

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

THE BOOK OF **MARK**

VOLUME **57**

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8901

THE MARK OF MARK

The gospel of **Mark** was **written** by a servant about The **Servant**. **Like** so **much** of the Scriptures, **it** bears **the imprint** of its **human** author though **written** by **the Spirit** of God. **It** has **certain** attributes **that** we readily associate **with what** is **expected** of servants. For instance, **it** is short on speech **but** long on action. **It** is brief, **being the** shortest of **the** gospels. **It** is to **the** point, yet **it** does not **fail** to **give** a comprehensive account of **the** events of **the** Lord's earthly ministry. **When** we consider how **much** could **have been written** about **the** things "**which** Jesus **did**" (John 21: 25) **we are** forced to **the** conclusion **that** **what** has **been put** into **the** shortest of **the** gospels must **be** very important, to **the** last jot **and** tittle. For **example**, the single word "**in**" **in** the phrase "**in** **the** Jordan" (Mk. 1: 9) is of **great** significance because **the** Revised Version **Margin** tells us **that** **it** really means "into", **being the** Greek word *eis*. This **single**, tiny word gives **the** lie to **the** scene (**and** **the** doctrine **that** is **behind it**) **depicted in** a famous **painting** **which** shows **the** Lord standing **in** **the** Jordan **and** **being** sprinkled **with** **water** by John. **The** Lord was **baptized** into **the** Jordan, **meaning that** **He** was immersed **in** it.

The ability to **write** briefly **and** concisely is hard work **but** **it** benefits **the** writer **since** **it** forces **him** to **make** every word **accurate**. **We** encourage contributors to write their *Bible Studies* contributions **in** this style because **it** is clear, from both **the** number of papers **received** this month **and** their **length**, **that** **lack** of space **will** prevent **all** **that** is submitted about such **a** **rich** subject **being** printed. Repetition, wordiness **and** "**retelling the story**" must **be** avoided **at** **all** costs. **Rather** **than** try to cover everything **it** is **better** to concentrate on **a** part of **the** portion **and** **deal** **with** **it** in detail. Fellow contributors **will** no doubt **deal** **with** **the** other parts **that** must **be** omitted **as** **a** consequence, **in** **just** the same way **as** **the** other gospels complement Mark's account. **Thus** papers **in** this month's issue **have** **been** reduced **in** size, **but** **we** trust nothing has **been** lost overall. **Should** **this** **be** so **then** Editors **extend** **their** apologies.

I. E. P.

EDITORIAL MOVEMENTS

All will be pleased to hear of the improvement in health of PLH. As he takes up his editorial work again, we say farewell and thanks to JKDJ who bore his brother's burden, but now returns to the ranks of editors of *Needed Truth*. Meantime, we are pleased to welcome as fellow-editor, Bro. M. Archibald of Paisley, who has been a contributor to *Bible Studies* for over 25 years.

Editors

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL (Mk. 1: 1-45)

From Aberdeen: The Lord preached the "kingdom of God" as being "at hand". It has been suggested that He was the King of that kingdom who set up the kingdom of God, by the formation of churches of God, over which He would rule. This being so, we would understand the kingdom being "at hand" in terms of a short "length of time". But can we rule out the "at hand" as also meaning that He, as King, was "near" mankind by His presence in a human body? A scripture which seems supportive of this latter view is: "But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Luke 11: 20) [Comment 1].

The words concerning the fishermen of Galilee are refreshingly simple: "they (Peter and Andrew) left their nets, and followed him... they (James and John) left their father... and went after him" (1: 18-20). Our response to His call need not be complicated even though the world has become more complex.

When the Lord healed the leper His knowledge of the leper's future disobedience did not sway His judgement nor dampen His compassion for that man. It is so with us in our salvation. His knowledge of our future failures and disobedience in no way alters His judgement nor His compassion to save us.

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: John was the forerunner of the Messiah, and pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ. Today, unlike John, we in our preaching are pointing backwards to the finished work at Calvary's cross. John's call to repentance for the forgiveness of sins was complemented by baptism in water, but baptism could not suffice to wash away sins (Acts 19: 4, 5). Today, the gospel which we proclaim is based solely on the finished work of Christ. In the same vein, the Lord's baptism was not out of necessity. He had no sins for which he needed to make confession

(1 Pet. 2: 22, 24). Far from it! This was as a fulfilment of "all righteousness"(Mat. 3: 15). Similarly, we practise baptism not as a means to cleansing sin, but as a token of our allegiance and devotion to Christ (Acts 2: 41; Mat. 28: 19; Acts 10: 47; Rom. 6: 2-4).

Verses 14-20 emphasize the simplicity of the gospel that was preached by Christ. There was no ambiguity or unnecessary use of words. He was always to the point. The beginning of the gospel witnessed the call to discipleship. The call of the gospel is first to salvation and then to service. Christ, in calling these men, displayed the concern and initiative which should characterize a preacher who endeavours to win souls.

In addition to this, there was a tremendous manifestation of divine power in the preaching of the gospel (vv. 22, 27). Demons trembled before the mighty power of God. In the gospel which we preach today there is power, authority, and boldness. Power not necessarily to perform miracles, but to transform the lives of men (Acts 1: 8; Rom 1: 16; 8: 15).

Finally, the beginning of the gospel introduces us to the vital importance of prayer. A powerful preacher is a prayerful preacher. He must rely entirely on God for strength and guidance (Mk. 1: 35-39).

G. Okwena, F. Nitido

From Birmingham: There are omissions and additions peculiar to Mark's Gospel which emphasize the servant aspect of the Lord Jesus. For example, there is no genealogy, no miraculous birth as we read in Matthew. There is no record of childhood in Nazareth, nor subjection to his parents nor increase in wisdom and stature as in Luke's gospel. Neither is there reference to His pre-existence and Divine glory, as in John. Rather Mark comes at once to service, beginning with "John came, who baptized" (v. 4) and "Jesus came... and was baptised" (v. 9). There is no "sermon" on the mount. The laws of the kingdom would be out of place, for the servant, not the king, is here manifested. There are no lengthy discourses and but few parables; for the service here is of doings rather than teaching. Never is He called Lord in Mark.

The demeanour of the Servant seems to be brought out in Mark's gospel in His dealings with others. Only Mark records how in the case of Peter's mother-in-law He "took her by the hand, and raised her up" (v. 31) and how with the children "He took them in His arms"(Mk. 10: 16); so, too with the blind man (8: 23). It conveys the importance of tenderness and compassion because the Lord Jesus as Servant not only loved people, but conveyed that message to them by His demeanour.

R. Wood

From Birkenhead: Mark takes us back as far as Isaiah to show us how John's role of forerunner is foretold. John preached a baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. Those who heeded his message confessed their sins and, having been baptised, were looking for the coming of the Saviour. When He appeared John would give place to Him (John 3: 30).

Jesus' coming to the Jordan to be baptised of John set the divine seal of approval on John's work. The descent of the Spirit as a dove confirmed to John the identity of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Himself recognised the importance of His accreditation and addresses Himself to this matter at length in John 5: 30-47.

There are those who question the reality of the temptation of the Lord Jesus because of His nature - truly God yet truly man. On the basis of Heb. 2: 18 we must accept that He experienced the pressures of temptation and as a consequence shares the pain of our struggles. The Lord Jesus effectively used Scripture in dealing with Satan, and we in turn are told that in our warfare we must use the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6: 17).

Some may imagine that salvation from sin is the extent of the gospel, but in 1: 15 we are introduced to the truth of the kingdom of God (the matter of God having rule over His redeemed people) and brought to realise that this is embraced within God's good news through Jesus Christ. Individuals who had heard the gospel were challenged to follow as disciples, and own Jesus Christ as Lord. We read of the ready response of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.

The story then moves to Capernaum where the Lord Jesus showed His divine authority in different ways. His teaching left the people amazed as they realised He spoke in such a way as to make an obvious contrast with the scribes, who would need to refer to other sources. He dealt directly with unclean spirits who immediately recognized the Holy One of God. It is obvious that many people were affected by demons at that time (vv. 27, 32, 39) and these beings caused the Lord to rebuke them for their open admission of His identity. He looks rather for the confession made by those who have exercised faith in Him. He also dealt with human sickness with the same divine authority, as He moved on from the synagogue to Simon's house. We see the recovery from sickness of Simon's mother-in-law, and rejoice to see the way in which they come to Jesus "and straightway they tell Him of her"(v. 30). This is a valuable lesson in our prayer concerns and we observe how the one who is restored is immediately able and willing to serve.

As the news concerning the Lord Jesus spread, so the crowds increased and produced many difficulties for the spread of the word. The 'report' (v. 28) and the 'spreading abroad of the matter' (v. 45) made

many curious to see for themselves (see John 6: 24-26). This hindered the work (v. 45).

These opening passages of Mark's gospel are typical of his action-packed description of the Lord's time of public ministry, yet they also give insight into the feeling the Lord showed over the plight of man when we read of His "being moved with compassion"^M(v. 41). Thus in the beginning of the gospel of Mark we are introduced to a wide variety of human need and the corresponding variety of ways in which the Lord deals with it.

G. H. Roberts, R. D. Williams

From Bolton and Leigh: The gospel according to Mark commences with "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ". There is no reference to the birth of the Lord and the entrance into the world of the Son of God; Mark launches almost straight away into the Lord's ministry. This is a very fitting start because Mark portrays the Lord in His servant character and, in this context, the birth of a slave or servant is unimportant.

It was suggested that there was a twofold witness in v. 11. "Thou art"; firstly to the Lord and also to the people. Here we have no mean proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, i. e. the person of the Father, a voice out of heaven saying to the Son, "Thou art my beloved Son", and the Spirit descending as a dove.

There is a contrast between the accounts of Matthew and Luke in that they say that the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, whereas Mark tells us that "the Spirit driveth Him forth into the wilderness" (1: 12).

The servant character of the Lord is again brought before us in that it was early in the morning when He rose up and went out to a desert place to pray to God, His Father (1: 35).

The differences in Mark's gospel when compared with Matthew and Luke were considered. Mark gives no account of the "Sermon" on the Mount (Mat. 5 - 7); instead he continues with the incident of the leper as in Mat. 8: 2. This may be because Mark was not recording the *preaching* of the kingdom. Mark also omits the details of the incident in the synagogue (given in Luke 4) although he states that "He went into their synagogues" (Mk. 1: 21, 39).

IV. Paterson, Jr.

From Derby: So far as the expression "the beginning of the gospel" is concerned, we considered this as relating to "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (which has yet to see fulfilment in a coming day). So in a sense we are still experiencing only "the beginning" [Comment 2].

We pondered the significance of the phrases "the gospel of Jesus Christ", "the gospel of God", and "the kingdom of God" (1: 1, 14, 15). It was put forward that maybe there is a difference between "the gospel of Jesus Christ" and "the gospel of God". We looked at the possibility of the former expression being that part of the Gospel which relates to the unbeliever coming first to Jesus Christ for salvation. It would mean that the second expression is narrowed down to the believer, hence the next phrase relating to "the kingdom of God". However there were those who saw no difference between "the gospel of Jesus Christ" and "the gospel of God". In further discussion the thought was expressed that John the Baptist proclaimed "the gospel of Jesus Christ". He it was who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus. Then when the Lord Jesus started His ministry, He proclaimed "the gospel of God" [Comment 3].

In relation to the Lord's ministry, the demoniac was going around declaring that here was the Christ. The point here is that the authority of Scripture was being undermined. There was only one who was to "prepare the way of the Lord", that was John the Baptist [Comment 4].

L. E. Foster

From Dulwich: The beginning of the Gospel (Mk. 1: 1-18) is introduced from Malachi and Isaiah, with John the Baptist as the messenger sent to prepare the way (1: 15). In Malachi 3: 1 the Lord of Hosts sends His messenger to prepare the way "for Me", but in Mark, the Lord sent the messenger before the face of His servant, the Lord Jesus.

The fiery message of John (Mat. 3: 7-12; Luke 3: 7-17) is omitted in Mark; instead the emphasis seems to be more on His person. When John preached, God's people were spiritually barren (Is. 53: 2) and their paths were far from being straight (Acts 2: 40). The message of repentance and cleansing had been preached before (Is. 1: 18), but in Mark, in addition, we have baptism of (or unto) repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

The omission of the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, and the beginning of John, also the absence of the early part of the Lord's life from Mark would be consistent with the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1: 1), in His servant character. Further, as a servant He is driven by the Holy Spirit in contrast to what we have in Matthew (4: 1) and Luke (4: 1) where He is led.

The words 'straightway'¹, 'immediately' or 'forthwith', found so often in Mark, are translated from the same Greek word (*eutheos*). In this we see the character of the Servant of Jehovah, instant in season, and out of season, utilizing every moment for service, and also somewhat the character of the writer [who was also a servant - Eds].

It was the anointing *that* was displayed in the command of authority in teaching, preaching, healing and the casting-out of demons, which so amazed the onlookers.

We note that the service to Peter's mother-in-law is completed by a helping hand, omitted in both Matthew and Luke. At even we have the highest point of a period within twenty-four hours of the unremitting activity of the Perfect Servant (1: 21-45). How necessary it was for the Servant of Jehovah to withdraw from the clamour of the crowd, and to be found early in the morning, in a solitary place, in prayer to the Upholding One (Is. 42: 1).

