

At the top of a hill overlooking Jerusalem, Jesus stopped. The people were filled with pride as they looked at the beautiful sight of Jerusalem and the temple in the light of the setting sun. They were thinking of the glory they would have as a nation once Jesus became king. But when they looked at Jesus, instead of seeing the same pride they were feeling, they were shocked to see tears coming to His eyes. Soon Jesus let out a wail of sorrow and broke down sobbing and crying. Even though He knew He was going to suffer and die shortly, Jesus was not crying for Himself. He was sad because the nation of Israel had rejected Him and would soon be suffering terribly because of their rebelliousness against Rome.

Jesus and the procession once again started moving towards the city. It was still not too late for Jerusalem to accept Him. If they would accept their Savior and Messiah, their course would have changed and they would not have suffered the terrible destruction they were headed for. But when Jesus reached the gates of Jerusalem, He was met by the rulers of Jerusalem who demanded, “Who do You think You are, leading this noisy crowd into Jerusalem?”

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the disciples answered:

Adam said He is the one who would bruise the serpent’s head.

Isaiah will tell you He is “Immanuel,” “Wonderful Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6).

Daniel said He is the Messiah.

John the Baptist called Him, “The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 NLT).

God Himself said, “This is My beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with Him” (Matthew 3:17 NLT).

The evil spirits call Him “The Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24).

Then the disciples said, “And we say He is Jesus, the Messiah, the Prince of life, the Savior of the world.”

64

A Doomed People

This chapter is based on Mark 11:11-14, 20, 21; Matthew 21:17-19.

The angry priests and rulers, still trying to silence the crowd, turned to some Roman soldiers and told them, that Jesus was the leader of a rebellion and was about to declare Himself king in Jerusalem. Once again, in a calm yet powerful voice, Jesus reminded them that He had not come to set up an earthly kingdom. He said He would soon be out of their way because He was going back to His Father.

As the soldiers looked at the calm face of Jesus, they could see love, but they also saw power as if He really were a king. It was clear to them that Jesus had no thoughts of rebellion against Rome. Instead of arresting Jesus, they felt more like treating Him as royalty. Then turning on the priests and rulers, they accused them of causing a disturbance.

While this discussion between the priests, rulers and Roman officials was going on, Jesus quietly slipped away to the temple without being noticed. He stayed there for a little while and then took His disciples back to Bethany. When the crowd looked for Him to try to place Him on the throne, He was nowhere to be found.

On His way back to the temple the next morning, Jesus and the disciples passed a fig orchard. Jesus was hungry and even though it wasn't fig season, He hoped that He might find something that He could eat. It is normal for figs to appear on the tree before the leaves, so when Jesus saw a fig tree covered with leaves, He thought there was a good chance that it would have some fruit. When they arrived at the tree, they searched it from top to bottom but couldn't find any fruit. As usual, Jesus was always looking for object lessons to help people remember His teachings so He cursed the tree saying, "May no one ever eat your fruit again!" (Mark 11:14 NLT).

The next day as they were passing the orchard on their way to the temple, they noticed that the tree had withered up and was dying. The disciples had been shocked by the cursing of the fig tree by Jesus, because it was so unlike Him. His whole life had been spent healing, forgiving and showing compassion.

The tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel. They had been chosen by God to receive His law and had been showered with His blessings. Their beautiful temple and the impressive ceremonies were like the leaves of the fig tree. But the fruit which should have been the sharing of God's love and mercy with others was nowhere to be found. The withered tree was an example of what the Jews would become like when the grace and blessings of God were taken from them. Because they refused to share them, they would no longer receive God's blessings.

The cursing of the fig tree is a lesson for us as well. Those of us who have been given God's Words and learned of His love and mercy must share this knowledge with others. If we do not, we will be more guilty in the end than those who didn't know about God. Our religion would be like the tree full of leaves without any fruit. In God's eyes, a bad person who doesn't know about Him is less guilty than a person who claims to be a Christian but bears no fruit.

65

The Temple Cleansed Again

This chapter is based on Matthew 21:12-16, 23-46; Mark 11:15-19, 27-33; 12:1-12; Luke 19:45-48; 20:1-19.

At the start of His ministry, Jesus had cleared the temple of the people selling animals and exchanging money. Now near the end of His ministry, He found the temple in the same or worse condition, with the sellers and money changers treating the people so unfairly, that they might as well have just been stealing their money.

As He did the first time, Jesus silently looked over the courtyard of the temple. All eyes were watching Him and noticed the power that seemed to flow out of Him. People near Him who felt guilty tried to move as far away as possible. It was completely quiet when Jesus finally spoke with a voice as powerful as thunder, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a place of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves!” (Matthew 21:13 NLT). Then as He did three years before, He commanded them, “Get these things out of here.”

After the sellers and priests had run from the temple the last time, they felt ashamed that they had been scared of Jesus whom they claimed was just a simple carpenter. They thought that if they ever had a second chance, they would stand up to Him and not run out like they did the first time. But this time, they found that they were more scared than they were the first time, and they tripped over each other in their rush to get out of His presence.

The Jews had actually gotten so used to the sight of blood from the animal sacrifices that it had pretty much lost any meaning for them. They had no idea that it represented the blood of Jesus when He would be sacrificed to pay for the sins of the world. In the past through the prophets, Jesus had tried to teach the people that sacrificing animals was not done to please God. He was much more interested in their obedience than He was in their sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22). “‘I am sick of your sacrifices,’ says the LORD. ‘Don’t bring Me any more burnt offerings! I don’t want the fat from your rams or other animals. I don’t want to see the blood from your offerings of bulls and rams and goats. Why do you keep parading through My courts with your worthless sacrifices? Wash yourselves and be clean! Let Me no longer see

your evil deeds. Give up your wicked ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows” (Isaiah 1:11-12,16,17 NLT).

When the priests and rulers finally found the courage to come back, they saw all kinds of sick people being healed. They saw children making lots of noise, praising Jesus. He had children on His lap and one had even fallen asleep in His arms. In fact, after riding into Jerusalem as a King a few days before, they thought maybe now He would take the throne and declare Himself king. As they looked over the scene, their thoughts were that the temple was being dishonored by the children and all their noise. When they asked Jesus to quiet the children down, He responded by saying, the prophets had predicted this rejoicing by the children and if they became quiet, the pillars of the temple would sing His praises in their place.

Three years ago, the priests and rulers had asked Jesus for a sign. Since that time, He had healed many sick people, fed thousands, walked on the water, calmed storms, raised the dead, cast out demons, and always knew what they were thinking. Now they asked who gave Him the right to do what He wanted with the temple. They expected Him to say that God gave Him the right and then they would try to find a way to use that against Him. Instead Jesus surprised them by saying, “I will ask you a question and if you can answer My question, I will answer yours.” He asked, “Did John’s baptism come from God or not?”

The priests right away saw that they were in a bind. If they said, it was from God, Jesus would ask why they didn’t accept John’s teachings. But they didn’t want to say it wasn’t from God because most of the people believed John was a prophet and they were afraid the people would turn against them. So they said to Jesus, “We cannot give you an answer.” And Jesus responded, “Then neither will I.” Every time Jesus saw through their traps and avoided them, the people lost more and more respect for the priests and rulers.

Jesus now told a story. “A man with two sons went to the first son and asked him to go work in the vineyard. The son answered, ‘sure dad,’ but he never actually went to work in the vineyard. The father went to the second son and asked him to go work in the vineyard. The second son answered, ‘dad, I don’t want to work in the vineyard.’ But later the second son decided to obey his father and went to work in the vineyard.” Turning to the priests and rulers, Jesus asked, “Which of the two sons obeyed the father?”

They had been following the story closely and immediately answered, “The second son.” Jesus then looked directly at them and said, “The publicans and other people you think of as great sinners will enter the kingdom of God before you. You claim to follow God but you are not really doing His will, yet these sinners, when they heard John’s call to repent, believed him and did what he said.”

“I have another story for you,” Jesus said. “A man planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, and built a winepress and a tower. Then he rented the vineyard out to farmers and went to live in a country far away. When the time came for the grape harvest, he sent some servants to get his share of the crop. But the farmers beat and killed the servants. So the owner sent more servants, and the farmers did the same to them as well. Finally, the owner decided to send his son, thinking they will respect him. But when the farmers saw the son, they said, ‘let’s kill him as well and then maybe we’ll inherit the vineyard.’” Jesus asked, “When the owner of the vineyard comes back, what do you think he’ll do to those farmers?”

Again the priests and rulers had been following the story and had an answer, “He will kill those farmers and rent his vineyard out to farmers who will give him his share at harvest time.” Even as they were finishing their answer, they realized that they were the bad farmers in the story. It was not just this generation of Jews that were guilty. Messengers and prophets that had been sent by God throughout their history had been beaten, stoned, tortured and killed. Even though they could clearly see their part in the story and they had pronounced their own death sentence, they hated Jesus so much they were willing to go ahead and do their part by killing the Son of God.

Jesus had one more illustration to share. During the building of the temple by Solomon, huge stones had been cut at the rock quarry and were brought to be assembled into the temple. It was designed so that all preparation would be done off site and that no noisy tools would be used in the final assembly of the temple. As they were laying the foundation, there was one especially large and strange shaped stone. The builders couldn’t figure out where it went, so it just lay around, even getting in their way as they went about their work. When the time came to find a stone for a corner of the building, no stone was big or strong enough to do the job. It was important to choose the right stone for this corner of the foundation, because it would affect the strength of the whole building. When they finally tried the stone that had been in their way for so long, they found that it was a perfect fit. The stone had been sitting out in the heat and cold, sun and rain, yet not a single crack could be found on it. When they tested it to see if it would hold

up under the weight it would need to support, it held up without any problem. The stone in this story was a symbol of Christ. Even though He was rejected by the Jews, He eventually became the corner stone of the foundation for the Christian Church.

66

Controversy

This chapter is based on Matthew 22:15-46; Mark 12:13-40; Luke 20:20-47.

Even though Jesus saw through every single one of their traps, the priests and rulers kept trying to trick Him into saying something they could use against Him. To lay another trap for Jesus, they were even willing to cooperate with their hated enemies, the Herodians who were supporters of Herod. They sent some young, sincere looking spies that they thought Jesus wouldn't recognize to ask Him a question. "Teacher, we know how honest You are. You teach about the way of God regardless of the consequences. You are impartial and don't play favorites. Now tell us what You think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?" (Matthew 22:16-17 NLT).

Jesus read their thoughts as an open book and immediately saw their trap. He said, "Do you really think you can trick Me that easily? Show Me a coin." When they handed Him a coin, He asked them, "Whose picture is on the coin?" They answered, "Caesar's." Then He said, "Pay the taxes that Caesar requires and give your tithe and offerings to God."

The spies had thought Jesus would just answer their question. So if He said not to pay your taxes, He would be in trouble with the Romans. If He said to pay your taxes, they were going to claim He said to pay your taxes instead of paying your tithes and offering. When they heard Jesus' answer, they were amazed and left.

The Sadducees claimed to believe in most of the scriptures but they didn't believe in angels, the resurrection of the dead or in life after death. In all these points they disagreed with the Pharisees. Because of these disagreements, there were many arguments which often ended with the Pharisees confused or angry because they didn't know how to respond to all the questions of the Sadducees.

Now the Sadducees decided to question Jesus on the topic of the resurrection. If He should agree with them, they could make fun of the Pharisees. If He disagreed with them, they felt confident that they could confuse Him and make fun of Him the way they always did to the Pharisees.