W. Townsend

From Kilmarnock: Mark omits the early life of the Lord and begins immediately (a key word in this gospel) with His public ministry, so showing His servant character.

After a statement regarding the Lord Jesus Christ's being the Son of God there is a quotation which Mark attributes to Isaiah, yet the first half of the quotation is from the book of Malachi. Could it be that Mark in his haste overlooked the book from which the first half of the quotation came? [Comment 5]. He used the first half of the quotation as a link to the main part of the quotation and thereafter into the work of John the Baptist. The fulfilment of the quotation of verses 2 and 3 lay in his preparing the people, by baptizing them and telling them to await the coming of the Messiah.

We now come to the first words that the Lord spoke in Mark's record, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the Gospel" (v. 15). Immediately afterwards He called His first disciples, but this was not the first time He had spoken to them. They left all immediately and followed Him.

While it was still dark on the day after the eventful Sabbath He left (we think, as the disciples slept) to pray alone in a desert place. When His disciples found Him they said that everyone was looking for Him but the Lord said that He must go elsewhere. This is the beginning of the spread of the Gospel. Following his cure, the leper was strictly charged not to say anything but to show himself to the priest (as commanded in Leviticus 14) but the man immediately went away and spoke to many

people regarding what had happened. This disobedience restricted the Lord's movement but the people still came out to Him in the desert places. Thus, at this point the Lord had now taken over fully from John in that the people now came out to Him, whereas before they had come out to hear John.

A. Ramage, D. Cranson

From Liverpool: Mark's Perspective The gospel writers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, present, when taken together, the total picture of the Lord Jesus necessary for our understanding. Each however, presents a different perspective and in Mark it is the role of **the** Lord Jesus the Perfect Servant doing the Father's will which is stressed. It is noticeable that Mark's narrative contains such expressions as "straightway" (RV) or "at once" (NIV) to describe the actions of the Lord! We noted a parallel with Paul's words (Phil. 2: 6-11).

John the Baptist The quotations (actually from Malachi and Isaiah) reveal John's role as "My messenger". Thus he took his instructions from the Son of God for whose coming he was preparing. John's duty was to present the immediacy of the Lord's presence among His people and the importance to that people of being in the right condition for His coming. In one sense John was the last of the Old Testament prophets; yet in another they were until John (see Mat. 11: 13). He had a distinctive ministry: they saw from afar, he pointed to Christ close-up. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance unto forgiveness. The Lord had no need to be baptised but did so to provide a perfect example of submission to His Father. He never expected others to do what He was not prepared to do Himself. We noted the appearance of the Trinity in this occasion.

Tempted by Satan We saw the purpose of this period in the Lord's life as being to establish His sinlessness and faithfulness; and to show that Satan had no power over Him. However hard it is for us to understand it, we felt sure that the temptations were very real and, at least, there must have been a possibility of His succumbing. The fact that he had no tendency to sin does not show otherwise, for Adam had no sinful tendency, yet did so. The Lord Jesus overcame by the skilful use of Scripture and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Responding to the Lord's call The response of Simon and Andrew (1: 18) and the others is not an example of blind faith. Obviously they had seen the Lord Jesus, had heard Him and had spent time with Him (John 1: 35-42). The decision to leave all and follow was not a spur of the moment act but the response to the challenge of the very Person as well as the word He spoke. The call to follow involved sacrifice and commitment on their part. Discipleship is a life-time activity.

The Kingdom of God at Hand meaning either that the presence of the King brought the kingdom near to them or else a proclamation of the

setting up of the kingdom which never actually came to pass because they rejected Him. Either way, the King was preparing subjects who would spearhead the spiritual kingdom after His death and resurrection [Comment 6].

D. J. Webster

From Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Simon and Andrew responded immediately to the call of the Lord Jesus. This makes the first-time reader ask, 'What was it that Simon and Andrew knew about Him?' Despite the sudden response on this occasion, Simon and Andrew had also been acquainted with Him gradually (John 1). It is also probable that they had been baptised by John and it is not impossible for this to have coincided with the baptism of Jesus [Comment 7].

What is the Person we are confronted with in Mark's gospel like?

Given the corrupt state of civilization, He had a clear preference for the open country. In this we can see independence and self-sufficiency; no human sponsors to keep in communication with; no libraries and back-up required; no stocks and shares to look after. When He did come into the towns it was to visit the synagogue. It is possible to conclude that Jesus would have liked all His ministry to have been based within the traditional framework of the synagogues. "That I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth (v. 38) [Comment 8].

Healing was incidental and secondary. In Capernaum, the healing was only after the teaching of the Sabbath day. Within this context, we may note that it was the teaching the people evaluated rather than appearances. The people were astounded at His teaching and His authority. They had not assembled for entertainment. In the light of this it is somewhat strange that there is so little recorded in Mark of the teaching itself. Instead, the reader is presented with the authority of prophecy (vv. 2-3) and of Heaven (v. 11) and they are supported, as was the teaching, by the power over spirits.

After such a build-up the reader might be surprised to find that they Lord is nevertheless vulnerable to mankind. The preferred itinerary of travelling and teaching was spoiled by publicity, and we know that this was only the first of many instances where the intended course was interfered with by the choices and actions of people He encountered,

P. J. Stoner

From Paisley: The Spirit, through Mark, chooses the ministry of John the Baptist as the first topic in his highly concise presentation of the Gospel. Then by prefacing it with the heading "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ... ", Mark underlines the importance of John's ministry as a prelude to the work of our Lord. John called the people to repentance, and his work was named "the baptism of repentance" (Acts 13: 24; 19: 4); the Lord preached, "Repent and believe" (Mk. 1: 15; cp. Mat. 3: 4; Luke 13); and the apostles preached repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20: 21; 2: 38; 3: 19; etc). Here, then, is guidance for the Gospel-messenger today, still to give God's requirement of repentance a prime place in his message.

It has been suggested that Roman readers would appreciate Mark's action-filled record, and so many cases through the book of the Lord's casting-out of demons. We, however, were impressed by hearing the voice of the Lord's authority in this chapter: "The time is fulfilled... Repent ye, and believe... Come ye after Me... Hold thy peace, and come out of him". The results were as immediate as His actions and words.

The expression 'proclaim good news', of course, had many Old Testament associations, especially as linked with Mark through the Septuagint Greek, for example, in the list of references to good tidings in Isaiah, such as 61: 1 about the Lord's first coming, and so it was a term charged with joy and hope for the godly Israelite.

Turning to the "hired servants" (v. 20), we noted that we may sometimes underestimate the abilities of those men whom the Lord chose to be apostles, who were experienced fishermen, practised in partnership (Luke 5: 10) and in the direction of hired crews, in work that demanded endurance and skill. We need to respect also their courage and love, who were drawn to give up all to follow Jesus, and later to learn that to be great in this service is to be a servant to others, while to be first is to become a bondservant (Mat. 20: 26, 27).

M. Archibald

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): The second of the explanations given by friends in Aberdeen is what is meant by "in the midst of you" (Luke 17: 21 RVM) and therefore cannot explain the different expression "at hand". We suggest that the Scripture (Luke 11: 20) quoted by friends supports their first explanation. Miracle-working is always associated with major new development in the unfolding truth of the kingdom of God. Thus

the miracle-working of Moses heralds the establishment of the people at Sinai. That of Elijah and Elisha was meant to direct the northern kingdom to the fact that the house of God was in the southern kingdom. That of the Lord and the apostles established the spiritual kingdom of this dispensation.

2. (**Derby**): Friends in Derby are making this too difficult. By the time Mark's gospel was written, the gospel of Jesus Christ had spread far and wide. He writes in response to the inevitable question, 'How did it all begin?'

3. (**Derby**): These are different descriptions of the same gospel and illustrate servant character. The gospel which Mark spread was not his. He was a servant who got it from his Lord, hence he called it the "gospel of Jesus Christ". Similarly, the Lord *as a Servant* got it from His Lord and so it was to Him, "the gospel of God". *I. E. P.*

"The gospel of Jesus Christ" was the good news of the appearing and work of Jesus, the anointed Messiah. It encompassed everything to do with His coming and its consequences, not solely His work for the salvation of men from the penalty of sin. As is pointed out above, this gospel was the gospel of God because He was its originator, and the Lord Jesus, the Son, served the Father in its promulgation. The "kingdom of God" signifies the rule of God among the people of God; this should be a consequence of the receipt of the gospel.

P. L. H.

4. (**Derby**): There is a more serious reason. The Lord demands that the preacher practise what he preaches, so He will not have the damned, who are also servants of one who is damned, to preach the gospel. At this time, too, the Baptist was imprisoned and thus not free to prepare the way of the Lord. Indeed, his task was satisfactorily completed.

5. (**Kilmarnock**): It would be easy to say that the RVM says that there is doubt about the reference to Isaiah in the original text. In fact, the RV is usually correct when it notes differences from the Received Text and therefore we cannot answer the question raised by friends in Kilmarnock save to say that the first part of the quotation is to be read parenthetically.

I. E. P.

The reading "in Isaiah the prophet" has been consistently regarded by scholars as much stronger than the RVM, even when they have wished to set aside the quotation in v. 2 as an insertion. One can understand Mark as identifying the more important prophecy of those he has collected.

M.

A.

M. A.

6. (**Liverpool**): See Comment 1. The Lord could not set up a kingdom till the kingdom had been taken away from Israel, else He would indeed have been a sectarian man and guilty of the charge made against Him by the leaders of Israel (Luke 23: 2).

7. (Newcastle-on-Tyne): John the Baptist pointed his disciples to the Lord, expecting them to believe on Him. He literally did so in the case of Andrew (John 1: 36-37) only one day after the revelation to Him that the Lord was the Messiah.. Thus Andrew and Simon followed the Lord immediately and without any gradual acquaintance with Him. Andrew is described as one of John's disciples (John 1: 35) which suggests more than one day's acquaintance. Since they are presented as brothers doing things together it is likely that Simon, too, was a disciple of John's of the same long standing.

It seems to me that John 1: 29-37 can be read to mean that Andrew and the other disciple had heard John's witness, recorded in vv. 29-34, and by v. 35 were waiting their opportunity when John again pointed out the Lord, to find out more from this new Teacher. 1: 35 would thus indicate, not that John's disciples had been absent the day before, but simply that the focus is now on those two who followed. It is reasonable to suppose, with friends in Newcastle, that John's witness in vv. 29-34 was addressed to some of his disciples at least. To assume, however, that Andrew and John were baptized at the same time as the Lord would suggest that they were slow to respond to the Baptist's ministry, and hardly accords with the distinctive title "his disciples".

M. A.

8. (Newcastle-on-Tyne): The direct opposite is the case. The Lord loved the company of fellowmen and women and constantly sought it. In this He is to be contrasted with John the Baptist (see Luke 7: 24-32). Friends in Kilmarnock point out that the Lord was in the desert (Mk. 1: 45) because of the disobedience of the healed leper. His early morning rise and trip to a desert place (Mk. 1: 35) is a different matter. Here we have the Busy Servant at His personal devotions which He performs in His own time and place. Servants today should not filch time from their earthly masters to attend to their private devotions.

LE. P.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

From Kilmarnock: Did all the temptations take place during the fortieth day?

The three temptations which are detailed in the gospels took place "when He had fasted forty days and forty nights". It was when He was hungry as a result of this that the Devil came with the temptation about the stones (Mat. 4: 2-3). Mark and Luke however, record temptations throughout the forty days (Mk. 1: 13; Luke 4: 2).

I. E. P.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8902

PRAYER WITH FASTING

First, it is a pleasure to welcome contributions from assemblies where new generations are making it possible to revive group-study. We recall Lord Bacon's wise words: "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man".

The interest of more than one group in New Testament fasting prompts us to devote this issue's 'Editorial'¹ to the subject. In the Old Testament, fasting is recorded at times of national or personal crisis, as when Israel gathered themselves to Samuel at Mizpah, and he cried to the Lord for them, when David pleaded for the life of his child by Bathsheba, or when Nehemiah mourned for the affliction of the remnant in Jerusalem, and the broken walls. This fasting accompanied a specific burden of prayer. From Is. 58: 5, Ps. 35: 13 and Zech. 8: 19, we gather that afflicting one's soul during the Day of Atonement and other national observances involved fasting. It was these annual occasions, however, that eventually drew the Lord's rebuke because the people's conduct showed that many cared only for themselves and their own pleasures.

We need not be surprised, then, that the practice appears so seldom in the New Testament, and that the Lord warned His disciples of its dangers and relieved them of its pursuit while He was with them. It was all too easy to become preoccupied with the observance, to the neglect of its purpose, and even to use it to impress others (Mat. 6: 16).

But as fellow-students remark, the Lord spoke of days to come when His disciples *would* fast (recorded in three Gospels), and gave advice about how it should be done by the individual. Whether He was speaking of the days immediately following His ascension, or of the practice of the early churches, or of the exigencies of the siege of Jerusalem, we read in the Acts of only three cases when there was deliberate, planned abstinence:

(1) when certain prophets and teachers in Antioch "ministered to

the Lord, and fasted" in the stirring days while the Word spread as never before (Acts 13: 2)

- (2) when Barnabas and Saul were separated for the Lord's service (Acts 13: 1-3); and
- (3) at the appointment of the first elders of the new churches (Acts 14: 23).