Their question started out with this story. The oldest of seven brothers got married but died before having any children. The Law of Moses said that a brother should marry the woman and have a child to carry on the name and inherit the property of the oldest brother. Eventually all seven brothers married the woman but died without having children. So, the question was: “When they are resurrected from the dead, which of the brothers will be the husband of the woman?”

Jesus answered, “Your problem is that you don’t understand the scriptures, or the power of God. After the resurrection, people will not marry but will be like the angels in heaven.” The Sadducees refused to believe something if they couldn’t understand and make sense of it. The problem with that reasoning is that God is can do things that we can’t even imagine or understand. Sadly, many people refuse to believe in God because they cannot understand or make sense of Him.

The Pharisees were ready for another try at tricking Jesus. They choose a lawyer to present this question to Him. The lawyer asked, “Which is the most important of the Ten Commandments?” The Pharisees believed that the first four commandments, which have to do with out relationship with God, were much more important than the last six which have to do with our relationship with our fellow man. Jesus answered, “The first commandment is this: there is only one God, and you must love Him with all your heart and mind and strength. The second commandment is similar and it is to love your neighbor as yourself. Everything in the scriptures and all that the prophets wrote all agree with these two commandments.”

The two commandments cannot be separated. We cannot break one of them but still keep the other. It is only when we truly love God, which is the first commandment, that we will be able to truly love our fellow man.

After answering the question, Jesus asked the Pharisees who were there a question. He wanted to them to think about whether the Messiah they were expecting was a man or God, so He asked, “Whose son will the Messiah be?” They all quickly answered, “The Son of David.” Then Jesus asked, “Why does David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, call the Messiah Lord when he wrote: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, Sit in honor at My right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet’” (Psalm 110:1). No one could give Him an answer, so they left and didn’t ask Him anymore questions.

67

How Terrible Will It Be For You Pharisees ...

This chapter is based on Matthew 23; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 20:45-47; 21:1-4.

On the last day that Jesus taught in the temple, He was surrounded by a huge crowd of people. He was dressed in the simple clothes that He always wore. He was surrounded by priests dressed in their beautiful priestly robes and teachers in their expensive clothes with all the accessories to show how smart or important they were. Jesus stood calmly in the center and even in His humble clothes, He looked like a king. The priests, teachers and rulers surrounding Him had scrolls that they looked at from time to time as they tried to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him. They had never succeeded yet they kept trying. The people were amazed that the leaders refused to believe in Jesus, when His teachings were so simple and made so much sense.

The people had been taught to respect the priests and teachers, which caused many of them not to accept Jesus. Jesus wanted to show the people that most of these leaders didn't really care about them, and instead were actually taking advantage of them. He wanted the people to see what these leaders were really like.

The scribes and Pharisees tried to enforce many rules some of which even allowed or caused God's laws to be broken. They had so many rules that it was nearly impossible to keep them all. There were certain laws that they tried to make the people keep that they secretly ignored, and there were some that they claimed they did not have to keep because they were leaders.

These men also wanted to be called rabbi or master, but Jesus said, "Don't let people call you rabbi or master because Christ is your Master and you are all brothers. If Jesus were here today, He would probably tell the people who have the title "Reverend" the same thing. The Bible says, "Holy and reverend is His name" (Psalm 111:9 KJV). If God is called Reverend, what person deserves the same title? Jesus said, "The person who is greatest among you will be the one who is willing to be like a servant to everyone else."

Jesus said, "How terrible will it be for you, scribes and Pharisees, because you increase your wealth by taking from widows, then you try to make

yourself look good by praying long prayers in public. For this you will receive a greater punishment in the end.” The Pharisees were not ashamed to use their influence over the people to convince them that they should donate their money or property to God. But, once the money was in their control, they would use it to add to their own personal wealth.

Jesus did not say we shouldn't give our offerings to God. He can still bless us for giving even if the money is not used in the right way. When He noticed the poor widow putting her pennies in the offering, He pointed her out to His disciples and said that she had put in more than all the rich people, who had dumped bags of money into the offering. What God values most are the little things we do, or small gifts we give, not to make us look good, but just because we love Him. This was the reason Jesus smiled on the widow for giving her few pennies to God.

Jesus continued, “How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things” (Matthew 23:23 NLT). So many rules for tithing had been made, that a person could never quite know if they had kept them all.

“Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24 NLT). God had also told the Israelites not to eat unclean meat. But instead of leaving God's law as it was given, the Pharisees made so many laws that once again, a person could hardly know if they had kept them all. They were even required to strain their water in case there was the tiniest bug that might be considered unclean.

“How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees, you are like beautifully painted tombs which look nice on the outside but are full of decomposing bodies. You try to look good on the outside but when no one can see, you break all kinds of laws.”

“How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed and decorate the graves of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. Then you say, ‘We never would have joined them in killing the prophets.’” They said they would never have taken part in the murder of those righteous prophets, yet at the same time they were planning to take the life of the Son of God.

By rejecting Jesus, the nation of Israel was losing their status as God's chosen people. As Jesus left the temple for the last time, He knew that God's

presence would leave with Him. The temple services which pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Son of God would soon be meaningless.

68

In the Outer Court

This chapter is based on John 12:20-43.

While Jesus was in the temple, some Greeks came to Phillip and asked if they could see Him. Phillip wasn't sure what to do so he talked to Andrew and together they decided to tell Jesus.

At this time, Christ's mission looked pretty much like a failure. Even though He always defeated them in the battle of words, it was pretty obvious that the religious leaders were not going to accept Him as the Messiah. To the disciples who hoped that Jesus would be accepted by the Jews and made king, their cause seemed hopeless.

When Jesus heard that some Greeks wanted to meet Him, He was excited. At the beginning of His life, wise men from the east had come to worship Him and now near the close of His life, foreigners from the west were coming to meet Him. To Jesus, this represented the people from all over the world who would accept Him after His death on the cross. "Many Gentiles will come from all over the world and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 8:11 NLT).

The Greeks had heard about Jesus riding into Jerusalem like a king. They heard about how He had cleared the temple of people who were selling things. They had also heard that Jesus was supposed to become the king of the Jews. They wanted to talk to Him personally so they could learn the truth about His mission.

Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat dies and is buried in the ground; it will remain a single grain, but if it is buried, it will spring up out of the ground and will then produce more grain." "Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25 NLT). In other words, if all we think about is our life in this world, that's all we will have. It is a law of life that those who are willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of others will actually be saving their own lives. Another way to look at it is that a person, who is only interested in their own life, is like a grain that is eaten instead of planted.

“I am very troubled about what is coming,” Jesus went on. “Should I ask My Father to spare Me from having to go through it? No, that is the very reason I came, so instead I will ask My Father to bring glory to His name.” Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, “I have already brought it glory, and I will do it again” (John 12:28 NLT). Along with the voice, a light came down and surrounded Jesus like a wall of fire. The people were terrified but when they could finally speak, some said they heard thunder but some said it was a voice from heaven.

Jesus told the people that this display of power was for their benefit, not His. “The time has come,” He said, “When I will be crucified, then all men will be drawn to Me.” By the death of Jesus on the cross, Satan would be defeated, and man would finally be restored to the image of God. By this act, God not only saved the human race, but showed His love to the rest of the universe.

69

On The Mount of Olives

This chapter is based on Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-38.

Then Jesus said, “And now look, your house is left to you, empty and desolate” (Matthew 23:38 NLT). Even though the priests and rulers hated Jesus, they did not take His words lightly. Some of the things He had been saying hung over them like a dark cloud threatening to bring a terrible storm. They wondered if His words could possibly refer to the destruction of their beautiful temple which they were so proud of. The disciples had the same feeling of terrible things to come, and were hoping Jesus would say more. As they were walking out of the temple, they pointed out to Jesus how strong and beautiful the temple walls were. They were shocked when Jesus replied, “Do you see all these buildings? I assure you, they will be so completely demolished that not one stone will be left on top of another!” (Matthew 24:2 NLT).

Later when they were alone with Jesus on the Mount of Olives they asked, “When will all this take place? And will there be any sign ahead of time to signal your return and the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3 NLT).

Jesus did not answer the two questions separately but gave answers for both events together. The things He described were not for the benefit of His disciples alone, but were also for those living during the days just before His return.

Jesus told them, “Many will come and claim to be the Messiah, and many people will believe their lies. There will be many wars and rumors of wars, as well as famines and earthquakes but this is only the beginning of the end.” These things happened before Jerusalem was destroyed and will happen again before Jesus comes back.

Jesus went on, “Some of you will be arrested and some will be killed, and you will be hated because you are faithful to Me. Many will turn away from Me and then will turn on you and have you arrested. Even family members and friends will betray each other. False prophets will come and many people will follow them, but whoever holds on until the end will be saved. All people on the earth will learn about Me, and then the end will come.”

Jesus gave His disciples a sign so that they could recognize when Jerusalem was about to be destroyed so they could escape. “And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you will know that the time of its destruction has arrived. Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. Let those in Jerusalem escape, and those outside the city should not enter it for shelter” (Luke 21:20-21 NLT). “A person outside the house must not go inside to pack. A person in the field must not return even to get a coat” (Matthew 24:17-18 NLT). Jesus added, “Pray that your escape won’t have to be in the winter or on the Sabbath.”

Between the time when Jerusalem was destroyed and His second coming, Jesus saw that His church would have to go through more than a thousand years of persecution. What He saw was so terrible that He did not describe it in any detail because it would have been too much for them to bear. He said, “This will be the worst time of suffering since the beginning of the world, and nothing this terrible will ever happen again. If God doesn't make the time shorter, no one will be left alive. But because of God's chosen ones, he will make the time shorter” (Matthew 24:21-22 CEV). During those dark ages, millions and millions of God’s faithful followers were tortured and killed.

Now Jesus spoke specifically about His second coming, “So if someone tells you, ‘Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,’ don’t bother to go and look. Or, ‘Look, he is hiding here,’ don’t believe it! For as the lightning lights up the entire sky, so it will be when the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 24:26-27 NLT). Next He gave some very specific signs for us to look for. “Immediately after those horrible days end, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29 NLT).

Since the signs of the sun, moon and stars have all happened, according to what Jesus said, we should know that His coming is very near. We can know that His coming is near, but Jesus said that no one will know the exact day or hour of His coming. He also said it will be like in Noah’s day, where the people were going about their lives as usual when suddenly the flood came and destroyed them. How else is Noah’s day described? “The LORD saw how bad the people on earth were and that everything they thought and planned was evil” (Genesis 6:5 CEV).

When Jesus said that the entire world will learn about Him, it doesn’t mean that everyone will be saved. It does imply that we might be able to help Him

to come sooner if we take care of the business of telling the whole world about Him.

Finally Jesus said, “Watch out, don’t get careless and think only of the concerns of this life. Don’t let that day catch you by surprise. Stay ready and pray that you will be able to survive to see Me come back again.”

70

“The Least of These My Brothers”

This chapter is based on Matthew 25:31-46.

When Jesus comes back, He will separate all people into two groups. To the ones gathered on His right side, He will say, “My Father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave Me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave Me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed Me, and when I was naked, you gave Me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of Me, and when I was in jail, you visited Me.’ ‘Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, “When did we give You something to eat or drink? When did we welcome You as a stranger or give You clothes to wear or visit You while You were sick or in jail?’ ‘The King will answer, ‘Whenever you did it for any of My people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for Me’” (Matthew 25:34-40 CEV).

The act of being kind and helping others, especially those in worse situations than ourselves shows that we are true disciples of Jesus. Our Father in heaven thinks of these unselfish workers as His most precious treasures. There will even be some in this group at His right hand who knew little or nothing about Jesus, but by the way they lived and treated others, they showed that they had His Spirit. They will be surprised and happy to hear those words of Jesus, “I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these My brothers and sisters, you were doing it to Me!”

Those on His left side had failed to minister to Jesus by failing to minister to the poor, the sick and the suffering. God has given riches to some people so that they can help and comfort His children. Too often however, they think they are better and look down on those who have less or are going through hard times.

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, “You will go to be with the Devil and His angels!” “I was hungry, but you did not give Me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give Me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome Me, and I was naked, but you did not give Me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of Me.’ Then the people will ask, ‘Lord, when did we fail to help You when

You were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?’ The King will say to them, ‘Whenever you failed to help any of My people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for Me’” (Matthew 25:42-45 NLT).

Many people never grow in their Christians experience because they do not get involved in helping others. The happiness they experienced when they first came to Jesus, could have been kept alive by giving their time and effort to help those in need. Many young people would stay out of trouble, if they would use their energy in doing good for others.

Loving our fellow man is a sign that we truly love God. Before He left, Jesus said, “I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you” (John 15:12 NLT). If we love other people the way Jesus did, then in God’s eyes we are ready for heaven.

71

A Servant of Servants

This chapter is based on Luke 22:7-18, 24; John 13:1-17.

Jesus sat at a table with His twelve disciples where they had gathered to eat the Passover meal. He knew that in less than one day He would be sacrificed as the true Passover lamb and He wanted to spend these last few hours with His disciples. Normally, these times when Jesus was alone with His disciples were times when they could relax and enjoy each other's company. But this time, as they gathered in what later became known as the upper room; gloominess seemed to hang over them.

“Jesus said, ‘I have looked forward to this hour with deep longing, anxious to eat this Passover meal with you before My suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won't eat it again until it comes to fulfillment in the Kingdom of God’” (Luke 22:15-16 NLT). On that last evening together, Jesus wanted to tell them what was going to happen but they were not ready or able to hear it. In fact, even though a shadow of gloom hung over them, they still believed that Jesus would become King and they were each hoping that they would have the highest position of power next to Him.

Now as Jesus looked at them, there was an uncomfortable silence. The disciples had forgotten to arrange for a servant to wash their feet and now it seemed that one of them should do it. But how could any of them hope to have the highest position if they were willing to act the part of a servant to the others.

Jesus waited for a little while to see what the disciples would do and when none of them made a move, He got up from the table and took off His coat. Then He picked up the towel, poured some water in the basin and started to wash their feet. The disciples were shocked and humbled by this act of Jesus which now put their desire for power in an entirely new light.

Christ showed His love for His disciples even though their selfishness filled Him with sadness. Instead of saying anything to them, He gave them an example they would never forget.

Even though Judas had already agreed to betray Jesus to the priests and rulers, he was still there with the rest of the disciples acting as if he hadn't

done anything wrong. Even though Jesus knew exactly what Judas had done, the rest of the disciples had no idea what he was up to. When his feet were being washed, Judas was touched by the love of Jesus and wanted to confess his betrayal. But when he didn't confess right away, his desire for money and power came back and then he decided that if Jesus was willing to humble Himself as a servant He could never be a king. It was now clear to him that there was nothing more to be gained by continuing to follow Jesus.

When Peter's turn came to have his feet washed by Jesus, he was filled with shame that Jesus was doing this job instead of one of the other disciples. Peter said, "You shouldn't be doing this, I don't want You to wash my feet." But Jesus said, "If I don't, you won't belong to Me." Then Peter said, "In that case wash my hands and head as well." Jesus said, "I only need to wash your feet to make you clean." He said this because one of His main purposes was to wash the jealousy and desire for power out of their heart. Except for Judas, He was able to accomplish this for His disciples and Jesus could say, "Now you are clean."

When He had finished, Jesus said to the disciples, "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you" (John 13:13-15 NLT). While the disciples were arguing about which one of them should have the highest place, Jesus did the job of a servant. During His life on this earth, Jesus was always serving others, and by His life He showed what God is like.

Jesus told us to perform this act of foot washing to prepare us to receive His body and blood through the ceremony of the bread and the grape juice. We cannot be one with Him as long as we have pride in our heart and a desire to have power over others. If we participate in the service of foot washing with a true desire to have our pride washed away we will receive the spirit of Jesus which is a desire to love and serve others.

72

“To Remember Me”

This chapter is based on Matthew 26:20-29; Mark 14:17-23; Luke 22:14-23; John 13:18-30.

Jesus was about to be sacrificed as the Lamb of God which would bring an end to all the ceremonies that pointed forward to His sacrifice. The Passover was one of these ceremonies that would soon be ending and Jesus wanted to start another service which could be kept by all His followers in all countries until He came back again.

The bread without yeast and the grape juice, which was called wine, that were prepared for the Passover meal were in front of Jesus. Then He took a loaf of bread; and when He had thanked God for it, He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is My body, given for you. Do this to remember Me.” After supper He took a cup of wine and said, “This wine is the token of God’s new agreement to save you—sealed with the blood I will pour out for you” (Luke 22:19-20).

Jesus had given Judas evidence that He knew what he was up to, but the disciples still had no idea. Finally Jesus said, “One of you is going to betray Me.” The disciples were shocked to think that one of them would actually betray Jesus. Knowing that Jesus was always right, they each began to look at themselves wondering if they had something against their Master. They wondered what possible reason could one of them have for betraying Jesus. Then they began asking Jesus, “Will it be me?” John, who was sitting on the right side of Jesus asked Him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus quietly answered, “The one who dips his bread in the dish with Me will betray Me.” There was a lot of confusion going on with everyone talking at once but soon everyone was looking at Judas because he was quiet. Just to turn the attention away from himself, he asked the same question everyone else was asking, “Will it be me?” Jesus answered, “You said it.” Confused and embarrassed that he was exposed, Judas dipped his bread in the dish then got up and left. Because everyone was talking, the disciples had not really heard the whole conversation between Jesus and Judas. They actually thought Jesus had sent Judas on an errand.

Jesus had done everything He could to try to save Judas. Jesus loved him, washed his feet, and treated him with kindness even while letting him know

that He knew of his plans. Jesus even avoided embarrassing him in front of the other disciples. His purpose in telling the disciples that one of them was going to betray Him was that they would have more proof later on that He knew what was going to happen in the future. He also didn't want them to think that He was surprised or caught off guard by the betrayal.

Jesus showed by letting Judas take part in the last supper, that we should never stop someone from participating in the communion service. If Jesus knowing Judas wasn't clean allowed him to share in the supper, who are we, who can't know people's thoughts, to decide whether they can take part in the communion service or not. This doesn't mean we should take the service lightly, because Paul warns, "For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself" (1 Corinthians 11:29 NLT). Finally even as Jesus stressed the importance to Peter of washing his feet, if we choose not to participate in the communion service, it might be said of us, "You are not all clean."

Jesus wanted the communion service not only to remind us of His sacrifice, but also of His second coming to take us to heaven. He said, "I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom" (Matthew 26:29 NLT). As we spend time thinking about God's amazing love for us, we will become more like Him, and the more we become like Him, the more we will be able to show His love to the world.

73

“Don’t Be Troubled”

This chapter is based on John 13:31-38; 14-17.

Jesus said to His disciples, “God is going to receive glory from what is about to happen. Very soon I am going to finish what I came here to do, but when I’m finished, I will have to leave you.” He continued, “Don’t be troubled. You trust God, now trust in Me. There are many rooms in My Father’s home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am” (John 14:1-3 NLT).

Then Thomas said, “Lord, we don’t know where You are going or how to get there.” Jesus replied, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6 NLT). Then Phillip said, “Lord, can we see the Father?” “Jesus replied, ‘Philip, don’t you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see Him?’” (John 14:9 NLT).

Jesus said, “Whoever believes in Me will be able to do the things I have done, but because My time here was so short, you will be able to do more than I did.” Those who choose to believe and do the things Jesus did, will also receive help from the Holy Spirit. He also promised us that if we ask anything in His name, He will do it for us. Our request will be treated as if it had been made by Jesus Himself.

We need to realize that truly praying in Christ’s name means that we love Him and are trying to carry on His work here on earth. Jesus said, “If you love Me, obey My commandments” (John 14:15 NLT). If we ask Him to, Jesus will blend our will and desires with His own, so that when we do what comes naturally to us we will be obeying Him.

As Jesus was trying to prepare His disciples to accept that He was going to leave, He was very excited about a gift He would be leaving for them. The gift the disciples and all followers of Jesus would receive was the Holy Spirit. In a human body, Jesus could only be in one place at a time. But the Holy Spirit would be able to provide comfort, teaching and power to resist sin to any person willing to accept it. The Holy Spirit is an equal partner

with Jesus and God the Father and so He brings the full power of God to help us. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible for us to resist the temptations of Satan. Without His help, it would also be useless for us to even try to tell other people about Jesus. We can plant the seed by telling someone about Jesus but it is the Holy Spirit that causes the seed to sprout and grow.

Now as they were leaving the room, Jesus said, “All of you will abandon Me tonight.” The disciples were shocked and amazed because they didn’t think anything could shake their belief in Jesus. Peter said, “Lord, even if it means dying with You, I will never abandon or deny You.” Then all the rest of the disciples said the same thing. Jesus said to Peter, “Before the rooster crows a second time tonight, you will deny that you know Me three times.” Peter truly meant and believed what he said but he didn’t know himself as well as Jesus did. Instead of insisting he would never do it, if Peter had asked Jesus to save him from his own weakness, he could have avoided the denial.

Jesus and His disciples had been heading towards the garden of Gethsemane, and now they were at the foot of the Mount of Olives. In the light of the moon, Jesus pointed to a grapevine and said, “I am the true vine.” Instead of choosing a beautiful or mighty tree that stands on its own, Jesus chose the vine as a symbol of Himself. Just as the vine needed the trellis to support it and give it something to cling onto, as our example, Jesus was completely dependent on the Father for everything. Earlier in His ministry He had said, “By Myself I can do nothing” (John 5:30 NIV).

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener” (John 15:1 NLT). The gardener takes care of the vine, cutting off the dead branches and pruning the live ones so they will produce more fruit. Jesus was like a vine that many were attracted to and some even said must have come from heaven. But the leaders in Israel beat the vine and trampled it under their feet and even tried to destroy it. But the heavenly gardener took the vine and transplanted it on the other side of the wall where it could no longer be treated badly but let the branches of the vine grow and hang over the wall. So, Jesus was taken from the earth to go back home with the Father, but His true followers were the branches that produced fruit for the benefit of the world.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 NLT). Just as a branch that is cut off from the vine will wither and die, we will eventually wither and die if we are not connected to the true Vine.

On the other hand, branches can be grafted onto the vine, so anyone who chooses can be connected to Christ and receive life through that connection. But even as a branch cannot survive by being connected one day and not the next, the life we receive from Christ can only be preserved by a continuous connection with Him. As the branch receives life from the vine, so we can receive power to resist temptation and overcome sin.

We should not concentrate on bearing fruit but on maintaining the connection with Christ. When we have a strong continuous connection with Him, the fruit will come naturally. We can stay connected to Him by reading His words in the Bible and by talking to Him through prayer.

One of the most important fruits we can bear is to love other people the way Jesus loves them. In fact the type of love He expected them to show was so different to them that He said, “I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, just as I have loved you. If you love each other, everyone will know that you are My disciples” (John 13:34 CEV). Then Jesus gave them this warning, “The world hated Me, so if you truly are My disciples, it will hate you as well.”

To many in our world, Jesus may have looked like a failure. He was rejected by His own people, He spent most of His time with the poor and common people, and He was killed only three and a half years after starting His ministry. Yet because of His coming death Jesus could say, “The time of judgment for the world has come, when the prince of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31 NLT). He also knew that when He would say, “It is finished,” heaven and the entire universe would rejoice in His victory. Jesus gave this warning to His disciples, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NLT).