Again, all these were occasions of special need or expectancy. Consider also the personal devotion of Anna the prophetess, who "departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day"(Luke 2: 37), and the great reward she received. We may pass over the privations of which Paul writes in 2 Cor. 6: 5 and 11: 27, since it is possible to view these as incurred by the hazards of travel and the demands of preaching "in season, out of season". It is noteworthy also that textual scholars are firmly decided that in Mat. 17: 21, Mark 9: 29, Acts 10: 30 and 1 Cor. 7: 5 fasting has been inserted in later Mss., reflecting human tradition.

We conclude that the recorded cases show that this practice belonged with prayer; was an option suited to special times or needs (an option, because many great acts of the Spirit left no record of fasting); and was pursued by people of devout life. It may be that others, great or lowly, noted the Lord's words and followed the example of Old Testament saints. But of this we are sure: the practice of controlled abstinence from eating, for the purpose of concentration on prayer and communion, brought rich reward in Biblical times, and its worth has been attested to by godly men and women through generations since. On the basis of Mat. 6: 16, Mark 2: 20, Luke 2: 37, Acts 13 and Acts 14, we commend the wise exercise of fasting when in health, but avoiding publicity, or upset to others. We need hardly add that in lands favoured with an abundance of food, the disciple of Christ will do well to heed such wholesome guidance on eating generally as Prov. 15: 17, 1 Cor. 6: 12, 13, 19, 20.

M. A.

OPPOSITION IN GALILEE (Mark 2: 1-3: 35)

From Aberdeen: The Lord experienced opposition because He forgave sins; because He ate with the collectors of Roman taxes, and with sinners; and because of His dealings on the sabbath. The Pharisees accused the Lord of permitting "unlawful" behaviour from His disciples (who plucked the ears of corn on the sabbath) and were minded to accuse Him as they "watched" to see whether He would heal on the sabbath. Before healing the man with the withered hand, the Lord tackled the Pharisees on the matter of the sabbath and by His sound words showed that their argument was without foundation. That they could not suffer "doing good" on the sabbath highlights the fact that they were suffering from an evil eye (Mat. 6: 23). They hated

the Lord without a **cause and** so they **interpreted** His every action through **an** evil eye. From **the** darkness **which** spread from **their** eye to **their** whole body they **reached** the point of blaspheming against **the** Holy Spirit.

What was this sin? The Lord's reply indicates **that** the Pharisees **were** so stubborn **that** they threw out **an** unreasonable challenge **in** the face of the clear manifestation of **the** power of God. They were prepared to use **an** unsound **argument** against **the** **evident** work of God **and** **in** so resisting **the** **truth** they were resisting **the** Holy Spirit **as** **He** worked to convict **them** of God's work. By resisting **the** only One who could **save** **them**, they **were** leaving themselves exposed to eternal judgement.

Had the Pharisees **and** John's disciples recognized **that** **the** man, Jesus, was really **the** Son of **the** **Living** God they would not **have** **been** so **taken** **up** **with** fasting. The Lord's disciples **experienced** the privilege of companionship **with** **the** Son of God here on earth. **When** **the** Lord **was** **taken** away from **them** to **be** **crucified** it would **be** a normal reaction for **the** disciples to fast through loss of **appetite** [Comment 1].

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: The **evident** **faith** of the whole party (Mark 2: 1-12) resulted **in** Jesus declaring **that** the sins of the ill man were forgiven. There **was** a **view** current at this **time** **that** sickness **and** sin were bound **up** **with** one another (see John 9: 2), **and** Jesus was **able** to confound any of this **mind** by healing **the** man's sickness **and** removing any reasonable doubt **in** the minds of those genuinely seeking **Him** [Comment 21].

From **thence** Jesus **went** by **the** seaside **and** there saw **Levi** the tax-gatherer **at** work **and** called **him** to discipleship. **Luke** adds a helpful detail to **the** picture 'he forsook all' (**Luke** 5: 28). Here **was** a man who was despised by **the** people for **the** way **in** which he conducted **his** business, relinquishing his means of support **and** offering his allegiance to **One** about whom he presumably **knew** little [Comment 3].

Having pointed out **the** true purpose of the sabbath **the** Lord Jesus continued to offend **the** Pharisees by **healing** a man with a withered **hand** on the sabbath. **When** challenged to **defend** their **view**, they **were** unable to do so **and** **the** Lord Jesus was moved to express His righteous anger **at** their attitude. The healing roused **the** Lord's enemies to madness, i. e. unreasonable behaviour (**Luke** 6: 11) **and** Mark records a strange affinity **with** **the** Herodians, supporters of Herod Antipas, **in** scheming His destruction [Comment 4]. The Lord makes abundantly clear **that** no **human** law is recognized **that** runs contrary to **the** **divine** decree to do good (Mat. 12: 12) **at** all times.

The opposition to the work of the Lord Jesus took a fresh turn when the scribes came from Jerusalem and attributed His miracles to the power of Beelzebub. The foolishness of their reasoning was exposed when it was made clear to them that it was illogical to conclude that the powers of evil would work to cast out evil spirits [Comment 5]. The Lord continues by clearly stating that it was possible for people to fail to appreciate His true identity and therefore it was possible to forgive such, but for any who wilfully reject the incontrovertible evidence of divine activity through the Holy Spirit there would be no forgiveness.

Subsequently, there were those of His earthly family who sought Jesus, and this presented the opportunity to declare that His disciples were those who actively sought to do His will. These stood in family relationship to Him in a spiritual sphere.

A. E. Turner, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: We have a further illustration in Mark 2 of the legalistic application of the law by the Pharisees when they found fault with the disciples for plucking ears of corn. In this case it was a gross overstretching of the law which forbade manual labour on the sabbath (Ex. 20: 10), but in their zeal to maintain the law they had readily forgotten the weightier matters of the law, mercy and love (Mat. 12: 7) [Comment 6].

Although the Lord laid heavy emphasis upon obedience to His commands yet we learn from this chapter that mercy has its place. David was allowed to eat of the Shewbread which was not lawful for him to eat (see also Mat. 12: 4). It certainly tells us at least that obedience to His commands must be balanced with mercy. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1: 17), and if I give my body to be burned and have not love it profiteth me nothing (1 Cor. 13: 3). However, the example of David and the Shewbread and the priests and the sabbath, seems to go beyond that, giving licence, on the grounds of mercy, to suspend certain commandments for at least a period of time, under special circumstances. Defiant and rebellious disregard for the law of God brought instant death (Num. 15: 30), but in cases of necessity the law did not bind a man (see also Mat. 15: 5-6).

Today, have we authority on the grounds of mercy to suspend certain of the Lord's commands? We wonder if divorce might come into this category, where the letter of the law might demand a certain course of action but mercy allows another [Comment 7].

R. Wood

From **Bolton and Leigh**: The common people noted that the Lord spoke with authority, and not as the scribes. Doubtless when the Lord Jesus said to the sick of the palsy "Thy sins are forgiven", the people accepted it as a further demonstration of the authority with which He spoke. Not so the scribes, who in their hearts were turning the Lord's words into a charge of blasphemy. Knowing the reasonings of their hearts, the Lord Jesus proceeded to use the healing of the sick man as a confirmation of His authority, by posing the question "Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" The second choice was obviously the more difficult so, when the word of power was spoken and the sick man was cured, the Lord's authority to forgive sins was pointedly established and it was also clear that His authority was from God.

When we come to the matter of the sabbath day, here was an issue that was to be a constant source of disagreement between the Lord and His antagonists. The incidents of the plucking of the ears of corn by the disciples, and the Lord's healing of the man with the withered hand on the sabbath day, show the difference between Him and the Pharisees, as to how they applied the law of Moses. The Pharisees brought a pedantic attitude to bear on the law, seeking to apply it in the smallest degree, so much so, that they lost sight of the original purpose of sabbath observance. They were turning the law into a burdensome thing to be endured, rather than an ordinance given by God for the benefit of His people (2: 27). There was no precedent in the law to condemn what the disciples did to satisfy their hunger; on the contrary, there was a precedent to show that when men were hungry the ritual observances of the law could be temporarily set aside, to allow them to meet their need. When it came to the matter of healing on the sabbath day, the Lord's question (3: 4) showed the stance of the Pharisees to be absurd.

It is somewhat ironic that men sought to discredit the Lord while the unclean spirits bore true witness to who He was: "Thou art the Son of God" (3: 11).

Alex Reid

From **Derby**: The opposition of the scribes and Pharisees to the Lord Jesus was gradually mounting. He, in His infinite knowledge, looked into the heart of the paralytic and knew that his physical condition was the result of the underlying sin, so He said to him, "Thy sins are forgiven" [Comment 2]. He also knew that the scribes were thinking, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" The question was correct. They failed to realise that Jesus as Son of God was exercising His divine prerogative while He was on the earth.

No-one could see the evidence of this act of forgiveness, so Jesus told the paralytic to walk, and thus His power was manifested to all and the faith of the sympathetic friends was honoured.

Answering a further objection over the Lord's attitude to the sabbath, He said the sabbath was made for man and that certain types of work were permissible. His disciples needed food and the plucking of the corn was not unnecessary work. The forces of evil were rampant and did not cease from their activities because it was the sabbath and so acts of mercy could not be postponed. Thus Jesus felt compelled to cure the man's arm. While he was being criticised for doing good on the sabbath day by the Pharisees they themselves went out with murderous intentions in their hearts to join with their arch-enemies in seeking to kill Him. The demons recognized Him but did not believe on Him for salvation and were forbidden to make Him known.

When He returned home His family were desperately worried about Him and wanted to help Him. Following on from their concern, the scribes implied that Satan was in control of Him. With an apt illustration He showed them how absurd their accusations were. The Holy Spirit pleads with men but if they persistently and utterly reject what He is saying about the Christy then they cut themselves off from the only avenue to eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His family has deeper and more abiding ties than any earthly family, and it is well for us all to be in it.

G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: The opposition in Galilee was typical of that which the servant of the Lord received in all the three-and-a-half years of His service, culminating in the decision of the Sanhedrin (Mat. 26: 3, 4). Six times in these two chapters we have the opposition focussed before us: in the house at Capernaum; at the entrance to Levi's house; in the cornfield; in the synagogue; the question of fasting; and the matter of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The scribes, having rejected the testimony of John the Baptist, and aware of the ritual relating to the forgiveness of sins, charge the Lord with blasphemy.

Though the Hebrew word *qarab* ('to pierce', Dr. Young) seems to have a deeper meaning than the Greek *blasphemo* ('to speak injuriously against it') yet in the context of our studies there is no diminution of its serious character: the scribes were guilty of this blasphemy in its highest form against the Holy Spirit. Having noted the serious character of this blasphemy, the enormity of spiritual and religious pride is observable in their critical attitude to the Lord through His disciples.

The matter of opposition in the plucking of the ears of corn, and the healing of the man with the withered hand in the synagogue, are both to do with the sabbath. In addition to this we have six instances where miracles were performed on the sabbath: Mark 1: 21-28, 30, 31; 3: 1-5; Luke 13: 11-17; John 5: 1-16; 9: 1-41. The only exception to not working permitted by the Pharisees was work arising from death, so they were hostile to the point of destroying the Lord (Mark 3: 6).

In the contemplation of the goodly qualities of His works in creation, God found rest and refreshment (Ex. 31: 14-17). Herein was the great purpose of the sabbath, and it was made for man also. Was it not right then that the great Master-workman, who brought these things into being (Prov. 8: 30), should by His grace and power make the sabbath rest a reality of enjoyment to suffering and demon-possessed ones? [Comment 8].

W. Townsend

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: In chapter 2 we see the Lord at work in Capernaum, the centre of His Galilean ministry. Although Capernaum now became His home town, it was rebuked later for its hardness of heart and unbelief. Here, however, the Lord takes every opportunity to show Himself towards its people, in His conversation, His miracles, His preaching and His teaching (2: 12, 17). Just as the Lord spoke to people about Himself and His Father, so also we should seek every opportunity to direct others towards God.

In the early stages of his gospel, Mark deals with the profound question of the Sonship and deity of the Lord Jesus. His words of forgiveness to the paralytic aroused opposition from the scribes, who reasoned, "... who can forgive sins **but** one, even God?" His claim to have authority to forgive sins implied, within it, His claim also to be the Son of God, and so the scribes accused Him of speaking blasphemy. His claim was vindicated, however, by His subsequent healing of the paralytic, a visible sign of His divine authority.

It is significant that the Lord did not first heal the man, but rather forgave his sins; He first dealt with the root of the problem and then tackled the symptoms. The Lord's ministry was primarily one of forgiveness, rather than healing. Having forgiven the man's sin, in response to an act of faith, the Lord was then able to heal the paralytic.