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “And this is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one You sent to earth. I brought glory to You here on earth by doing everything You told Me to do. And now, Father, bring Me into the glory We shared before the world began” (John 17:3-5 NLT). Jesus then prayed for His disciples and everyone else who would believe in Him. “Now I am departing the world; I am leaving them behind and coming to You. Holy Father, keep them and care for them—all those You have given Me—so that they will be united just as We are” (John 17:11 NLT). “The world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not.

I'm not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one" (John 17:14-15 NLT).

After finishing His prayer, Jesus was ready for His last battle with Satan where He would willingly give up His life and die so that all who believe in Him can be saved.

74

Gethsemane

This chapter is based on Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12.

Jesus had been talking to His disciples while they walked but as they got close to the garden of Gethsemane, He became silent. During His life on this earth, Jesus always had a connection with the Father. Now as He prepared to take the sin of the whole world upon Himself, He was tempted to fear that it would separate Him from His Father's love forever.

The disciples noticed the change that had come over Jesus but they didn't know what to say. Not only was He struggling as if He was carrying a very heavy burden but He looked terribly sad and upset. Twice He would have fallen to the ground if the disciples had not caught Him and held Him up.

When they reached the Garden Jesus asked Peter, James and John to stay with Him, and He asked the other disciples to pray for themselves and for Him. After going a little further He asked Peter, James and John to watch and pray while He went on just a little bit further. The three disciples could both see and hear Jesus where He stopped. Many times they had come to the Garden with Him and after praying for a while, slept until He woke them up in the morning. But this time, Jesus asked them to watch and pray with Him.

Jesus lay face down flat on the ground as He struggled with the burden of our sins. After having lived His life constantly connected with the Father, He was now feeling the separation from God that sinners will feel when they will die for their own sins. For One who had always been together with God the Father, this separation was almost more than He could bear. Jesus had to go through this without using His Godly power in order to take the penalty for our sin upon Himself.

If Jesus could not go through with the sacrifice, the human race would forever belong to Satan and would never again be reunited with God. Everything was at stake and Satan put all his effort into trying to get Jesus to abandon His mission. Satan tried to convince Jesus that His mission had been a failure and that if He took the sin of the world upon Himself, He would never be reunited with God the Father.

Jesus thought of His suffering and death as drinking a cup of something that would kill Him. He prayed, "Father, if possible, take this cup from Me so I won't have to drink it, but I will do whatever You want." Jesus needed some encouragement but when He went to His disciples, they were fast asleep. He had warned them that they would all abandon Him. They should have been praying along with Him for strength to stand the trial that would be coming, but they were so tired, they couldn't seem to stay awake. Jesus woke them up and reminded them to watch and pray for strength so they wouldn't give into the temptations that would be coming their way. They were shocked when they saw Jesus and could hardly recognize His face because of the suffering He was going through.

A second time Jesus prayed, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken from Me unless I drink it, I will do what You want." Again, He went back to Peter, James and John for comfort and found them sleeping. He tried to wake them up and reminded them to watch and pray. A third and final time Jesus prayed, "Father, if this cup cannot be taken from Me unless I drink it, I will do what You want." He had made His final decision to go through with His sacrifice for the human race. Now a light came down from heaven as an angel was finally allowed to comfort Jesus. The angel told Jesus that His mission had not been a failure, and reminded Him of the Father's love for Him. He told Jesus that His death would result in the final defeat of Satan, and that many people would be saved because of it. After receiving this message from God, Jesus' pain and suffering were still there, but the depression and discouragement were gone.

Jesus got up and went to the disciples and said, "You can sleep on now." But just as He was saying that, He heard the footsteps of the mob, so He said to the disciples, "Get up, the one who will betray Me has come."

Jesus stepped between His disciples and the mob and asked, "Who are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am He." As He answered, the angel who had just been comforting Him moved between Jesus and the mob and let his glory show. A light also shone from Jesus' face and the mob fell backward to the ground. The angel hid his glory and mob got up and Jesus asked them again, "Who are you looking for?" The mob had just been given proof that Jesus was more than just a man, but they came forward and answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said, "I already told you that I am He, so take Me but let My disciples go."

Even though Jesus had identified Himself, Judas still wanted to do His part, so he came up to Jesus and gave Him a greeting kiss. He had told the mob,

“The person I greet with a kiss is the one you’re looking for. Make sure you hold on to Him tightly.” Jesus said to Judas, “So, you’re betraying Me with a kiss.” Then the mob moved in and grabbed Jesus and tied His hands together. Peter now pulled out his sword and started swinging it wildly. Amazingly, the only damage he caused was to cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Even though Jesus’ hands were tied and He was being held tightly, He simply released Himself, touched the wound and the man was healed instantly. Then He said to Peter, “Put your sword away. If I didn’t want to be taken, don’t you think I could ask My Father for twelve legions of angels?” A legion was a major unit of the Roman army consisting of 3,000 to 6,000 foot soldiers and 100 to 200 soldiers on horses. Jesus went on, “This is God’s will and it is also what scripture predicted.”

There were priests and rulers in the mob, and Jesus turned to them and said, “I taught daily in public, but you never laid a hand on Me. The night and darkness is better suited to your work.” The disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus allow Himself to be arrested. At that time, Peter suggested that they save themselves, so they ran away, leaving Jesus in the hands of the mob. So it happened just as He said it would; “But the time is coming—in fact, it is already here—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving Me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32 NLT).

75

Before Annas and the Court of Caiphas

This chapter is based on Matthew 26:57-75; 27:1; Mark 14:53-72; 15:1; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:13-27.

It was past midnight as Jesus was roughly hurried along by the mob to the palace of Annas the ex-high priest. The job of getting rid of Jesus was too important to leave entirely in the hands of the less experienced high priest Caiphas. Jesus would of course have to be formally tried by Caiphas but it would be easier to figure out the best approach without having to involve the entire Sanhedrin.

Roman law allowed the Sanhedrin to try people and to pass judgment but it did not allow them to condemn someone to death. That sentence could only be passed in a Roman court. This pre-trial by Annas was designed to find accusations that could be used against Jesus. His approach was to try to accuse Jesus of blasphemy to the Jews and as someone secretly planning a rebellion to the Romans. A person who claimed to be God, was accused of blasphemy

Annas tried to get Jesus to say something that He could twist and use against Him, but Jesus didn't give him anything to work with. Then Jesus even pointed out that it was the priests who were having secret meetings at night and breaking laws by arresting and treating Him as a criminal without proof that He had done anything wrong. Finally He said, "If you want to know what I teach, you can ask anyone who has heard Me and they will tell you."

At this time, Annas decided to send Jesus on to Caiphas. Caiphas did not have the respect of the people that Annas did, but he was just as cruel and willing to do anything to get what he wanted. Together Annas and Caiphas questioned Jesus but they were still unable to get Him to say anything they could use against Him in a Roman court.

Now with some specially invited members of the Sanhedrin, Caiphas took his seat on a throne as president of the council. The court had many powerful, educated and wealthy rulers. Impressive Roman soldiers stood at their stations. Lastly, there were the common people, many of whom were out wandering in the night looking for some excitement. All eyes were fixed on Jesus, and what everyone saw was someone who even though dirty, tired

and bound as a prisoner, looked like a king. For a moment, even Caiphas was struck with admiration at the calm and noble bearing of Jesus. Quickly he pushed those thoughts aside and in a sneering voice demanded that Jesus perform a miracle for them. Jesus completely ignored him which only made him angrier.

Next, some people who had been paid to lie were brought to the witness stand to tell what they supposedly had heard Jesus say. They accused Jesus of trying to start a rebellion against the Romans and that He was trying to set up His own government. But the witnesses could not even agree with each other and some even said things that didn't even agree with their own statements. Finally two people were found whose statements did not disagree as much as the others. One of them who had been paid said, "This Man said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days'" (Matthew 26:61 NLT). What Jesus had really said was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19 NLT). Even though the Romans had helped to build the temple and took pride in it, the false testimony was still not enough to get a death sentence.

Caiphas was getting desperate. With a raised voice, he said to Jesus, "Don't You hear what all these people are accusing You of? Aren't you going to say anything?" Jesus remained silent as was predicted by the prophet Isaiah. "He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7 NLT).

Finally, feeling like they were getting nowhere, Caiphas said, "I demand in the name of the living God that You tell us whether You are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63 NLT). The way in which Caiphas questioned Jesus, by law required a truthful answer. Jesus respected that law but more than that, His relationship with the Father was being questioned. Jesus knew they would condemn Him to death for His answer but He replied, "Yes, it is as you say. And in the future you will see Me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64 NLT).

Caiphas was shocked by the boldness of Jesus' answer. The idea of a resurrection with people coming back to life whom he had killed as well as being judged for your actions was something the high priest did not like. He was angry that Christ's words could make him feel this way especially since he didn't even believe a resurrection was possible. He pushed these thoughts aside and tearing his priestly robe in fake horror, he said, "Blasphemy! Why

do we need other witnesses? You have all heard His blasphemy. What is your verdict?’ ‘Guilty!’ they shouted. ‘He must die!’” (Matthew 26:65-66 NLT).

The Sanhedrin had given Jesus the death sentence during their midnight trial even though Jewish law said that a person could only be tried and condemned during the day. And now that He was supposedly found guilty, the soldiers and especially the mob started making fun of Him and hitting Him and spitting at Him. Satan was happy to see Jesus treated this way and he did his best to keep the mob at it.

But there was something else going on that hurt Christ much more than the abuse He was taking from the mob. After running away in the garden, Peter and John had followed Jesus at a distance. John was recognized as a disciple of Jesus and was allowed to enter the courtyard. He asked if he could bring Peter in with him and he was allowed. John did not try to hide the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus and he found a quiet corner where he could watch to see what would happen. Peter on the other hand, did not want to be recognized as a disciple of Jesus so he tried to blend in with the mob by standing around a fire with a group of rough looking people. As he was standing there a servant girl thought she recognized him and out of curiosity, asked, “Are you one of His disciples?” Peter was embarrassed and confused and tried to ignore her, but when she kept after him, he said angrily, “Woman, I don’t even know Him.” Right after he said that the rooster crowed.

If Peter had been called to fight for his Master, he would have pulled out his sword and been willing to fight to the death. But when it looked like someone was wanted to make fun of him, he was a coward. A second time someone said to Peter, “Aren’t you a follower of Jesus?” Again Peter denied it. Another hour passed and then a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off said, “I think I saw you in the garden with Jesus. Besides that, you sound like one of His disciples because of the way you talk.” Now Peter became angry and he started cursing and swearing and insisting that he didn’t know Jesus. The rooster crowed a second time and then Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny that you know Me three times.” At that moment, Peter glanced over at Jesus, who looked back at him with sadness.

Peter left the courtyard with tears blinding his eyes, but it didn’t matter because he didn’t care where he went. Finally after wandering about, he

found himself at the very spot where Jesus had prayed that night. Peter fell on his face and wished that he could just die.

As daylight came, the full Sanhedrin assembled and Caiphas wanted to get them to condemn Jesus legally in the light of day. So he asked Jesus again, "Are You the Messiah?" At first Jesus didn't answer, but finally He said, "You will see Me sitting at the right hand of God." Then they all asked, "Are You the Son of God?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say." Then they all condemned Him for blasphemy because of what He had said.