The Lord's teaching concerning fasting led us to a discussion of the importance of fasting within the church. Since the "bridegroom" has been taken from us, is this not a time for fasting? Certainly, we have the precedent of the early churches, who prayed and fasted (Acts 13: 1-3) (See Editorial),

The Lord's teaching and miracles provided conclusive evidence that He was indeed the Son of God, but this was of no interest to the teachers of the law; their only concern was that He had forgiven sins, and that He had worked on the sabbath. The Pharisees and Herodians, two rival factions, now became one in their plans to kill Jesus, spurred on by hatred and jealousy. The consummate wisdom of the Lord can be seen, however, as He first answers the criticism of His enemies, and then performs the miracle.

In order to advance His ministry, the Lord chose twelve followers as disciples, men who would become close companions, learn from Him, and then go out to preach in His authority. Service should always be preceded by fellowship with the Lord Jesus: we must first establish a personal relationship with the Lord before we communicate our faith to others.

J. D. Williams

From **Innerleithen**: Invariably a work of God will arouse strong counteraction from the Adversary. Chapter 2 records the commencement of conflict and the rising tide of enmity against the Lord which was to culminate in the brutal and violent act of crucifixion, signified by the Lord's words (v. 20) "the bridegroom shall be taken away". The same expression is found in Is. 53: 8. "Taken away" and "cut off" point to the callous and rough treatment to which the heart of sin is prone and to the extreme physical pain the Lord endured at the hands of sinful men. All service for Christ may be expected to produce suffering in some way or other [Comment 9].

The exercise of faith by the paralytic's four companions and the Lord's healing would have provoked envy in the hearts of his accusers but His word on forgiveness of sins was unbearable to them. His deity was displayed in three ways; (1) His granting of forgiveness; the prerogative of God alone, so acknowledged by the critics; (2) His making known to them of their very thoughts and (3) the raising of the bed-bound man.

Chapter 3 has the Lord in the synagogue again on a sabbath day. The man with the deformed hand (caused either by disease or accident - "withered") had the joy of seeing his right hand restored to normality. Again, the deputation of the scribes monitored every move. The Lord Jesus looked briefly in anger (aorist participle), but His grief was prolonged by reason of their hardness and unmercifulness (present participle). The Lord's kinsfolk, differentiated from close relatives in vv. 31, 35 [see Comment 11], were upset by what they heard and sought to impose restrictions on the Lord's activities, saying "He

is beside himself" (lit. 'out of His wits'). "Natural" opposition can be expected to surface when God's will is being done, but the scribes' ascription of Satanic power to the Lord's work done in the fullness of the Spirit's power evoked the strongest indictment from Him. In what they said they were committing an unforgivable and eternal sin. That was only possible when He was here in flesh (v. 30). The will of God, too, must have precedence over family demands. The Lord's statement was another gentle rebuke to Mary and others for seeking to presume on His time in the Father's work. The absence of "father" in vv. 33-35 is not only because Joseph would have been dead by this time, but because of the truth of Ephesians 4: 6 "there is one God and Father of all" [Comment 16].

R. B. Fullarton

From Kilmarnock: In the case of the palsied man brought by four, the Lord Jesus saw their faith and said to the sick man, "Thy sins are forgiven". He said this because, although there was joint faith among all five men, He perceived that the sick man was troubled about his sin. Some scribes reasoned within themselves that Jesus had blasphemed since no-one but God could forgive sins. The Lord knew what they were thinking. It was equally simple for Him to forgive sins as to heal the man but the scribes could not comprehend this. So He demonstrated His power to forgive sins by healing the sick man.

The criticism made by the Pharisees was of the disciples for plucking and eating ears of corn on the sabbath. The Lord answered that just as David was in need when he ate the Shewbread (and did not sin) so the disciples also ate on the sabbath because they were in need and did not sin. Certain actions on the sabbath were permissible under the Law; the sabbath was not to be a burden to man but a privilege and benefit for men and therefore for God. Later on that same sabbath [Comment 10], Jesus entered into the synagogue and knew that He was being watched to see whether He would heal on the sabbath. Therefore, He publicly proclaimed that He was Lord of the sabbath by making sure that the man was in full view of the crowd when He healed his withered hand, thereby teaching us that it was not wrong to do good on the sabbath. The Lord was angry at the stubbornness of the Pharisees and also grieved because of it. The Pharisees had no pity for the man. They joined with the Herodians and plotted to destroy the Lord and His teachings. They were so blind to His teachings that they became the allies of their former enemies.

On the occasion when His friends went out "to lay hold on Him" (3: 21) or "to take charge of Him"(NIV) they said that He was out of His

mind. (Was the Lord at this point exhausted by the opposition and His workload?)[Comment 11]. The teachers of the Law from Jerusalem fastened on this statement and said that it was by Beelzebub that He was doing these great wonders. This was a nonsensical statement from learned men, as the Lord Jesus showed. It was also blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and they were guilty of an eternal sin. In their hatred of the Lord the scribes were incapable of thinking rationally.

David Cranson, Drew Ramage

From Liverpool: Proof In the healing of the paralytic the Lord Jesus openly confirms that he had not just come to heal the bodies of men and women but also lays claim to deity in claiming the ability to forgive sins. At first we had some sympathy for the thoughts of the scribes, for they were right! Only God can forgive sins. What they failed to appreciate was that the mighty miracles of the Lord were not simply an end in themselves but were specifically meant to prove and vindicate his verbal claims (cf. John 10: 38). Anybody could claim to forgive sins, but in doing the seemingly harder thing in raising the sick man up the Lord was changing the basis on which his first statement should be judged. The stunned reaction of the crowd speaks for itself. We felt sure that the sick man appreciated which was his greater need and had already repented; for without repentance there is no ground for forgiveness.

Indictment The grounds that persuaded the Pharisees finally to plot to kill the Lord (3: 6) were various: blasphemy (2: 7), a life not in keeping with the concept of holiness (2: 16), quibbles about interpretation and additions to the law (2: 18, 2: 24), and pure hatred (3: 2). It is noticeable that when the issue was pure prejudice and making void the word of God, the Lord had no time for his opponents' feelings on the matter and did not seek to avoid upsetting them, rather he set out to confront them directly.

The Question of Fasting We noted that the Lord, in explaining why His disciples did not fast, expected them to do so at a later time. In another place He said, "When you fast... "; is this not to be taken in the same way as "When you pray... "? We need to know what fasting is for, and we were unable to answer that (see Editorial).

The Unforgivable Sin The Lord is not introducing here a new type of sin which we need to guard against; rather he is pointing to the inevitable doom of a condition of heart which is beyond divine illumination.

It is not meaningful to ask if it can be committed today: John 3: 18 reveals that unbelievers are "condemned already" and those who refuse to believe put themselves beyond the pale of God's salvation [Comment 12].

D. J. Webster

From **Middlesbrough**: In Mark 2 the opposition consisted of direct challenges against the Lord in respect of His power, authority, deity and lordship.

The challenge against the power of the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the event involving the man who was sick of the palsy. The Lord said to the man who was sick, "Son thy sins are forgiven". As a result the scribes in effect challenged His power in their hearts by reasoning, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" In the face of this covert challenge the Lord Jesus Christ not only healed the man but reinforced His power by referring to it, "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins..." (2: 10).

The group who challenged the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ were the Pharisees. Their challenge was more direct. "He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners" (2: 16). During the course of this event the Lord Jesus revealed His authority both by commanding Levi to follow Him, and by referring to the purpose of His ministry, "I came... to call... sinners" (2: 17).

It was the Pharisees, too, who challenged the Lord's deity. This was done by their implying that He was no greater than John and the Pharisees: "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Thy disciples fast not?" (2: 18). This was a more direct challenge than either of the other two, involving as it did a direct challenge to the Lord Himself. On this occasion He dealt with their challenge by identifying Himself as the bridegroom [Comment 13].

The issue of the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ arose over the disciples plucking ears of corn on the sabbath day. This resulted in a dual challenge by the Pharisees to the Lord Jesus Christ. This challenge implied that He did not understand the law or was disregarding it: "Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" In response to this challenge the Lord made it clear to the Pharisees that it was they who lacked an understanding of God's word (2: 25), and that in fact He was the Lord of the sabbath.

The scribes accused Him of being "beside himself" (3: 21), and His family challenged Him by seeking to divert Him from the will of God. This was perhaps the most subtle challenge of all, appealing as it did to His earthly relationships [Comment 14].

A. A. McIlvenna, C. N. Williams,
J. McIlvenna

From Paisley: The Lord is the great Searcher of hearts who was gladdened or saddened (and angered) by what He saw there and who spoke and acted accordingly.

Believing hearts

(a) "They come, bringing unto Him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four" (2: 3). The change from past tense to present tense (a feature of Mark's record) makes the picture more vivid. They come with a determined faith—the crowd simply being an obstacle to be overcome. He sees their faith (which includes the man's faith) and He sees the sadness in the man's heart and His heart answers, "Son thy sins are forgiven" (2: 5).

(b) In the house at Capernaum He saw the faith of those who sat round about Him and He reveals how greatly He values the obedience of faith: "Behold, My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and My mother" (3: 34-35).

Unbelieving hearts

(a) Reasoning hearts [Comment 15].

"Why doth this Man thus speak? He blasphemeth... God" (2: 7). Reasoning which led to a wrong conclusion—"He blasphemeth". (The natural mind receives not the things of the Spirit of God.)

(b) Critical hearts

(i) Critical of Him "He eateth and drinketh with... sinners" (2: 16) implying that He condoned sin (were they blind to the repentance of these men?), but this brought from the Lord the glad gospel message, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners".

(ii) Critical of His disciples "Why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" and He reminds them of what David did and enunciates another great truth, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (2: 24-27).

(c) Hard hearts

"They (religious men) watched Him... that they might accuse

Him". In spite of putting the matter so clearly to them, "Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" (3: 2-4) their hearts were only hardened. (We took special note that this was a cause of anger and grief to Him.) He knew what would follow his healing of the man; that they would take counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him, but it was in His heart to do good no matter the consequences to Himself.

(d) Blasphemous hearts

Religious men said "He hath an unclean spirit" and were guilty of "an eternal sin" (3: 29-30).

John H. Johnson

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): It is probably true that the disciples were temporarily affected by loss of appetite when the Lord was taken away from them, but we should distinguish between this and the deliberate self-discipline of fasting referred to in Mark 2. See also 'Editorial'¹.

2. (Birkenhead): It is hard to see how the Lord by His treatment of the paralytic confounded those who thought sickness and sin were bound up with one another, since He did not here raise this subject. Surely the only link He did make was to contrast the difficulty of healing with that of forgiveness, and by carrying out the former, to show His authority to grant the latter.

3. (Birkenhead): Should we not have more caution even than our friends' word "presumably" suggests in gauging Matthew's knowledge of the Lord, when he was called? If the fishermen of Galilee could spend time with the Lord in Judaea before He called them in Galilee (cf. John 1: 39, 43 with Mark 1: 16-20), we could reason that Matthew had heard a good deal of the reports mentioned in Mk. 1: 28, 45; 2: 1.

4. (Birkenhead): Scholars have found only two references (one direct and one possible) in secular literature to the Herodians, from which it is deduced that they were not a recognised party or sect, but supporters of the Herods, and therefore of the Romans who appointed them. This allegiance was contrary to the Pharisees' nationalism, so that, as friends in Edinburgh and Musselburgh say, here (and in 12: 13) are rivals united only in their fear of a common enemy.

M. A.

5. (Birkenhead): Scriptures such as Deut. 13: 1-5 and 2 Cor. 11: 13-15 may indicate the basis of the scribes' allegation. Where they went wrong was in not accepting the scale of the Lord's working. This is carefully charted by Mark from its beginning with one spirit (1: 21-28), to His casting out many demons (1: 34), throughout all Galilee (1: 39), and from Judaea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, beyond Jordan, and about Tyre and Sidon (3: 7-8, 11-12) to His conferring the power to do likewise upon the twelve (3: 14-15). If all this was the work of Satan, then Satan's kingdom was well and truly tearing itself apart.

I. E. P.

6. (Birmingham): We may add another of the "weightier matters" the Lord spoke of in Mat. 23: 23 — judgement, i. e. the application of the law with understanding, fairness and mercy.

7. (Birmingham): Would it not be safer, in the case of Mk. 2: 23-28, to say that there are occasions when it is important to apply the spirit of the law in preference to the letter, as illuminated by other Scriptures, interpreted under the Spirit's guidance by men of discernment? Thus the purpose that man might have rest was to govern the sabbath commandment, as illustrated by the judgement of Ahimelech and David in 1 Sam. 21: 1-6. Decisions on divorce and re-marriage similarly require clear foundation in scripture being compared with scripture, by men gifted in understanding and led by the Holy Spirit.

M. A.

8. (Dulwich): It is well to note the contrast between Ex. 20: 11 and Deut. 5: 15. The sabbath was given to mark God's work in redemption as well as in creation, as friends in Derby imply.

9. (Innerleithen): Yes, this is the difference between Mark chapter 1 and chapters 2 and 3. The range of the Lord's work, indeed many of the incidents are so comparable in each portion. Unlike chapter 1, however, after each incident in chapters 2 and 3 we have an account of opposition to the Lord's work.