Now they thought, they just had to convince the Romans that because Jesus claimed to be the Messiah that He planned to make Himself King. In the mean time, having condemned Him again, the mob increased their torture and abuse of Jesus. In fact the mob was so out of control, that if the Roman soldiers had not protected Him, Jesus would have been torn to pieces. Heathen soldiers were angry at the treatment of Jesus especially since they had seen no proof for the charges. They also reminded the priests that only the Romans could condemn a person to death. In addition to that, Jewish law did not even allow a person to be condemned to death by his testimony alone.

The priests and rulers were beyond reason by this point. They were not about to let anything stand in the way of what they wanted which was to have Jesus dead. They were willing to do anything to accomplish their goal. They even joined in with the mob in making fun of and abusing Jesus. As this was going on, angels were carefully recording everything that was happening. One day those men who spit at and hit and made fun of Jesus will see Him come again, sitting in power at the right hand of God.

76

Judas

If Judas had died before that last visit to Jerusalem, he would have been remembered and honored as one of the twelve apostles. But instead, he has been remembered as the one who betrayed Jesus.

Judas had joined the disciples when large crowds were following Jesus. He saw how the people were moved by the teachings and the miracles of Jesus. Judas himself had felt the power of God working on his life and he enjoyed being around Jesus

Judas had a pretty high opinion of his own abilities, which was helped by the fact that the other disciples looked up to him. He was convinced that Jesus and the disciples would often be confused or in trouble if it were not for his abilities and his help. But Judas was blind to his own weaknesses, one of which was a love of money. Jesus allowed Judas to be in charge of their money so that by passing it out to those in need, he might learn to be unselfish with money. But instead, he would at times take money, and tell himself he was being paid for all his hard work; but in God's sight he was a thief.

Judas had a plan all laid out for Jesus that would lead to Him sitting on the throne. He was not happy when Jesus kept saying that His kingdom was not of this world. He wondered why John the Baptist was left to die in prison and why Jesus was always talking about hard times and death. He wondered why Jesus wouldn't give the Jewish leaders a powerful sign that they could not ignore.

Many people stopped following Jesus after He said the words, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you cannot have eternal life within you" (John 6:53 NLT). That was a turning point for Judas as well. It started to look like Jesus was not planning to setup an earthly kingdom and that there would be no honor or power or riches for him. He decided at that time to continue following Jesus, but not get too attached so that he could separate himself from Jesus if things went bad.

As time passed, Judas found that there was usually something that he disagreed with in everything Jesus taught. In a very innocent way he would

present his disagreements to the disciples and as a result caused them to have questions and doubts about Jesus.

Judas had not completely rejected Jesus and was still hoping that He would take the throne of Israel. He decided that if Jesus was to be crucified, then nothing would be changed by his betrayal. But Judas didn't really believe that Jesus would allow Himself to be crucified and he saw that there were some things that he could gain by doing it. He believed that when the people saw what was happening to Jesus, they would rescue Him and there would be such a great movement that they would go ahead and just proclaim Him king. So in addition to the money he received, he would also get the credit for placing Jesus on the throne. He thought that would earn him the right to the highest position next to Jesus.

But after Jesus had been arrested, Judas was amazed at the abuse He took without a single word of complaint. He had seen Jesus escape from the priests and Pharisees many times and he expected Him to do it again. But as time went on, Judas began to have a sinking feeling that maybe he had sold his Master to His death. As the trial was coming to a close, Judas pressed his way through the crowd to the throne where Caiphas sat. "I have sinned by betraying a man who has never done anything wrong.' 'So what? That's your problem,' they replied" (Matthew 27:4 CEV). Judas then threw himself at the feet of Jesus and said, "I know you are the Son of God, please free yourself." Jesus didn't show any anger toward Judas but simply said, "This is the very reason I came into the world." Then Judas threw the money on the floor and went out and hanged himself. Later that day on the way to Calvary, the remains of the dead body of Judas were found where he hung himself.

77

In Pilate's Judgment Hall

This chapter is based on Matthew 27:2,11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25;
John 18:28-40; 19:1-16.

In order to put Jesus to death, the priests needed the death sentence to be passed in a Roman court. For this reason Jesus was brought to Pilate's judgment hall. Pilate was in a bad mood because he had been called to court so early in the morning. He planned to get it over with as quickly as possible, and to be extra harsh just because he was upset. But when Pilate looked at the face of Jesus, he thought he had never seen a Man who looked so good and so noble. He was impressed with Jesus and started remembering things he had heard about this teacher from Galilee.

Pilate said, "Who is this Man and why have you brought Him to me?" The priests knew their accusations would have no weight in a Roman court, so they said, "If He were not a trouble maker we would not have brought Him to you." They had known Pilate to pass the death sentence on people who were really not guilty, so the priests figured they could get him to do it again. But there was something about Jesus that kept Pilate from giving in so easily. So he said, "If you are so capable of judging Him yourself, why are you bringing Him to me?" "We have already tried Him," they said, "and by our law, He must die."

Now they paid some witnesses to lie and say, "This man has been leading our people to ruin by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming He is the Messiah, a king" (Luke 23:2 NLT). Pilate turned to Jesus and asked, "Are You the King of the Jews?" "Yes," Jesus answered. Then Caiphias shouted out, "See, He even admits it." Then the priests and the mob started shouting, "He must die!" Pilate was amazed because he didn't believe the things they were accusing Jesus of and yet He didn't say a word to defend Himself. He asked Jesus, "Won't You say anything to answer these accusations?" But Jesus remained silent.

Pilate wanted to get away from all the noise and he also wanted to learn more about Jesus, so he took Him into a private room. He again asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus knew the Holy Spirit was working on Pilate so He tried to get him to talk, but Pilate chose not to talk about his

own beliefs. "I am not trying to set up an earthly kingdom," Jesus said. "If I were, My followers would fight to save Me from these Jewish leaders." Pilate asked again, "Are You a king?" Jesus answered, "Yes I am, and I came here so that anyone who would listen to Me could learn the truth." "What is truth?" Pilate asked, but he didn't wait for an answer. He went back out to the courtyard and said to the priests, "I find no fault with Him at all."

The priests started to lose control of themselves at the thought of Jesus being set free. They were willing to do anything now, to accomplish their goal. They started threatening to get Pilate in trouble with the Emperor. They said, "Anyone who claims to be a king is against Caesar. This Man stirs the people up against Caesar from here all the way to Galilee." (Caesar was the name of the emperor or King of Rome.)

Pilate had no intention of condemning Jesus, but he was also afraid to just release Him, because these priests might succeed in getting him in trouble with Caesar. When Pilate heard the word Galilee, he had a bright idea. Herod, who was governor over that region, just happened to be in town, so why not give him the responsibility. So he ordered the soldiers to take Jesus to Herod.

Now Herod was very happy to see Jesus, because he had heard a lot about Him and was hoping to see some miracles. He had felt guilty about killing John the Baptist and when he first heard about Jesus, he wondered if He was John the Baptist come back to life. He thought, maybe he could get rid of his guilt, if he saved this prophet from being killed. Herod mistakenly thought that Jesus would eagerly do anything to be released, so he thought he could get Jesus to perform some miracles to satisfy his own curiosity.

The priests were shouting their accusations against Jesus but Herod wasn't paying any attention to them, and he demanded that they be silent. Then he ordered that the Jesus' chains be loosened and asked why they were treating Him so roughly.

When Herod, looked at the calm face of Jesus, he immediately saw the same thing that Pilate did. Jesus was innocent and these Jewish leaders were trying to kill Him because they were jealous of His popularity with the people. Herod started trying to ask some questions, but Jesus completely ignored him. He said, "I have heard many reports that You are able to heal sick people. If You will perform a miracle, I will release You." Herod ordered that some sick and blind and lame people be brought in so that Jesus could

heal them. But Jesus had taken our nature on Himself and so He refused to use His own power to save Himself.

The priests and rulers knew that Jesus had the power to perform miracles and that was the last thing they wanted to see. If Jesus could be seen using His power to heal sick people, that would be the end of this trial and maybe even their lives, so they started shouting out their accusations again. Herod was getting upset because Jesus was completely ignoring him. Jesus had nothing to say to him because Herod had completely rejected the truth and nothing Jesus could say or do that would change his mind. Finally Herod angrily said, "If You refuse to answer me, I will put You at the mercy of the soldiers and the mob. Maybe they can get You to talk."

Now, with Herod's encouragement, a royal robe was placed on Jesus and he and his soldiers joined the priests and the mob in making fun of and abusing Jesus. Yet, as cruel and hardened as Herod was, he did not dare to condemn Jesus to death, so he sent Him back to Pilate.

Pilate was angry when the priests and the mob returned with Jesus. He reminded them that they couldn't prove a single one of their accusations and that neither he nor Herod found Jesus worthy of death. He asked, "What do you expect me to do? I'll tell you what, I will have Him whipped and then I will release Him." But being willing to punish someone he had just declared to be innocent showed his weakness, so the priests kept pushing.

While he was trying to decide what to do, a messenger came to him with a note from his wife. It said, "Don't have anything to do with condemning this innocent Man. I have seen terrible things in a dream about Him." In her dream, she had seen the trial, the abuse and the mockery. She saw Pilate agree to punish Him just after declaring Him innocent. She saw Jesus being crucified on the cross. And finally, she saw Jesus coming back again in power and glory.

Suddenly in desperation Pilate had an idea. He knew it was the priests who wanted Jesus dead. The people were just doing as mobs do which was to just follow the leader. At this time of year the Romans had a custom of releasing a prisoner chosen by the people. Pilate hoped to appeal to the people by offering them Barabbas, who was a hardened criminal and murderer, or Jesus. He asked, "Who would you rather have me release, the murderer Barabbas or your king Jesus?" To his horror, Pilate heard the crowd yell back, "Release Barabbas!" Pilate asked again, "Don't you want me to release your King?" Stirred up by Satan and his angels who were in human form in the mob, they replied, "Crucify Him!"

Still trying to save Jesus, Pilate asked, “Why, what wrong has He done?” But the voices of the people grew louder and louder as they chanted over and over, “Crucify Him!” Satan himself led the cruel mob in their torture and abuse of Jesus. It was his goal to get Jesus to sin in some way or to get Him to not go through with His sacrifice for us. In either case, the human race would be forever lost and stay under his power. But through it all, Jesus did not use His power to save Himself and He did not sin.

Pilate had hoped to satisfy the priests and gain some sympathy from the mob by having Jesus flogged. The flogging was a whipping with a leather strap with pieces of metal tied into it. The flogging was stopped at thirty-nine lashes because it was found that often people could not survive any more. Pilate now stood Barabbas next to Jesus and said to the people, “Here He is! I have found Him completely innocent. Now who do you choose?” Again the priests and the mob yelled back, “Crucify Him! He deserves to die because He claimed to be the Son of God.”

Pilate was shocked by this last statement. He sort of believed in gods or beings that were greater than humans. Then he wondered if Jesus really might be a divine being. That might explain how He was able to endure the abuse, the mockery and the trial without a single complaint. So, he asked Jesus, “Where are You from?” Now Jesus remained silent. Pilate was annoyed by Jesus’ silence and said, “Aren’t You going to answer me? Don’t you realize I have the power to kill or to release You?” Jesus answered, “You only have this power because God allowed you to have it.”

Pilate tried to release Jesus again but the priests said, “Whoever calls himself a king is challenging Caesar’s authority.” Even though the Jews hated that they were under the power of the Roman government, they were willing to accept it if they could just get rid of Jesus. Then Pilate said, “Do you want me to crucify your King?” The priests and the mob responded, “We have no king but Caesar.” And so, under the leadership of the jealous priests, the nation of Israel had rejected God and proclaimed Caesar as their king.