10. (Kilmarnock): Luke 6: 6 shows that the incidents occurred on different sabbaths, thereby showing that Mark is not giving a chronological account but has arranged his record to deal with servants of the Lord working on the sabbath. He uniquely gives the simple rule of Mark 2: 27 and the motives of 3: 4-5. Motive is all-important

in the work of **servants** of the Lord. See Ex. 21: 2-6, Mark 10: 28-31; Eph. 6: 5-9; 1 Cor. 4: 1-5 and so on.

LE. P.

11. (Kilmarnock): The scripture seems to indicate not so much exhaustion as a frenzy of activity. His friends (or family; the words can mean either) feared that His incessant high-pressure activity and the attention of so many people would be harmful to the health of body or mind.

P. L. H.

We may be assuming too much to link the errand of "mother and brethren " (vv. 31-35) with the concern of "friends" (or family relations) in v. 21, rightly distinguished by Innerleithen contributors. It could have been that the visit of immediate relatives was prompted by some private business.

M. A.

12. (Liverpool): There is, however, an important message for today's preacher in the insistent warnings sounded by the Lord's teaching about the sin which cannot be forgiven, the need for the gospel-critic to seek repentance in humility before God (2 Tim. 2: 25), the refusal to believe that represents God as a liar (1 John 5: 10), and the "sin unto death" (1 John 5: 16). These alarm-signals have great power to quicken hardened consciences.

13. (Middlesbrough): We are sure friends would agree that the jibe that the Lord was in league with Satan was a challenge to His deity of the worst kind.

M. A.

14. (Middlesbrough): It was not the scribes who said the Lord was "beside himself", it was His friends (or family). There is no evidence that they tried to divert him from doing the will of God, but they wanted to make sure He had some food, and some respite from the attentions of the crowds (3: 20).

15. (Paisley): We should be very wary indeed of depreciating the value of reasoning. God is the ground of all rationality, and He calls us to reason (Is. 1: 18). Truth and reason are inextricably inter-linked, and if we reject one we shall end up by rejecting the other. Erroneous reasoning, or that founded on false premises, like erroneous faith, brings erroneous results.

P. L. H.

16. (Innerleithen): We would agree this is suggested by the absence of mention of Joseph through most of each gospel, and especially from John 2: 12.

M. A.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Kilmarnock: "They were all amazed and glorified God (Mark 2: 12). Does "all" exclude the scribes?"

It is possible that "certain of the scribes" (2: 6) were so rebuked by the Lord's knowledge of their thoughts, and in those early days so dumbfounded by the healing that they joined the general response; though "saying, 'We never saw it on this fashion' " is surely representative rather than every individual's exact words. The considered view of the majority of the nation still was to fulfil Mat. 13: 13, 14.

2. From Kilmarnock: Mark 3: 5; Does the fact that the Lord Jesus was grieved show to us that in spite of a person's unbelief God still loves that person?"

Just as God is grieved by the sin of His creatures is He not still pained by persistent, deliberate sin, as when these men's hearts were hardened? Yet He waits in longsuffering for repentance, as when Israel is "fallen" by her "iniquity", He will yet "love them freely" (Hos. 14: 1, 4). But God is the judge of who will be granted repentance in the end (2 Tim. 2: 25).

M. A.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8903

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

Why did the Lord Jesus use parables so frequently in His teaching (Mark 4: 34)? His own disciples were puzzled about it, and Matthew records their question to Him, following his record of the parable of the sower (Mat. 13: 10). Some of our contributors suggest that the purpose was elucidation: the clarification of the abstract and unfamiliar by reference to the concrete and commonplace. However, this is not really adequate, for two reasons: first, it was not generally effective without explanation, and one would not expect the Lord to persist in the use of a method which did not achieve its desired end, and second, this was not the reason which the Lord Himself gave. This was "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.... Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Mat. 13: 11, 13).

Were parables then spoken deliberately to obscure? Mark 4: 12 might be taken to imply this, but v. 21 points out the foolishness of such a suggestion. What, then, does v. 12 mean? The first word "that" represents the Greek conjunction *hina*, which can be used to express purpose, like Latin *ut* with the subjunctive - "in order that". However, in the Greek of the New Testament it can sometimes be equivalent to *hoste*, expressing consequence - "so that". Accordingly it is at least possible that here it conveys result rather than purpose. The parables placed before those who had some spiritual light teaching which they could grasp for themselves, and grow thereby, and bring glory to God. Those who were spiritually dull and stupid found only bafflement and condemnation in the parables, which confirmed them in the way which they had chosen for themselves. The quotation of Is. 6: 9, 10 in Mat. 13: 14, 15 makes this clear: this is, incidentally, much closer to the Septuagint reading than the Old Testament text derived from the Hebrew.

P. L. H.

PARABLES AND MIRACLES (Mark 4: 1 - 5: 20)

From Aberdeen: It was following the decisive blasphemy which was committed by the scribes, that the Lord began to speak to them that were "without" in parables. Such rejection of the Son and the Father meant that the rejector put himself "without": forever beyond the reach of divine mercy. The Lord, therefore, spoke to them in parables: "That seeing they may see, and not perceive..." [Comment 1].

Was the Lord giving further exposition on the parable of the sower by His teaching concerning the "lamp" and the "measure" (Mark 4: 21-25)? Was He drawing our attention to Himself (the lamp) as being the light of the world (v. 21)? Was He implying that seekers (those who "take heed" to His words) would find Him (v. 22)? Was He confirming, as in the parable of the sower, that He is looking for nothing less than a whole-hearted measure of response to His own word (v. 24)? [Comment 2].

The second parable seems to indicate a time factor which is required to bring about the Kingdom of God. But what does the third parable concerning branches and birds indicate [Comment 3]?

A precious example of the Master's faith in God is seen in His unperturbed sleep in the stern while the storm raged and the disciples panicked. When all was calm He said to them, "Have ye not yet faith?" The Lord taught faith and He also exemplified it. The disciples witness His perfect trust in God, but they also witnessed His divine control of both physical elements and unseen spiritual forces.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: The use of a story about the visible world helps understanding of the spiritual truth to be conveyed. It also is intended to lead to thoughts being provoked in the minds of the hearers. It seems possible that the parable of the sower, recorded as occurring early in the Lord's ministry, is explained to the disciples in detail so that the full import of the Lord's use of parables could be grasped and used by them to gain the maximum benefit in future days. It is important to notice that, unlike allegories, it is not intended that a spiritual counterpart be found for every detail of the illustration used as a parable [Comment 12]; also to understand that the use of the word 'mystery' (4: 11) is stating that something previously hidden is revealed at the time of God's choice (see Rom. 16: 25, 26; Col. 1: 26).

The surface reading of Mark 4: 12 (see also Is. 6: 9, 10) may suggest that the Lord's purpose was deliberately to hide truths from the unregenerate, but this was not so. They had powers of natural sight and hearing, but this was not sufficient for them to perceive (i. e. fully understand) their true position and repent. Sin had produced a spiritual blindness

that resulted in an incapability to comprehend. There follows a number of parables recorded in few words (Mk. 4: 21-32). A study of Matthew's gospel seems to point to their being told at various stages in the Lord's ministry, and not consecutively as appears here in Mark. These latter are making only a few points in each case.

Another integral part of the Lord's ministry was His use of miracles. On occasion they were a testimony of God's love (Mk. 1: 41, 8: 2) but above all they were intended to lead men to faith in God (Mk. 9: 23). Nicodemus started along that road by declaring "No man can do these signs... except God be with him". In our study we commence with a "great storm" (Mk. 4: 37) of such intensity that seasoned fishermen feared, and end with a "great calm" (4: 39). In the second case we start with "no man could any more bind him" (5: 2), and end with the man "sitting, clothed and in his right mind" (5: 15).

In the case of the disciples in the storm the Lord draws their attention to their lack of faith, for they had been assured by Him that they were travelling to the other side of the lake. They were challenged to reconsider their understanding of Him — "Who then is this?" (4: 41). In contrast the demon possessed man with little knowledge of Jesus worshipped Him (5: 6) and received a remarkable blessing [Comment 13].

The working of miracles, however, did not always achieve its desired objective as many individuals rejected Him (Mk. 5: 17) not believing His works (Jn. 12: 37; Mk. 6: 5, 6).

It is noticeable that the Lord was perturbed by those who came out of idle curiosity and to this end, on a number of occasions He took steps to prevent them (e. g. Mk. 1: 43-45). We concluded that there must be a good purpose for Him seemingly to vary this policy (Mk. 5: 19), and decided that because the healed man was not residing in an area where He was to travel extensively then he could be most valuable as a messenger of the gospel in Decapolis [Comment 4].

R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: The Lord spoke in parables that those "that are without" might see yet not perceive and hear yet not understand. The secrets of the kingdom are for those within it (v. 11). Yet, though His own may have difficulty in understanding certain of His parables (v. 13) there is nevertheless that potential to understand things spiritual which is not with those who are without (1 Cor. 2: 10-16).

We may have difficulty in reconciling v. 12 with our perception of righteousness, but does God not have the right as the potter over the clay (Rom. 9: 21)? To see (v. 12) is merely "to look at" without knowing the thing or person looked at. To hear is merely to hear without under-

standing or comprehending that which is heard. To comprehend is to grasp something mentally, which seems to refute the assertion that a person can have faith and be saved and yet not know it, or to put it another way, not 'know' the person he has faith in [Comment 5].

Note how often the word 'hear' is mentioned in the parable of the sower. It is necessary for sinners to hear the word before they can have faith in it (Rom. 10: 17). Mat. 13 gives us further insight into the condition of those not able to understand his parables (vv. 14, 15). They are unlike those in the parable "who hear the word and straightway receive it" (4: 16). However, we do not stop at hearing, but go on and bear fruit. It is necessary that the Christian is good ground in which the seed can yield fruit, grow up and increase.

V. 24 may allude to reward both now and future when a full measure is promised —and more, in return for the measure we give, which we presume here is in relation to His word and the gospel. For those who do with His Word even as He intends God describes as "he that hath" and it is to "him shall be given" and "he that hath not" i. e. has not done with God's word as is intended, "shall be taken away" (see Mat. 25: 29).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: A parable could be defined as a story placed alongside a teaching. Why did the Lord teach with parables? The two-fold answer may well sound like a contradiction, but is given in Mat. 13: 10-17; (a) to conceal the truth and (b) to reveal the truth. To the Pharisees and religious rulers, uninterested hearers and rebels at heart, the truth was concealed, but to the disciples whose eyes and ears were opened (Mat. 13: 17) the truth was revealed. This is further amplified in Mark 4: 11, 12; 22-25, where the Lord is saying that plain language had proved of no avail as far as the religious rulers were concerned. Through their insensibility, their minds failed to comprehend the deep spiritual truths the Lord so powerfully illustrated in parables.

In the parable of the sower we learn that the seed is invariable and comprises not human words, but the word of God from above. Whilst we sow, the harvest is God's responsibility. It is He that prepares the human heart to receive the Word as the soil is prepared for the natural seed. Four different types of human heart are brought before us:

- (a) the *hard heart*, resisting the word of God, and making it all too easy for Satan to snatch it away [Comment 14].
- (b) the *shallow heart* where there is so very little soil that although the Word is received joyfully the flesh pushes it out when any temptation comes along.
- (c) the *crowded heart* where worldly weeds have not been removed, these suffocate the Word.
- (d) the *fruitful heart* where there is true evidence of salvation — the

heart has been changed towards God and brings forth three degrees of fruit. The great enemies of the Christian are the world, the flesh and the Devil (Eph. 2: 2, 3).

This parable can thus be applied to believers in terms of receiving the Word to bring forth fruit [Comment 61]. The Lord develops this theme with the parable of the lamp (or candle) vv. 21-25. A lamp, or candle, cannot give light of itself. It is a dark body and has to be lit and we, too, cannot give out light until we have received divine grace and enlightenment from the Holy Spirit [Comment 7]. Although many of the disciples were experienced fishermen, the violence of the storm at sea had them in fear. The One who caused a deep sleep on others (see Gen. 2: 21; 15: 12 and 1 Sam. 26: 12) enjoyed a sleep Himself. Perhaps the distressed disciples wondered why and how Jesus could remain asleep in such a storm. Their cruel words must have hurt the Saviour, when they should not have been distressed because (a) of the promise of the Lord of going to the other side, (b) of the Lord's being with them and (c) He was perfectly at peace with His God and Father (Cp. Ps. 4: 8). Then as a wonderful display of deity and humanity, the One who never slumbers or sleeps, arises from sleep and calms the storm. The meaning of "be still" is to muzzle or gag. Their faith had failed in not believing that sleeping or waking made no difference to Him.

The lessons for us today are (a) the sea reminds us of the restless and sinful world (Is. 57: 20; Dan. 7: 2) and (b) the wind, of the persecution of believers and (c) the tempest-driven boat can be likened to the Church which is His Body. We sail across the ocean of the world's history but we are safe because Christ is in the boat with us (Ps. 46: 1-3 and 93: 3-4) and even the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Mat. 16: 18) [Comment 81].

Having shown that He had power over the elements, the Lord then shows that even demons must ultimately obey His supremacy. The legion of demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God and knew that their final fate is the abyss with Satan and all his evil forces. In contrast the man sat clothed, at Jesus' feet; Christ-possessed instead of demon possessed. What a picture this is of the sinner now saved and learning at the feet of the Master. He was then told to tell his friends "how great things the Lord had done for him". The lesson for us surely must be that we don't all need to go abroad to preach the Gospel, there's plenty to be done on the home front.