When Pilate saw that he could not free Jesus and keep his position as governor, he washed his hands in front of the court and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this Man. I hope the God He claims as His Father will judge you and not me for what happened here today.” Then he turned Jesus over to them to be flogged again and crucified.

Caiphas said, “We will take responsibility for His death—we and our children!” (Matthew 27:25 NLT). This statement was taken up as a chant by the rest of the priests, rulers and the mob. Sadly, for them and their children,

they have taken responsibility for their actions. One of the results of rejecting Christ was the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews have also suffered through the centuries because they have been hated by so many people. And finally when Jesus comes back again, the very people who said those words will indeed take the responsibility on themselves.

78

Calvary

This chapter is based on Matthew 27:31-53; Mark 15: 20-38; Luke 23:26-46; John 19:16-30.

News was quickly spreading throughout all Jerusalem and now a huge crowd was gathering as Jesus was taken from Pilate's judgment hall to Calvary. The cross which had been prepared for Barabbas was placed on the shoulders of Jesus, but He couldn't carry it in His condition and He fell to the ground under the load. He had not slept or eaten since the night before. Thirty-nine lashes with the lead tipped whip would be enough to kill some people but Jesus endured it twice. On top of all that, He was carrying the burden of the sins of the entire world.

No Jew would carry the cross for Jesus because they would become unclean and would not be able take part in the Passover. While the soldiers were trying to figure out what to do, they noticed a man who was showing some sympathy for Jesus, so they immediately grabbed him and made him carry the cross. The man Simon from Cyrene had heard of Jesus but he was not a follower even though his sons were. After this experience which changed his life Simon was happy to also be known as a follower of Jesus.

In the mob that shouted "Crucify Him" were many of the same people that shouted "Hosanna" as Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on the donkey. There were lots of people who followed Jesus when it seemed the popular thing to do or when it looked like there was something they could gain from it. But now even His own disciples followed at a distance.

When they reached the top of the hill, the two thieves who were to be crucified with Him struggled with the soldiers as they were tied to their crosses, but Jesus offered no resistance at all. Mary was there with the disciple John, but she was not allowed to do anything to comfort her Son. She wondered how this could be happening if Jesus really was the Messiah, and even now she hoped that He would free Himself. But when they started nailing Him to the cross, she couldn't watch and John had to take her from the scene. As this was happening, Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NLT).

After He was nailed to the cross it was slammed into the hole that held it up causing Jesus the most pain yet. Pilate then made a sign written in Hebrew,

Greek and Latin and had it placed on the cross over the head of Jesus. The sign read, “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” In order to have Jesus condemned, the priests had chanted, “We have no king but Caesar.” Now when the priests saw the sign, they realized that people might think they liked being under Roman rule and were in favor of killing their own king. So they asked that the sign be changed to read, “He claimed to be the King of the Jews.” But Pilate was angry with himself and the jealous priests, so he replied, “What I have written, I have written.”

The way Jesus suffered on the cross had been written about in the scriptures hundreds of years before. “My enemies surround Me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on Me. They have pierced My hands and feet. I can count every bone in My body. My enemies stare at Me and gloat. They divide My clothes among themselves and throw dice for My garments” (Psalm 22:16-18 NLT). What actually happened: “They also took His robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said, ‘Let’s not tear it but throw dice to see who gets it’” (John 19:23-24 NLT).

Satan and his angels in human form were at the foot of the cross, tormenting Jesus and encouraging the priests and the mob to do the same. Following his lead, the crowd shouted up at Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, save Yourself and come down from the cross!” “‘He saved others,’ they scoffed, ‘but He can’t save Himself! So He is the King of Israel, is He? Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him! He trusted God—let God show His approval by delivering Him! For He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:42-43 NLT).

Because of everything that happened, Jesus received a lot of attention and as a result people went home to study the scriptures for themselves. Many came to the conclusion that He was the Messiah and that prophecies had been fulfilled in the events of that day.

One bright spot for Jesus as He hung on the cross was when one of the thieves accepted Him as Savior and God. He showed his faith by asking to be remembered when Jesus came back to take us to heaven. This thief was not a hardened criminal and there were many people in the mob who were guilty of worse crimes. He had heard Jesus teach and was impressed but he had been turned away by the religious leaders. Slowly, by choosing the wrong friends to hang out with and not listening to his conscience, he drifted deeper and deeper into a life of sin. Finally he was caught, put on trial and then condemned to die. Jesus knew what was truly in his heart and knew that he was sincere, so He answered, “You will be with Me in heaven.”

As Jesus hung suffering on the cross, He noticed His mother who had come back. He was happy to see that His disciple John was trying to comfort and take care of her. Jesus said to her, "Mother, when I'm gone, take care of John as you cared for Me." Then He said, "John, comfort and take care of My mother as you would your own." He was giving both of them a blessing because they could each be a reminder to the other of Him.

Jesus was dying on the cross but it was not the fear of death or the pain and shame of being crucified that bothered Him the most. Satan was still trying to get Him to fail in His mission to save us. He was there at the cross trying to discourage Jesus by saying that sin was so terrible to God that after taking the sins of the entire world upon Himself, He would never be able to be with His Father again. The thought of never being reunited with His Father again was what hurt Him the most.

Suddenly in the middle of the day it became dark as midnight without stars or moon. God the Father Himself was there suffering with His Son but He could not let Jesus know that He was there. Jesus had to go through this last trial trusting in His faith in God's love. The darkness also provided some privacy from the mob for the last few hours of Jesus' suffering. After three hours, the darkness was lifted from the people but still surrounded the cross. Finally Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have You left Me?"

As the end was drawing near, Jesus started to feel some of His physical suffering and He said, "I thirst." A Roman soldier who felt sorry for Him took a sponge on a stick and dipped it in some vinegar and offered it to Him. The vinegar would have helped Him to not feel the pain as much but would have clouded His mind, so when He tasted what it was, He refused it. The priests on the other hand felt no pity and were still making fun of Him. In the language He spoke, the cry of "My God, My God, why have You left Me?" had a word which sounded like Elijah. Now the priests said, "It sounds like He's calling for Elijah. Let's see whether Elijah will come down to save Him."

Suddenly the darkness lifted from the cross and Jesus shouted out in a clear loud voice, "It is finished. Father I put My life in Your hands." Then He bowed His head and died. Jesus, the perfect Son of God suffered and died on the cross, put there by the very people He had come to save. But it was not just the Jewish priests and the Roman soldiers who put Him there. It was also for our sins that He hung and died on the cross.

The moment Christ died; there was a strong earthquake, as if the earth itself was reacting to the death of its Creator. In the mountains, rocks broke loose and came crashing down the mountainside. Graves broke open and the bodies were thrown out. Priests, soldiers and the mob lay face down flat on the ground in terror.

At that same instant, in the temple, the priest was about to sacrifice a lamb that represented Jesus. His hand was raised with the knife when suddenly the curtain which hid the most holy place from view was torn from top to bottom. In terror and confusion, the priest dropped the knife and the lamb escaped. The temple and its services which pointed forward to the death of Jesus for our sins were no longer needed. From that point on, no one would need to sacrifice animals. No longer would we need priests on earth, because Jesus Himself is our priest in heaven. “Once for all time He took blood into that Most Holy Place, but not the blood of goats and calves. He took His own blood, and with it He secured our salvation forever” (Hebrews 9:12 NLT).

79

“It is Finished”

When Lucifer was first thrown out of heaven, there were angels as well as people on other worlds that were not totally convinced that he was wrong. His high position combined with his ability to make wrong sound right made it very difficult for anyone to see the truth about his plans. Now the difference between Satan’s way and God’s way was becoming clear to everyone.

Satan could have been destroyed right away but then everyone would have chosen to obey God out of fear. God wanted everyone to trust and obey Him because they truly believed it was the best way. Letting everyone watch Satan develop his plan was the only way to convince them of the truth.

When Jesus came to our world to live as a human being, Satan turned all his effort towards making life as difficult as possible for Him. He tried his hardest to get Jesus to sin, but the harder he tried and the more cruel he was, the more the angels and other worlds could see the difference between him and God.

All heaven was watching with great interest the final events in the life of Jesus. They watched His struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, and they saw His acceptance of the plan. They saw the unfair trial and the cruel torture and mockery, but they saw Jesus take it all without a single complaint. They watched the painful crucifixion on the cross, with Satan himself taunting Jesus trying to get Him to sin or to abandon the sacrifice. But when Jesus said the words, “It is finished,” and bowed His head and died, Satan knew that he was defeated and now everyone knew the truth about him.

Even though Satan was exposed, there were still some questions that needed to be answered. When he started the rebellion, he claimed that it was impossible to keep the law of God. He also claimed that God could not keep His own law and forgive someone who broke it. In other words he claimed that justice and mercy could not exist together. When he got man to sin, he said they could not be forgiven, because he was not offered forgiveness after he was thrown out of heaven. But there was a difference because Satan sinned while in the very presence of God and there was nothing more God could do to save him, but man was lied to and tricked into disobeying. While

that did not excuse him for his sin it did place him in a different situation. There was still a chance that man could be saved once he understood the true love and goodness of God.

The life of Jesus as a man accomplished several things at the same time. It showed us how much God loves us. His perfect life also showed Satan and the rest of the universe that God's law could be kept. It also provided a perfect life which the law requires, to take the place of our sinful life, if we will accept it. The fact that Jesus died for us proves that God was not willing to do away with His law, because if He could have changed it to save us, Jesus would not have needed to die.

Satan knows that God's law requires complete obedience. He also knows that God is willing to forgive us and cover our past sins with Christ's perfect life if we will accept it. But Satan knows that all he needs is for us to break one small part of the law. James wrote, "And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws" (James 2:10 NLT). So if Satan can get people to break just one of God's laws when they really think they are keeping them, he has them and they don't even know it. Then if he can get them to try to force everyone to do as they do, they are doing his work for him and his final plan will be in place.

In the end, everyone will have a chance to decide whether they will choose to keep God's laws or their own. There will be two sides, and only two groups of people. Those on God's side will go to heaven with Him and those on Satan's side will be destroyed with him and his angels.

God will not kill Satan and his followers because He is angry at them. When they first rebelled, the natural result of their actions would have been their death, but those watching may not have understood this. So, God allowed them to live so that all could see the true nature of their rebellion. At that time when God stops keeping them alive, they will naturally be destroyed by His glory. Then the whole universe will be happy to love, honor and obey God because they will know that He is loving and His law is fair.

80

In Joseph's Tomb

The long day of shame and torture was finally over and Jesus lay resting in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. He had just finished His work of providing a way for man to be saved from sin, and as He did after creating man, He rested on the Sabbath.

Just after Jesus died, a voice at the foot of the cross was heard loud and clear saying, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54 NLT). That voice belonged to the Roman centurion who was the commander of the soldiers responsible for the crucifixion. He recognized the bruised and bloody body hanging on the cross as the Son of God.

During the three hours of darkness that started at noon on the day of the crucifixion, everyone had been afraid, and some felt guilty for what they had done. The people in the mob had no reason to hate Jesus and were just going along for the excitement. They had assumed the accusations of the priests were true when they joined in the cries to crucify Him. But in the quiet of the darkness, they had time to think about all that had happened and had come to the conclusion that Jesus was innocent and that the priests wanted Him dead because they were jealous of Him. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost a few weeks later, many of these people were baptized and became followers of Jesus.

Now that the priests were so close to their goal of being rid of Jesus, they did not feel the satisfaction that they had hoped for. They were afraid of what the people would do when they found out what had happened to Him. They decided that He must not remain on the cross over the Sabbath where all could see Him, so they went to Pilate with their request. Crucifixion was a slow painful death but Pilate also wanted as little attention as possible on what had happened so he agreed to speeding up the death so Jesus could be taken down from the cross.