W. Paterson, Jnr.

From Derby: Put very simply, a parable is a form of teaching setting forth spiritual OP heavenly truths by means of an earthly story. The word itself (Gk. *parabole*) conveys the thought of putting of one thing alongside another, so as to make a comparison or illustration. It is

interesting to note how often the Lord's parables are quoted and used in ordinary conversation, e. g. 'passing by on the other side', 'hiding our light under a bushel' or 'making use of our talents'. The Lord used parables to present truth in a challenging way, and to quicken the understanding. They are designed to promote serious thought. In the interpretation of parables it is important to look for the essential element, or truth presented. The tendency to treat parables as allegories, that is every feature and detail must represent something, must be avoided [Comment 12]. All the parables in this portion were connected with nature; sowing the seed, its growth and development, and finally the harvesting.

Some discussion was centred on verses 10-13. It is inconceivable that the Lord used parables to blind those who were outside. His ministry was directed towards the common people, the publicans and sinners. Yet the purpose of the parables appears to be twofold, to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom to the disciples and to conceal such truths from those outside. In this respect it could be said that the parables told by the Lord are an enigmatical form of speech, intelligible and light to some and obscure and dark to others.

Mark in his customary way gives much detail in his account of the stilling of the storm, and the casting out of demons in the Gerasene demoniac. The stilling of the storm brings into sharp focus the contrast between the humanity and deity of the Lord. He was in the stern of the boat, asleep on a cushion, in need of rest after His many discourses and travels. This appears to be the only mention in the Gospels of the Lord sleeping. Majestically He arose, after being so rudely awakened, and rebuked the raging sea. His divine power was thus manifest.

A. G. Willis, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: By listing the parables and miracles given in Mark's gospel, we gather that the doings of the Lord Jesus are particularly prominent in it.

Similar parables which refer in Mark and Luke to the kingdom of God, are in Matthew related to the kingdom, or rule of the heavens. The kingdom of God seems to be a confined concept (Luke 13: 19) and was seen in Israel (Mat. 21: 43). In contrast to this is the kingdom of heaven, which is God's sovereign rule from heaven over the nations of the world (Mat. 13: 31, 38, 44, 45).

The key to the understanding of the words contained in Mark 4: 11-15 is found in Mat. 13: 15. "Their eyes they have closed". This is illustrated in the case of Pharaoh who hardened his heart (Ex. 8: 32). After that it is written "the Lord hardened his heart".

We gather from the classification of the miracles, the majesty and

glory of Jehovah's servant in the display of power and healing. The stilling of the storm belongs to a group demonstrating His power over nature.

- (a) The stilling of the storm (4: 35-41);
- (b) The feeding of the five thousand (6: 30-44);
- (c) The walking on the lake (6: 45-52);
- (d) The feeding of the four thousand (8: 51-59);
- (e) The withering of the fig tree (11: 12-14).

The casting out of the legion of spirits belongs to another group showing His power over the spiritual world of darkness:

- (a) The demon cast out in the synagogue (1: 23-28);
- (b) The Gadarene demoniac (Legion) healed (5: 1-20);
- (c) The healing of the Syrophenician's daughter (7: 24-38);
- (d) The demon-possessed boy (9: 17-20).

W. Townsend

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: The Lord was able to hold the attention of the crowd by using imagery which they could see and understand, imagery taken from nature around them. (It is possible that the parable of the sower was suggested by the sight of an actual sower at work in the hills above the lake.) These parables were powerful and effective, for the people listened with great interest as the Lord revealed a particular line of truth [Comment 15].

Although the parables may appear simple when their explanation is given, they were often shrouded in mystery, so that even the disciples were puzzled. So why did the Lord use this parabolic method of teaching at all? Was it a deliberate attempt to obscure the truth?

If the truth is hidden within a parable, it is only that it may be revealed: the ultimate purpose of the parable is not to conceal the truth but to reveal it. The parables were intended to unfold spiritual truths to committed followers, whilst hiding them from those who showed only a superficial interest. They tested the spiritual responsiveness of those who listened. The Lord's teaching was directed towards those who were initiated; those who were unregenerate were unable to appreciate His ministry. The problem was not in the telling, but in the hearing: some were able to see and hear, whilst others were not [Comment 16].

The parable of the growing seed is an amplification of the truths revealed in the parable of the sower. We are encouraged to sow the seed, leaving its development to the Lord of the Harvest. Salvation and spiritual growth are produced by God, and not by man's efforts.

In Mark 5: 35-41 Christ is shown as both fully man and fully God. As He lies asleep in the boat, the limitations of His physical nature are

evident (cp. John 4: 6). He is completely drained by His work of ministry, so that even the crashing of the storm cannot disturb His slumber. His full deity is also evident, however, as He commands the winds and the waves to be still. Their instant obedience shows Him to be the Master of creation.

As occasion **required, the Lord and His disciples worked miracles of exorcism, but few can have been as spectacular as that of the demoniac who had been possessed for some time. There seemed to be no means humanly possible by which he could be helped. The demoniac was a vivid expression of the destructive force of Satan, for he derived a supernatural strength from the many demons by which he was gripped. As on other occasions, however, the demons recognized Jesus from afar, throwing the man to his knees. The demons were then cast out into the swine, in order to demonstrate the reality of the expulsion.**

Fear was **the immediate reaction of the swineherds. Once the news had spread, the people begged the Lord to leave. The saddest part of the whole story is that the Lord, heeding their request, left them. He will not remain where He is not wanted.**

J. B. Williams

From Innerleithen: The human mind is prone to inattention, hence the exhortation, "If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear.... Take heed what ye hear" (Mk. 4: 23-23). The divine principle is that he that hath by his own exertions (hearing) shall be given more whereas he that throws away his opportunity of knowing God's will shall lose even the little that he hath (Hearing^f in the sense of 'taking heed' is the important thing. PLH).

Mark's gospel contains far **fewer parables than either of the other synoptic gospels but that of the seed cast upon the earth (4: 26-29) is peculiar to Mark and, in the imperceptible growth of the seed whose germination must be left with God, we see illustrated the gradual development of the work of grace.**

Mark **and Luke mention one demoniac but Matthew says there were two. Similarly, Mark tells of one blind man at Jericho (10: 46) but Matthew records there were two (20: 30). We think there would be two demoniacs, possibly one more prominent than the other and perhaps in a worse condition. He was not just suffering from an illness but was possessed by many demons, one of whom was the spokesman. This is the worst case of demon-possession we have in the scriptures but although the demons on being cast out entered into about two thousand swine, it would be wrong to deduce that there were the same number of demons.**

In contrast to the cleansed leper who was charged to say nothing to any man (1: 44), this man was to witness in an area from which the Lord had been asked to depart.

K.

Reilly

From Kilmarnock: The parable of the sower is fundamental to an understanding of all the parables of the Lord (4: 13). He spoke in parables as a judgement of God because of those who were not willing to consider or understand **when** He spoke plainly (4: 12). Those willing to consider and understand **what he** said would ask for an explanation of the parables.

A Christian should have a root in the teachings of Jesus Christ otherwise **he** will be like the seed sown in the rocky places (4: 17) for it is easy to believe in a simple message but to have no root. Therefore we should guard against preaching a Gospel of "easy believing".

Being involved with the "cares of the world" (4: 19) must not be a condition into which the Christian allows himself to slip. Once the Christian finds himself in this condition he is backsliding into a lessening of fruitfulness. Fruitfulness depends on the productivity of the soil. Each one has a gift which is to be used. If we do not use this gift but rather neglect it (or suppress it) it will be taken from us; but if we use gift then our ability will be increased (4: 24, 25). We must not hide anything which everyone else should see (4: 23).

The Lord Jesus was followed by a large crowd which was made up of those willing to learn and "hangers-on". To which group of people does verse 33 refer [Comment 9]? Those who follow Jesus Christ and are using their gift(s) will grow (like the small seed that was sown) and become part of the great Kingdom of God [Comment 10].

In the conversation which took place between the Lord and the possessed man it was one demon who was speaking through the man. This one demon was speaking for all the demons. Does the name 'Legion' in verse 9 refer to the man or to the demon? (The demons: PLH). That the Lord gave the evil spirits permission to enter into the pigs proves that He had the right of dominion not only over creatures and beings which serve Him but also over the beings which are in the service of Satan.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *Parables* These are for teaching or bringing God's word to man; but there are marked differences between them. Some are easily understood while others require some deep thinking. Some are simple stories with a moral; others, like the sower, are allegorical. They are to be distinguished from fables as not interfering with the natural order of things as fables do. On first reading, the Lord Jesus' statement (4: 11, 12) seems to indicate that parables were also told to prevent insight. It is surely more subtle than that. The Lord Jesus did not come to bring spiritual darkness or add to confusion. Perhaps He was indicating that light would be withheld from a rebellious people to confirm them in their self-chosen spiritual darkness. Or could it be that He is saying that those who choose darkness rather than light and refuse to listen when God speaks do not have the spiritual capacity to understand.

An Allegorical Parable The path indicates an unsaved person, the gospel having fallen on 'deaf ears!' The rocky soil (a shallow layer of soil on solid rock is what is meant) indicates a saved person who has no commitment and though saved his spiritual life dies off almost immediately. The thorny ground indicates a believer with a level of commitment which allows the world around to eat into his spiritual life and causes him to lose his faith or give up any reality in Christian service. The good soil should be the aim for each of us!

A Straightforward Parable The parable of the lamp is an example of a parable with a straightforward meaning. We felt it referred to disciples openly confessing their faith rather than to the Lord Himself [Comment 11]. This seems to be confirmed in vv. 24, 25. The more we aim to live for the Lord the greater will be our appreciation of His truths, and the Lord will enhance the little we do for Him for His own greater glory and our edification.

Miracles The Lord Jesus works miracles because He is the Creator. In this story His Creatorial authority is foremost. The reaction of the disciples indicates that they had not got used to the unusual occurrences that were part and parcel of walking with Him. We note Mark's additional note that "other boats were with Him" — they must have experienced the same squall but without the Lord at hand. There is always someone worse off than yourself!

D. J. Webster

From Middlesbrough: There can be no doubt about the meaning of the parable of the sower as it is clearly explained by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There may be four different results from the sowing of the word of God. These are: it may be taken away by Satan (4: 15); it may be received with joy, but because of lack of root the recipients stumble when persecution arises; it may become unfruitful because for example of the deceitfulness of riches; or it may be accepted and result in a fruitful crop.

It is interesting to note that the Lord states that the secret of the kingdom of God is given to the disciples, and not to unbelievers. This view is reinforced by John (3: 3) where the Lord Jesus Christ also refers to this subject, stating "... Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God". Clearly an understanding of the kingdom and the truths associated with it can only be obtained by those who have experienced the new birth.

Two parables are used by the Lord Jesus Christ to explain the truth of the kingdom of God; these are the parable of the growing seed and the parable of the mustard seed. The lessons learned from these parables are that the kingdom of God is a (a) living place (4: 27-28) (b) growing place (4: 28-32) and (c) fruitful place (4: 28-29). This should be endorsed in the

in the Kingdom of God today; in particular the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized that the expectation was that fruitfulness would be evidenced (Mat. 21: 43).

The parable of the lamp was used to illustrate that disciples have a role to fulfil. Just as a lamp would fail to fulfil its role of giving light if it was hidden away so a disciple would fail in his role if the word of God was not revealed in his life. Paul taught that we should follow the example of Christ (1 Cor. 11: 1), and in doing this we should remember that he is the light of the world (Jn. 8: 12).

A. A. McIlvenna, J. McIlvenna

COMMENTS 1-13. (ADDITIONAL COMMENTS IN BS 8904, DV)

1. **(Aberdeen):** It is, perhaps, going a little far to assume that all those "without" had committed the blasphemy stated in 3: 22.

2. **(Aberdeen):** One would answer "yes" to all of these questions. The Lord was pointing out that although the parables sometimes seemed obscure, true seekers after truth would find enlightenment from God through them.

3. **(Aberdeen):** The parable of 4: 30-32 indicates that the kingdom of God, which had insignificant beginnings among a small group of disciples, would grow to dominate the whole earth.

P. L. H.

See Comment 12. Following Dan. 4: 12, 14, 21, the birds and the branches may be taken to represent those peoples who benefit from the kingdom in all its ramifications, particularly where a part characterises the whole. As far as the kingdom of God is concerned, this would embrace the fulfilment of scriptures such as Deut. 28: 12-13; 1 Kings 10; Zech. 8: 21-23.

LE. P.

4. **(Birkenhead):** This is not a variation of policy. The former demoniac was a man who had been converted by the power of God, and the Lord wanted, as He always wants, the one who had known the grace of God to speak of it to others. See also next month's issue.

5. **(Birmingham):** This is a non sequitur. Someone may grasp the basic truths about God's Son and believe that Christ died for him, without knowing that he thereby has eternal salvation which cannot be lost or added to. Furthermore, many who are saved understand little about the kingdom of God.