When the soldiers at the cross received their orders, they broke the legs of the two thieves to speed up their death but when they found that Jesus was already dead, they didn't break His legs. This fulfilled the requirement of the Passover sacrifice, "They must not leave any of the lamb until the next morning, and they must not break any of its bones" (Numbers 9:12 NLT).

When the priests went back to the cross to make sure the soldiers got the bodies down before sunset, they were surprised to find that Jesus was already dead. Just to be sure, they asked a soldier to stick his spear into Jesus' side which would have killed Him if He were not already dead. This also was the fulfillment of a prophecy which said, "They will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10 NLT).

Now that Jesus was dead, the disciples wished that they could give Him an honorable burial but they didn't know how they could. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were members of the Sanhedrin, were able to help the disciples out because, they also wanted Him to have an honorable burial. So Joseph went to Pilate and asked for permission to bury Jesus. Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus was already dead so he called for the centurion who told him everything. After Pilate agreed, Joseph and Nicodemus gently took Jesus down from the cross and buried him in a tomb Joseph had prepared for himself.

Joseph and Nicodemus had not publicly accepted Jesus while He was alive. They had hoped to use their position in the Sanhedrin to protect Him, but when the priests figured this out, they didn't invite Joseph and Nicodemus to the trial. Now there was no longer any reason to hide their belief.

The next day was Sabbath and even though the Passover services went on as they had for hundreds of years before, there was a strange feeling hanging over the people. Before then, the most holy place had always been hidden from everyone but the high priest. Now with the curtain torn from top to bottom, it was open for all to see. The exposing of the most holy place caused the people to have a feeling of bad things to come.

Many people were also thinking about the things that had happened the day before. Some were studying the scriptures to prove to themselves that Jesus was not who He claimed, and some were studying to prove that He was. Even though they were looking for different things, most came to the same conclusion, that Jesus was truly the Messiah. Many priests even came to the same conclusion and after His resurrection; they accepted Him as the Son of God.

Not everyone knew about the death of Jesus the day before, and now as they had become used to doing when Jesus was in town, people started bringing the sick to be healed by Him. When they learned what had happened, they were very upset and many had to be forced from the temple courtyard and soldiers even had to be used to control the crowd. People started asking

questions and even though the priests tried to keep it quiet, soon everyone was talking about what had happened.

When the priests were asked to explain the prophecies about the suffering and death of the Messiah, they tried to make up some explanations which didn't sound very good. Many people came to the conclusion that the religious leaders had actually played their part in fulfilling the prophecies.

The priests had hoped to enjoy being rid of Jesus, who had been like a thorn in their side, but now the people were turning against them. They were also scared because they had seen enough of His miracles to know that He had power they couldn't explain. Many of them had even stood by the grave of Lazarus as Jesus raised him from the dead. Now they remembered that He had said He would die and then come back to life in three days. The thought made them tremble with fear.

Feeling like they had to do something, they went to Pilate and said, "When He was alive, He said He would die and then be raised back to life in three days. Let's have some soldiers guard the tomb so His disciples don't steal the body and then tell everyone that He has risen from the dead." Pilate was in full agreement so they placed one hundred soldiers around the tomb.

Little did they realize the uselessness of their efforts to keep Jesus in the tomb. In fact the more soldiers they placed around the tomb, the more people there would be to watch His actual resurrection. "Why do the people waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the LORD and against His anointed One . . . But the One who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them" (Psalm 2:1,2,4 NLT). The time for the Son of God to rise from the dead was soon approaching and there was nothing that man or Satan could do to keep Him from rising in victory.

81

“The Lord Is Risen”

This chapter is based on Matthew 28:2-4; 11-13.

It was just before daybreak on the first day of the week, and Jesus was still resting peacefully in the tomb. Roman soldiers surrounded the tomb, but more than that, Satan and his angels were there and if possible would have kept Christ in the tomb forever, but all they could do was watch. There were also angels from heaven who were there waiting to welcome Jesus back to life.

Then the mightiest angel, the one who took Lucifer’s place, came down from heaven. Having just left the presence of God, he was still shining with brightness and glory, and as he approached, there was an earthquake. When the soldiers saw the angel, they fell face down on the ground in fear. While trying to shield themselves from the brightness, they watched as the angel moved aside the huge stone as if it were a pebble. Then they heard him say, “Son of God, come out, Your Father calls You.” Next they saw Jesus come out of the grave and say, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Finally they saw the angels bow down and worship Jesus.

When the brightness and glory of the resurrection had passed, the soldiers got up from the ground, and still trembling from the experience, they made their way into the city. As they went, they told everyone they met the amazing things they had seen. They were on their way to report to Pilate when they were stopped by the priests who had already heard the reports of the resurrection. The soldiers told them exactly what they had seen, and then added, “It was the Son of God that was crucified; we saw angels bow down and worship Him as God and King.”

The priests were so scared when they heard this news, they were speechless. Caiphas tried to speak but even though his lips moved, no sound came out. The soldiers were about to leave when he finally found his voice, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen and heard. Instead tell people that you fell asleep and the disciples came and stole the body.” At first the soldiers were shocked at the thought of telling people that story. Besides bringing shame upon themselves, they would be killed for sleeping on duty. But the priests offered them a lot of money and said they would make sure Pilate didn’t

punish them. Finally they agreed and the soldiers who came to the priests with wonderful news of a risen Savior, left with a load of money and a lie to spread about what had happened.

Meanwhile Pilate had also heard the reports of the resurrection of Jesus. He had felt bad about allowing Jesus to be crucified but he wasn't letting it bother him. But now he was scared to death at the thought of Jesus appearing before him. When he talked to the soldiers they dared not lie to him and told him the whole truth. From that moment on there was no peace for him.

In killing Jesus, the priests had let themselves be used by Satan, now they were completely under his control. They now felt that their only choice was to continue fighting, so they did their best to spread their story about the stolen body. The problem was that there were people who had heard the true story of Christ's resurrection. There were also people who had been raised from the dead when Jesus rose, and they were going around telling everyone they met about the resurrection of Jesus. These were people who had lived at different times in earth's history but had all been killed because they refused to be silent about their belief in God.

Like Pilate, the greatest fear of the priests was that they would come face to face with Jesus. From that time on, they would never have peace. They would never ever forget their cries, "We will take responsibility for His death—we and our children!" (Matthew 27:25 NLT).

During His ministry, Jesus had raised several people from the dead. He raised the widow of Nain's son, the ruler's daughter and Lazarus. But these were not raised to live forever, and they eventually died as all people die. But those who were raised at the time of Christ's resurrection were raised to a life that would never end. They were taken to heaven with Jesus and are an example of what will happen to all the rest of us who are faithful to the end.

82

“Why Are You Crying”

This chapter is based on Matthew 28:1,5-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18.

The women who had been at the cross when Jesus died were waiting for the Sabbath to end so they could anoint His body with the burial spices and ointments they had prepared. Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they made their way to the tomb. They had no idea how they were going to roll away the stone so they could get to the body but they went on anyway.

Suddenly there was an earthquake and the sky lit up but it wasn't the light from the rising sun. When they arrived at the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and all the soldiers gone. The women had come from different directions and Mary Magdalene actually got there first and when she saw the empty tomb, she went right away to tell the disciples. When the other women arrived they also found the tomb empty, but they saw an angel who looked like a person but light surrounded him. The women were scared and were about to leave when the angel said, “Don't be afraid; I know you're looking for Jesus but He's not here because He's risen.” Then the women rushed off to take the good news to the disciples.

Mary Magdalene did not see the angel and had told the disciples that someone had moved the body of Jesus. Peter and John rushed to the grave and found the cloth that had been used to wrap His body neatly folded and left in the tomb. When John saw that he thought something good must have happened but he wasn't sure what it was.

Mary Magdalene had followed Peter and John back to the tomb and when they returned to Jerusalem, she stayed behind. As she looked into the empty tomb, tears came to her eyes as she thought of Jesus. Suddenly she noticed two angels sitting in the tomb where Jesus had been. They said to her, “Woman, why are you crying?” She replied, “Because someone has taken away my Lord and I don't know where they put Him.” Next she heard a voice behind her saying, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” Thinking that maybe it was the gardener, she answered, “If you have taken the body, please tell me where you took it, because I have a place where I can bury Him.”

Now in a familiar voice Jesus said, “Mary.” Instantly she knew it was Him and she moved toward Him to hug Him at His feet. “I can’t stay right now because I have to go see our Father and our God, but go tell My disciples that you have seen Me and tell them where I went.”

The angels had also told the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus wanted to meet with them in Galilee. But the disciples didn’t believe the women and instead of rejoicing at the news, they remained sad and afraid. The disciples had been hiding in the room where they had their last supper with Jesus. They were afraid that the priests would come after them next. Now to make matters worse, they began to hear rumors that they had stolen the body of Jesus so they could tell people He had risen from the dead.

Many of us are like the disciples when we think God has left us. We are also like Mary when we are so full of sadness about our trouble that we don’t even recognize Jesus right beside us talking to us. We should be happy because we know that we have a Savior Who loved us enough to die for us and also rose from the dead so He can continue to help us and be with us.

83

The Walk to Emmaus

This chapter is based on Luke 24:13-33.

Late Sunday afternoon, on the day of the resurrection, two disciples began the eight mile walk to their home in Emmaus. They had come to Jerusalem for the Passover and were shocked to learn that Christ had been killed. As they walked home, they were discouraged and felt totally hopeless. They hadn't gone far when a stranger joined them. After walking a ways with them and listening to them talk He asked, "What are you talking about and why are you so sad?" Then one of them, named Cleopas answered, "Are you joking? Don't You know what happened in Jerusalem this weekend?" They went on to tell this stranger about their Master, "He was a great teacher and He performed amazing miracles, but the priests and rulers arrested Him, condemned Him to death and had Him killed." Then they added, "We had hoped that He was the Messiah."

Then Jesus started explaining to them, all the things Moses and the prophets wrote about the Messiah. He showed them from the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah and that He had to suffer and die in our place to save us from sin. But that was not the end of their hopes and dreams; they must go on, teaching people as Jesus had done. The disciples were thrilled with the things they were learning and thought this was how they felt when they Jesus taught them.

When they reached their home, the sun had gone down and they asked the stranger to join them for dinner and stay for the night. They were showing kindness by offering him food and a place to rest, but they also wanted to spend more time learning from Him. He acted like He wanted to go on, but they begged Him to stay, so He did. If they had not urged Him to stay they would never have known it was Jesus that walked with them that day.

When they sat down for the evening meal, Jesus prepared to bless the food as He always did. Suddenly the disciples recognized Him and then they noticed the nail holes in His hands. They said, "It is the Lord," and were about to bow down and worship Him when He disappeared. No longer tired from their long walk, they immediately left their house and headed back toward Jerusalem to tell the twelve disciples the wonderful news.

84

“Peace Be Unto You”

This chapter is based on Luke 24:33-48; John 20:19-29.

It was dark when the two disciples from Emmaus reached Jerusalem. They made their way to the upper room, where Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples. When they knocked on the door, there was no answer but after giving their names the door was opened. Before they even had a chance to share their good news, the twelve disciples excitedly told the two from Emmaus that Peter had seen Jesus. Then still panting from their run, the two disciples told everyone about their walk to Emmaus with Jesus.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the room in front of everyone and they were all afraid. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? I’m not a ghost, it’s really Me, touch Me, see the nail holes in My hands and feet.” Then to give them more proof that He was not a ghost, He ate some food. After that everyone believed and they were all happy.