6. **(Bolton and Leigh):** Is not the primary application of the parable of the sower to believers? It relates to "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (4: 11). There must be, of course, some initial reception of the gospel to make it applicable at all, but it deals basically with growth

and fruitbearing, warning disciples against hardheartedness, superficiality and worldliness. It is ourselves who need to hear!

7. (Bolton and Leigh): Gk. *lychnos* always indicates a lamp fuelled by oil, not a candle.

8. (Bolton and Leigh): This last simile is rather far-fetched; the disciples had entered the boat for a short journey only, and were to leave it. The Church which is Christ's Body is an eternal spiritual reality; how can it be conceived of as tempest-driven?

9. (Kilmarnock): The "them" of v. 34 is placed in opposition to "His own disciples", and it can therefore be deduced that some of "them" in v. 33 could not be called disciples; but the description "hangers-on" is somewhat opprobrious! See also next month's issue.

10. (Kilmarnock): It is the kingdom of God which grows in vv. 30-32, not those in it.

11. (Liverpool): In Mat. 5: 15 the ^Tlight under a bushel¹ is clearly the witness of a believer, but the Lord may be using the illustration in a different context here. Is it not possible that the Lord is responding to the disciples' puzzlement about His speaking in a way that is not generally understood?

P. L. H.

12. (Birkenhead and Derby): But can this view really be sustained? How do we know what is important and what is not? Surely we only know as we are led by the Spirit to compare the parable with appropriate other Scriptures? If our ability to interpret the parables is so determined, is it not more likely that our inability to interpret features of the parables stems from our own inabilities rather than that the Lord (who has purified His word seven times (Ps. 12: 6)) has adorned it with "ornamental" words and phrases?

13. (Birkenhead): 'Worship' here means that reverence which is due to one in authority. The demoniac, being demon-filled could not worship the Lord.

I. E. P.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

From Dulwich: Why are there two men mentioned in Mat. 8: 28, in contrast to the one of Mark 5: 2?

The suggestion put forward by Innerleithen friends seems a good one: that there were two demoniacs, one more prominent or in a worse condition than the other. This is the one who provided the spokesman for the demons.

P. L. H.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8904

MARKING MARK'S MARKS

Comparison of the companion scriptures in the gospels by Matthew and Luke will show that the four parables and four miracles of Mark 4 and 5 have been clearly selected and placed next to each other. We suggest this has been done to demonstrate the nature of the Lord's Servant's message and the range of His work. Such deliberate selection meant omitting much that could have been told and is characteristic of Mark's penchant for brevity. If what he has omitted is great then what is left must be of enormous importance and demands all the more of our attention. What is even more striking, however, is that each parable or miracle that has been selected is dealt with in more detail than in any of the corresponding accounts in Matthew and Luke, so demanding even more of our attention. In sum, Mark may be brief but he is also deep.

Exactly this choice faces contributors. There is so much that could be said and so little space in our magazine (these days less than 500 words per paper). We therefore commend the approach of friends in Birmingham who have chosen but one aspect of this month's portion, considered it in some depth, yet have had their paper printed almost in full. We can hardly do other than commend them for following in the footsteps of Mark!

LE. P.

ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION (Mark 5: 21 - 6: 29)

From **Aberdeen**: The woman with the worsening condition rested her mind on the Lord and not on her ailment (5: 28). Jairus, too, was encouraged to rest his mind on the Lord and not on the fatal report concerning his daughter (5: 36).

After the miracles performed on the crowded Galilean shores the Lord came back to His own country where He received a hostile reception. The Nazarenes may have been astonished at His teaching and at the miracles of which they had heard but their jealous minds diverted their thoughts far away from the source of His power and wisdom. Over the

years they had known Him as the carpenter. They did not want to believe that this Carpenter had a higher calling than carpentry (6: 1-6). Faith in God was lacking in the Nazarenes and so the Lord could do no mighty work except to heal a "few" sick folk.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: Jairus' actions demonstrate certain facts: (a) falling at His feet he worshipped Jesus (Mat. 9: 18) thus declaring his recognition of the standing of the One in whom he placed faith; (b) by seeking help he recognized his own helplessness; (c) by coming openly himself he laid himself open to being ostracised by the Jews. If in any way his faith faltered on hearing news of the death of his daughter, the gracious encouragement of the Saviour would be invaluable. While the mourners laughed scornfully, those with believing hearts were taken into the presence of the child to witness the working of the miracle.

The narrative concerning the woman has many points in common with that of Jairus and his daughter. There is the same pressing need, which was insoluble by any human agency; the same faith; the same power; the same readiness to confess openly; the same need to come personally to the Lord [Comment 8].

Their acceptance by faith stands in stark contrast with His return to Nazareth. The people of Nazareth declared His humble origin, and gave other human reasons to reject Him, in spite of His conduct, miracles, words and wisdom.

In sending forth the twelve the Lord prepared them. Their work corresponded with their Lord's because they both came in the Name of the Father to preach a message of repentance which divided the hearers. Herod was one of those who rejected Him. Herod's conscience was troubled by his past sins. Being responsible for the death of John, he believed the person known as Jesus to be resurrected John returning to challenge him concerning his unlawful association with Herodias. He was a man who although "he was exceeding sorry" (6: 26) did things which he considered expedient. The Lord knows the hearts of all men, and called him appropriately a fox (Luke 13: 32), highlighting the reason for his downfall.

D. Thomson, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: Having healed the young child, the Lord charged them much that no man should know this (5: 41-43). This may seem strange in the light of other scriptures, e. g. Mat. 5: 16; Mk. 6: 7-12; 16: 15; John 10: 38. The Lord often sought to restrain others from speaking of His miracles and good deeds, (Mat. 8: 4; 9: 30; Mk. 1: 43). The more He charged people to remain silent so much the more they

published it (Mk. 7: 36). The Lord's reasons for this may have been different depending on the circumstances. For example, the leper's command (Mat. 8: 4) probably had something to do with the law that such a man present himself to the priest for cleansing (Lev. 14: 2) and thereafter it may have been permissible for him to testify of his experiences. Mark emphasizes an additional aspect (1: 45) where the resultant publicity hindered the Lord's progress. Mat. 12: 9-21 casts light on Mark 3: 1-6, showing that the Lord had no wish to argue unduly with those who were so opposed to Him (Mat. 12: 19) (Gk. *erizo* from *eris* - a quarrel), knowing that such arguments could only hinder His work.

On other occasions, despite the tremendous interest in Him, He sought to keep a "low profile"; perhaps for fear men sought Him for misguided patriotism or mere curiosity (John 6: 15, 26).

Some things, however, were to be kept secret until the Son of Man was risen from the dead (9: 9). In this case the disciples were given the proof of who He was, the testimony of three (Deut. 17: 6) being witness to His being the Messiah.

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: In the two interwoven events of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood and the raising of Jairus' daughter, the common element is faith (5: 25-43). In what or in whom did these two people place their faith? The answer can only be, in the power and Person of Christ. The antithesis is seen later where lack of faith in Christ held back blessing (6: 5-6).

What were the reasons why the Lord was not accepted by those among whom He had been brought up? We felt that the main reason was familiarity breeding contempt. The same people who listened in amazement to the Lord's wisdom, could not accept that He was a Prophet of God because they felt that they knew all there was to know about Him. Those people, in putting too much weight on the fact that they knew Jesus well, failed to heed the deeper significance behind the things He said and did.

When sent forth, the twelve were firstly to be single-minded in their ministry of preaching and healing, not being distracted by providing for their own needs. Secondly, they were to learn dependence upon God to provide what they needed [Comment 9].

Beyond His own country, the Lord's activity was giving rise to speculation as to who He really was (6: 14-16). The opinions expressed seemed to us to echo the opinions related by the disciples (Mat. 16: 13, 14).

There can be no doubt that the linking of His person with these great names of the past gives us some idea of the impact that the Lord's ministry was having, even to pricking the conscience of a king.

Alex Reid

From Dulwich: The Lord came to His own and His own "received Him not" (John 1: 11). The nation, as led and controlled by their leaders, rejected Him, though many of the common people, and some of the rulers and priests did accept Him.

For Jairus to fall down before the Lord would certainly seem to be a public confession of faith; to do so in the midst of such hostility would be a convincing evidence of faith (Acts 2: 30; Rom. 10: 1-9). It is also interesting to note the sovereignty of God in using Jairus' daughter's illness, not only as a means of faith, but also in the interruption of the woman with the issue, as a further trial of the father's faith (1 Pet. 1: 7).

Luke, who claims to write an orderly and accurate account (Luke 1: 1-4) places a visit to Nazareth by the Lord at the beginning of His ministry. The order of events in Matthew and Mark is quite different, and there is a lot of Luke's account missing in the two previous Gospels. If there were two visits, His rejection publicly would date from the beginning of His ministry, yet we find it difficult to reconcile this with His permission to read a second time in the synagogue [Comment 1].

We note the contrast of the expressions, "Joseph's son" (Luke 4: 22), with "the carpenter's son" (Mat. 13: 55), and "Son of Mary" (Mk. 6: 3) [Comment 21. He grew up in Nazareth, in favour with God and with man, and His workmanship as a carpenter would be perfect, yet He was not accepted (Mat. 13: 57; Luke 4: 29). His own brethren also rejected Him (Jn. 7: 5).

Being poor, He would not be accepted by the rich (Jas. 2: 6, 7). As an ordinary working carpenter, He would be despised no doubt by the rabbinical schools [Comment 101. The condition of their heart of unbelief was such that the nation could not accept Him, except for their own convenience (Jn. 6: 15).

W. Townsend

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: The sick woman (5: 25) is an interesting "type" of the sinner. Because she suffered from a disease which was ceremonially unclean, she was denied access to God in the temple, and barred from worship in the congregation (cf. Lev. 15: 25-29). She had tried every possible cure but had failed. In spite of many costly attempts to find a remedy, there was nothing she could do to help herself but she grew worse. Finally, she acknowledged her own helplessness, stretched out in faith and grasped the hem of the Lord's garment (cf.

Num. 15: 38-40). Through her faith she was made whole, and she fell at His feet in submission and reverence.

Was Jairus' daughter actually dead? Luke, the physician, tells us that "her spirit returned" (8: 55) which suggests that death had taken place. Moreover, the Lord called together Peter, James and John, as though a very important miracle — such as the raising of the dead — was about to take place. But in the New Testament the Greek *katheudo* is used exclusively of natural sleep; it is never used as a metaphor of death [see Comment 4]. Moreover, the expression, "his spirit came again", elsewhere implies a return of strength, rather than resurrection (Judg. 15: 19; 1 Sam. 30: 12).

In order to further His ministry, the Lord sent out His disciples to teach others. They had spent time in His company, receiving His instruction, and now they were to go out in His service, taking no more than the bare necessities. It seems that the Lord never sent out His disciples alone but in groups of two (cf. Luke 10: 1). The principle of fellowship in service is also seen in the witness of the apostles (e. g. Paul and Silas, Peter and John). It was suggested that we also should witness in twos, the one giving support and encouragement to the other.

Mark tells of how Herod had enjoyed listening to John preach. He recognized his spiritual stature and had a certain respect for it, but John's words put him in a great quandary. Having brought about the tragic death of so great a prophet, Herod now felt genuine remorse (but could not escape his weakness of character — *Eds.*)

J. D. Williams

From Innerleithen: In Mark 5: 21-43 we see that the Lord is the Lord of the individual. On the one hand we have the bold public faith of Jairus and on the other a probably single, perhaps ostracised woman who wished to have a secret, timid faith. He who is no respecter of persons was willing to be accessed by both. Both had faith sufficient to command that which was able to answer their human cry. Yet, He who is giver of faith to all knew that each faith was requiring to be made perfect by testing. One was sharpened by having the experience of delay and the other by publicly stepping forth to Him.

For twelve years there had been no link between the two lives but because of His presence and power there was soon an eternal link. One life had been growing with the freshness of Spring, scattering youthful petals of joy in the midst of an adoring family. The other had been wasting away in the Winter of despair, bringing gloom to all associated with it. To both of these vividly contrasting lives "the exceeding greatness of His power" was to bring a newness that would stretch into eternity. One was, in human terms, as good as dead and the other was to experience death. In these lives we see the Lord's power to save from death and to overcome death.

It is worthy of note how practical the Lord was with the little girl in commanding her to be fed. There is need for us to remember that new disciples have human needs such as companionship and possibly material support.

A. MacDonald

From Kilmarnock: Jairus and the woman must have known the things concerning the previous healings of Jesus because through their faith, He was able to heal the woman and raise the damsel. It was through touching (she touched Him and He touched the damsel) that both were restored to their former health. Could we look upon these works as one of the first instances of faith healing (or healing by faith)? [Comment 3].

As these people were restored through faith, so today we must come with faith to draw the 'healing' power from the Lord into our lives (Mat. 7: 7). When Jairus was told that his daughter was dead he could have lost faith. Similarly, confronted with tribulations, Christians today can lose faith and must do as the Lord said, "Fear not, only believe".

When the Lord arrived at Jairus' house the weeping was not necessary for the damsel was not dead. The Lord said she was not dead because, although the breathing had stopped, the soul had not left the body; she was clinically dead but not 'properly' dead [Comment 4]. This does not in any way lessen the divine work which He did in the house.