During the times Jesus met with the disciples after His resurrection, He explained to them all the prophecies that pointed to His life and suffering and death. He also told them that their job would be to tell the world about Him and how He came to save us from sin. But Jesus told them that they would not be on their own. When He was gone, the Holy Spirit would come to take His place among them. The best part about this was that the Holy Spirit could be with anyone, anywhere at the same time, which Jesus could not do in a human body.

Jesus told the disciples, the church or group of believers should be responsible for teaching or correcting members who have done wrong. They must first show mercy but if the sinner refuses to repent, they must separate the sinner from the church. This must be done so that those looking in at the church do not get a wrong picture of God. On the bright side, when anyone confesses their sins and repents, the church can assure them of God’s forgiveness and acceptance.

When Jesus had appeared to the disciples, Thomas had not been with them. He said, “Unless I touch the nail holes in His hands and the wound in His side, I will not believe He is alive.” One evening when the disciples including Thomas were gathered in the upper room, Jesus appeared before

them and said to him, “Come and touch the nail holes in My hands and the spear wound in My side and believe.” Then Thomas knelt down at the feet of Jesus and worshipped Him saying, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus gently reproved him saying, “You believe because you have seen Me, but blessed are those who believe in Me without seeing Me.”

There are those today who say they would believe if they could see and touch Jesus as Thomas did. But they have Thomas’ story and all the other things written in the New Testament of the Bible. Many who wait for their last doubt to be erased will never believe because even when their last doubt is answered, they find another. In the story of Thomas, Jesus gave us an example of how to deal with people who doubt. Unbelief is rarely overcome by arguing and debating, but it is usually made stronger. We should simply present Jesus as our loving merciful Savior and the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest.

85

By the Sea Once More

This chapter is based on John 21:1-22.

Jesus had told His disciples that He wanted to meet with them in Galilee. So, as soon as the Passover was over the disciples made their way to the meeting place. Seven of the disciples who had traveled together found a quiet place on the shore of the sea to wait. The scenes around them reminded them of many of the miracles and teachings of Jesus. They talked about how He had walked on the water, calmed the storm and fed more than ten thousand people with five pieces of bread and two fish.

It was evening, the time they would normally have gone out fishing before they had left their jobs to follow Jesus. Peter suggested, for old time's sake and because they could use some money, that they go out for a night of fishing. As they worked they remembered and talked about their experiences with Jesus over the last three and a half years. They talked and worked all night but didn't catch a single fish. As morning was beginning to dawn, a man on the beach shouted out to them, "Have you caught anything?" When they answered, "No," He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will catch some fish." It seemed like a strange suggestion, but when they did it, they found their net full of fish. Right away John turned to Peter and said, "It is the Lord." In his joy, Peter left his friends to bring in the catch while he dove into the water and swam to shore.

When they were all ashore, they noticed that Jesus already had a fire with hot coals, and some bread and fish. He asked them to bring some of their own catch to add to what He had. By caring for their needs, Jesus was showing them that even though He was not going to be with them in person, their needs would be taken care of. He also wanted them to learn that their work would be more successful if their effort was combined with His help.

At this time Jesus also wanted to restore Peter to his position among the twelve. After betraying Jesus, some of the disciples and even Peter felt he was unworthy to take his original position as a disciple. When we sin against God and no one else knows about it, we can privately ask for God's forgiveness. But because everyone knew about Peter's sin, his repentance must also be public. He had denied Jesus three times, and three times Jesus

asked him in front of the rest of the disciples if he loved Him. Peter was now not as sure of himself as before, but he honestly said in front of everyone, “Lord, You know that I love You.” The first time Jesus replied, “Feed My Lambs.” The next two times, Peter’s answer was similar, “Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You.” Those last two times, Jesus replied, “Feed My Sheep.” In His replies, Jesus was giving Peter a job which showed that He still trusted him. Peter was also learning that his first work would be to take care of those who were new, or young, in their faith in Jesus. His failure, repentance and forgiveness had prepared him to be understanding of those who were young and possibly weaker in their faith.

Before the death of Jesus, Peter had assured everyone that He would follow Jesus anywhere, even if it meant dying with Him. Now talking to Peter in private, Jesus wanted to let him know that he would get his chance to follow in death. In fact when he was old, after a life of service for Jesus, he would be crucified. After learning about his future, Peter was suddenly struck with curiosity about the other disciples. He saw John behind them and asked about his future. Jesus told him, “That is not something you need to know. If I want him to live until I came back again, it shouldn’t matter to you.”

Years later near the end of his life, Peter wrote these instructions to the elders of the church at the time. “Just as shepherds watch over their sheep, you must watch over everyone God has placed in your care. Do it willingly in order to please God, and not simply because you think you must. Let it be something you want to do, instead of something you do merely to make money. Don't be bossy to those people who are in your care, but set an example for them. Then when Christ the Chief Shepherd returns, you will be given a crown that will never lose its glory” (1 Peter 5:2-4 CEV).

86

Go Teach All Nations

This chapter is based on Matthew 28:16-20.

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He met with a large group of believers on a mountainside in Galilee. The time and place for this meeting had been set even before the crucifixion. The angel at the tomb reminded the disciples of the meeting and the invitation was passed on to any and all believers. When the day arrived, about five hundred people had gathered on the mountainside. The disciples and those who had seen Jesus since His resurrection were walking among the people telling about their meetings with Him. They were also explaining what they had learned about all the prophecies of the Messiah and how they had all been fulfilled.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared among them. Some believed it was Him and bowed down and worshipped Him, and as always, there were some that didn't believe. Jesus told the people that His sacrifice was complete and that now there was a way for man to be saved from sin. His work on earth was finished and He was going back to heaven to continue the work of saving the human race. Then Jesus told the people gathered that they had a job to do as well. He told them, "Go to the people of all nations and make them My disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20 CEV).

Even though the Jews had rejected Jesus and would likely do the same to His followers, the disciples were to begin their work in Jerusalem. There were many who had secretly believed in Jesus, but because of the lies and threats of the priests and rulers, they had not openly followed Him. These people were now to get a second chance to accept Jesus. But the work would not end there. The disciples were to spread the story of Jesus to the whole world and anyone who believed would become part of a single church.

Through the Holy Spirit, the disciples were to have the same power to perform miracles that Jesus had. When they performed miracles, it would help people believe the things they were teaching. Since He knew that people would try to kill His disciples, Jesus said that if they drank something that was meant to kill them, it would not hurt them. He also promised them

protection from poisonous snakes. And when the time came for them to teach people who spoke other languages, the Holy Spirit would translate so that the people would hear and understand in their own language.

If we follow Christ's example, we will not only tell others about God's love, but we will care for their health and comfort as well. When Jesus healed people, He warned them not to keep sinning or something worse might happen to them. He was not teaching that sickness and disease was a punishment from God, but He did want them to learn that many diseases are a natural result of breaking God's laws. Even though they may not have realized it, many of the laws God gave the Israelites in the desert were for health reasons.

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations . . . And be sure of this: I am with you always" (Matthew 28:19,20 NLT). When we do the work He gave us to do, we have the promise that He will be with us. But if the church doesn't do this work, it will become weak and begin to die. The best way for a minister to bring life to a dying church is to teach its members to look for and save the lost. Just as a parent would be angry at someone who could have but refused to save their child, so God will be angry at those who ignored their chances to save His lost children. When they are judged by Him at the end of time, He will say to them, "I really don't know who you are! Get away from Me, you evil people!" (Luke 13:27 CEV).

In His command, Jesus told us to go to all nations teaching the things He taught. This included what He taught while here on earth as well as the things He spoke through the prophets and other writers of the Old Testament. There is no place for our own ideas, or for new rules or traditions setup by churches or leaders. The message we spread should not just be presented as rules and things to believe, but as a power to change lives. God wants everyone to know that no matter how bad they have been, He will accept them and forgive them. And when their lives have been changed, they can be an example to others of what God can do for them.

If we prepare ourselves and pray as the disciples did, God will pour out the Holy Spirit on us like rain. And the results will be even more amazing than it was in their days. Those who give themselves entirely to God will through the Holy Spirit have access to all the power in heaven, then they will really be able to do His work on earth.

It is God's wish that everyone in the entire world would reflect His character of love. This is the only way we can be truly free of sin and Satan. In the end, everyone will learn about God, but not everyone will accept Him.

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“To My Father, and Your Father”

This chapter is based on Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12.

The time had come for Jesus to go home to heaven. After the resurrection, He had stayed on earth for a time so that His disciples could get used to Him as their risen and glorified Savior. Now with them for the last time before going home, Jesus and His disciples walked out through the gates of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. From this mountain, He would leave the earth, and to this same mountain, He will return again as King.

As they walked, Jesus reminded them of the things He had taught them and told them to do. When they reached the top of the mountain, He stopped and they gathered around Him. Beams of light shone out of Him as He looked lovingly at His beloved disciples. With His arms stretched out in blessing, and as a sign of His care for them He slowly rose from the ground. The disciples kept their eyes on Him until He was hidden by a cloud of glory. Then they heard the words, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20 NLT).

As they were still looking up in the air, they heard voices from nearby talking to them. They turned and saw two angels in human form, who said to them, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw Him go, He will return!” These two angels who had also waited around the tomb after Jesus had risen, were two of the highest angels in heaven. They had longed for the time when they could welcome their King back to heaven, but they had stayed back to comfort and encourage those He had left behind.

Jesus had taken human form when He came to earth, and when He rose up in the sky to return to heaven, He was still in the same form. Now the disciples were promised that the same Jesus they knew, who had gone to heaven, would come back again. “Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see Him—even those who pierced Him. And all the nations of the earth will weep because of Him. Yes! Amen!” (Revelation 1:7 NLT). “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the Archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First,

all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with Him forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NLT). “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit upon His glorious throne” (Matthew 25:31 NLT). “When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am” (John 14:3 NLT).

After the death of Jesus, people thought that the disciples would be sad and discouraged. But with these promises, the disciples went back to Jerusalem with happy faces, looking like they had just won a great victory. With joy they told the story of Christ’s resurrection and His going to heaven, and many people believed.

At the same time that Jesus was resurrected, there were others whom He had raised from the dead because of their faithfulness to Him. These now rose from the earth to go home to heaven with Him.

As He came near to the city of God, the angels who were with Him called out,

“Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.”

The angels from heaven responded,

“Who is the King of glory?”

They respond this way not because they don’t know who He is but because they love to hear the answer,

“The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, invincible in battle.
Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.”

The angels never get tired of hearing the praise of their King, so they respond again, “Who is the King of glory?”

“The LORD Almighty—
He is the King of glory” (Psalms 24:7-10 NLT).

As Jesus entered the gates of the city of God, there was great joy and singing and happiness. But, He didn’t stop until He stood in front of the throne of God. Then He said, “It is finished. I have completed the work of saving man

from sin. If the law is satisfied, I would like these to be able to stay here with us now.” Jesus was talking about those He brought to heaven with Him at that time, but also all those who will be ready to go home with Him when He comes back again.

God said, “We have obeyed the law in dealing with sin, and now Satan is defeated.” The Father hugged Jesus and then gave the command, “Let all the angels of God worship Him” (Hebrews 1:6 NLT). Gladly the angels all bowed down and worshiped Jesus, then all heaven was filled with glad shouts of praise and worship.

“The Lamb is worthy—the Lamb who was killed.
He is worthy to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and blessing.
Blessing and honor and glory and power
belong to the One sitting on the throne
and to the Lamb forever and ever” (Revelation 5:12-13 NLT).

The human race has been re-united with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus. We are now one family again, and we will all be together when Jesus comes back again to bring us home with Him.