Being sent out in pairs would strengthen the authority given to the Twelve by the Lord. Having received authority, they were more likely to be accepted and be successful in their ministry of the Word because they were not known as the Lord was known in His own area (See BS 8905 DV).

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: Both Jairus and the unnamed woman had faith, resulting from having heard about Jesus, but they expressed it differently. Jairus, a public official, expressed his faith openly; the woman, maybe shy and timid, expressed her faith quietly and unseen. But both of them were conscious of a need and that the Lord Jesus was the answer. They knew who He was and their faith was in a person. The Lord, however, dealt with them in different ways. The woman was healed instantly but then had to make a public confession of what had happened; whereas Jairus was severely tested, first of all in the delay occasioned by the Lord's bringing healing to another, then in receiving the worst of all possible news. However, we note the marvellous love of the Lord Jesus at the darkest moment in speaking a word of hope and encouragement. The Lord looks for faith but He does not unreasonably expect belief in the impossible. In Jairus' case it resulted in double faith: faith that the Lord could meet his need and then

faith that He could overcome the seemingly immovable obstacle. Was it faith that led to eternal salvation or simply to the solving of their immediate problem? In some cases He healed out of mercy and the healed person failed to have his spiritual needs met. Is this so? [Comment 5].

We were convinced that the girl was definitely dead (or, at least, beyond recovery given the state of medical knowledge) and not merely sleeping! [Comment 4]. The command of the Lord (5: 43) is a real puzzle. How could they possibly not let anyone know about it. A crowd of people had heard Jairus' request and, anyway, what were they supposed to say to the mourners wailing away at the door? [Comment 6].

The Lord's rejection was not because He was "only a carpenter" as some have suggested. Carpentry was an honourable occupation. Nor was it because He was local — so were His critics! Rather it was their inability to accept that somebody whose origins they thought they knew and whom they knew as not being a teacher should come teaching [Comment 7]. They did not recognize Him as a prophet, and were offended that He should aspire to be one. Even His own family seems to have had their reservations about Him (6: 4). The spiritual state of the other citizens of Nazareth would not permit Him to display His divine power and the Lord Jesus was not going to bless them "whether they liked it or not"!

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: Mark 5 beautifully portrays the Lord's power towards three who were beyond the help of man. In the case of the demoniac no man had strength to tame him: in the case of the woman, she was nothing bettered of the physicians: Jairus' daughter was at the point of death. In the healing of these three, the Lord displayed both His power and grace. The Lord crossed the sea of Tiberias initially to heal the demoniac; in this we see His love for the individual and His willingness to help. The other two healings in the chapter show the Lord's response to faith.

The woman's complaint, described as a scourge (RVM), was not only unpleasant but painful. Human skill could not heal this, and the woman was destitute. Her faith brought the assurance of healing. The touch of faith brought immediate relief, and the Lord knew that power had gone forth from Himself. The woman's confession was a testimony to the multitudes who thronged the Lord. The ruler of the synagogue evidently knew the Lord had power to heal having probably previously witnessed this in the synagogue. From a human point of view, the girl was dead, but death is not final as far as the Lord is concerned. The presence of Peter, James and John shows this to be a unique occasion in which there was special instruction for the disciples, shared on later occasions in the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark 6 presents a complete contrast to the previous chapter. The people of His own country, presumably Nazareth, were more concerned about His natural upbringing than the divine power evidenced in His works of healing. What was the Lord's purpose in visiting that area? Was it to lay His hands on a few sick folk and heal them? [Comment 11].

The twelve were sent forth to preach and heal. Upon them would devolve the responsibility of preaching the good tidings of the kingdom of God and this seems to have been a training session. Its effect reached the ears of Herod, whose conscience was obviously troubled at the evidence of miraculous powers displayed by the Lord and His disciples.

J. Renfrew

COMMENTS

1. (Dulwich): Mark and Luke refer to the same incident. Luke takes it out of its chronological order and places it first. This is because he is emphasizing that the minister of the Word of Mark's gospel was also a man with a home-town and because he is showing how His home-town rejected Him. It was a final rejection for He then moved to Capernaum. We can hardly fail to notice the deliberate contrast between His rejection in the synagogue and town of Nazareth and His acceptance in the synagogue and town of Capernaum. Luke 4 is deliberately written to have this contrast as its main structure.

2. (Dulwich): Mark not so much speaks of the "Son of Mary" but "the carpenter, the Son of Mary". Mark, the worker, marks the earnest workman toiling. See also 'Jesus the Carpenter', B. S. 1986, pp. 156, 157.

3. (Kilmarnock): "Faith healing" is a modern, not a scriptural term, and thus we have difficulties in defining what we are talking about. If it is meant that the sufferer needed to show faith before being healed, the Lord did not always operate like this. Indeed, the raising of Lazarus shows what an absurd notion this is. If it is meant that the Healer must show faith, then that is absurd when applied to the Lord. He healed by His own creative fiat. The poor woman did show faith, but she was not the first to do so in such circumstances, even in the abbreviated record of Mark.

4. (Kilmarnock): This has been a matter of long-standing debate. See *Young Men's Corner*, 1925, pp. 42, 56; *Bible Studies*, 1935, pp. 36-40; 1945, pp. 29-31. The present writer is amongst those who accept that the maid was not dead, though she appeared to be so as far as the medical expertise of the day was concerned. The Lord knows more about death than anyone and He said she was not dead in a way which does not admit of metaphorical interpretation. He had entered the room, and presumably inspected the patient before giving His diagnosis. It was this opinion the mourners laughed to scorn — not whether the Lord could raise from the

dead. Thus Luke in giving their reason (8: 53), says "knowing that she was dead", and employs the common literary device of telling the story from the point of view of the scorers to explain their scorn, rather than adding an impartial comment to the effect that they were mistaken. See, for example, how no comment is made on the mistaken efforts of the women who bought the spices on the Lord's day (16: 1-3).

LE. P.

We trust it is profitable to continue the debate! John 11: 11 — "Lazarus is fallen asleep" and v. 4 — "Then Jesus... said... plainly, Lazarus is dead, " shows that the Lord could use the term 'sleep' as a figure of death. This to me clears away any difficulty in understanding Mark 5: 39 similarly, to mean that where the Lord so wills, the process of death is reversible and the return of life resembles awakening out of sleep. This is consistent also with the terms used in 1 Thess. 4, except that there the speed is perhaps greater. The Greek word there and in John 11 is also used of literal sleep in Luke 22: 45 and Acts 12: 6.

M. A.

Edinburgh friends point out that a different Greek word is used in Mark 5 from that in John 11, and in the New Testament the former is used only in the context of natural sleep (apart from 1 Thess. 5: 10, where it refers to spiritual torpor). Nonetheless, the restricted number of occurrences does not show that it can only be used in this way, and I incline to the view of M. A. above.

P. L. H.

5. (**Liverpool**): The Lord distinguishes between the woman's faith making her whole ("saved thee" RVM) and her being healed in body (5: 34) so it would seem that her soul was saved and her body healed, too. Not all miracles were like this. The general association of faith and the miraculous is that the miracle is not an end in itself, but is a sign or sign-post to a teaching which has to be accepted by faith. If there were not faith to accept the teaching of the Lord, then the miracles were bereft of their purpose, and hence in Nazareth "fie could there do no mighty work" (Mk. 6: 5-6) because of their unbelief. A few had faith, however, and a few miracles were done.

6. (**Liverpool**): They were to say nothing! Actions speak louder than words. Friends in Birmingham give a number of reasons why the Lord commonly forbade broadcasting His miracle-working. In this case, we would suggest the Lord may have been mindful of such scriptures as "He that correcteth a scorner getteth to himself shame... reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee" (Prov. 9: 7, 8); "a scorner loveth not to be reproved" (Prov. 15: 12); "judgements are prepared for scorers" (Prov. 19: 29). Mark is the only one who tells us that it was the Lord, Himself, who evicted the mourners.

7. (Liverpool): Yes, but all these things are bound up together. They could not see how their wood-worker could be a miracle-worker. They could not see how an "unlettered" man could be so wise (showing their lack of belief in the book of Proverbs). So they could not see how their local man could be a national figure, the Prophet of the Lord. See also
Comment 10. I. E. P.

8. (Birkenhead): Compare, however, Liverpool paper para. 1 on the woman's wish for privacy. Many would doubtless have protested if they had known about her condition, as liable to defile them. But friends here rightly emphasize that when restoration has been given, the Lord looks for a testimony that will glorify God.

9. (Bolton and Leigh): We may add that, in contrast to our ministry today, the disciples had miraculous powers that were bound to generate grateful hospitality in many homes.

10. (Dulwich): We must, however, take account of Talmudic evidence that the Jews had a high regard for manual labour, and required a rabbi to learn a trade or craft so that if need arose he could support himself. Further, *tehton* denotes a craftsman of considerable skill. Is not the objection here that, out of the range of laymen customarily invited to read and comment in the synagogues, the local carpenter or builder would not be expected to teach with such authority? But see also
Comment 7.

11. (Paisley): Was the Lord's purpose not that the Light of the world should be made freely available throughout all Galilee (Mat. 4: 23; Mk. 1: 39), fulfilling Is. 9: 1, 2, whether His people would hear or forebear?

M. A.

COMMENTS CONTINUED FROM BS8903 - pp. 31-40

pp. 31 and 39 Yet Mark distinctively records at least three occasions when the Lord expressly forbade the persons healed to spread their news: 1: 43-45; 5: 43; 7: 36; possibly 1: 34 and 8: 26. In Mark, especially from 1: 45, we can see one purpose was to avoid hindrance to the "straightway" work of the Servant, as friends in Birkenhead remark. Mat. 12: 16-21 shows further that the Lord's ministry was also to avoid resemblance to the methods of the political agitator or demagogue [Comment 4].

pp. 37-40 I would prefer to trace "them" (v. 33) back through 21 to 10, as indicating "they were about Him with the Twelve", i. e. a small group

that included **the Twelve**. Two distinctions **are then made**: (1) "**them that are without**", contrasted **with "you" the above group**; (2) "**His own disciples**", who therefore **received** special exposition going **further than vv. 11: 20** (presumably to **the other parables**) "**as they were able to hear it**" could refer to **the amount they could absorb at one time**, as well as (or instead of) distinguishing **between groups** [Comment 9].

p. 32 If the first **kind of heart** listed **here** corresponds to **the "wayside" of the parable**, surely **we should give first place to the Lord's exposition in Mat. 13: 19: "and understandeth it not"**; though some do fail to **understand** because **they resist the message** [Comment 14].

p. 35 This is a welcome comment on **the significance of the settings of the Lord's ministry**. Some **have seen in the progression from synagogue to house, to seaside, the appeal to Israel nationally, followed by revelation to the comparatively few** who would listen, some of whom would later become another House, **and finally the broadcast sowing by the sea of "Galilee of the nations", where the Lord, in figure, sought others** who would also **be brought into the "one flock"** of John 10 [Comment 15].

p. 35 It is helpful to **have this clarification of two principles to be learned from the great Sower's methods, which we underline thus**:

- (a) **the use of common earthly things to win a hearing for the message** (cf. John 3: 12).
- (b) **the use of parables to separate those who saw enough to inquire further from those who would not see or hear** [Comment 16],

M. A.

THE TEMPTATION OF THE LORD

Some disquiet has **been** expressed about **the expression in the Liverpool paper in BS 8901, p. 8, which was printed** without comment. Relating to **the temptation of the Lord, it said that "There must have been a possibility of His succumbing"**. Some **have pointed out that God knew He would not succumb, and that the whole plan of redemption and the very righteousness of God would have been undermined had He done so**. This is **true, but knowing that something will happen and making it happen are not the same thing**. To **take an example of the opposite sort, God knew that Judas would betray the Lord, but He did not make him do so; his action was conscious and culpable, and it was "possible" for him to decide otherwise**. Thus Editors **generally accepted**

the view of our contributors that if the Lord were unable to perform any actions He was tempted to do, the temptation would be completely illusory. As our contributors say, we understand that the Lord, being the last Adam and having an incorrupt nature as Adam had, could be tempted to satisfy legitimate desires in illegitimate circumstances. Thus, He would not sin because He was the Perfect Man, filled with the Holy Spirit and so perfectly obedient to the will of God.

On the other hand, the view is advanced from 1 John 3: 5 and John 14: 30 that in the days of the Lord's flesh:

- (1) He did not inherit the sinful flesh from Mary, and
- (2) bodily appetites were completely governed by His desire to undertake the will of His Father through every day; so that the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life were not accommodated in His mind or heart.

Hence, although the Lord could be subject to the pressure of extreme hunger, and so be tempted as we could be, His will could not be broken. His dedication and purity could not be corrupted by companying closely with fallen men because He was "... undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb. 7: 26); yet He was distressed by human weakness and error around Him. Finally, the Adversary, by himself or by means of another, could try to prompt Christ towards covetousness or pride, or departure from obedience, but he provoked only righteous condemnation, as in Mat. 4 or 16: 33. The temptations, though powerful in appeal, were borne down by the Man who delighted in the law of His God. For the Son had laid up the word of the Father in His heart (Ps. 119: 11), and day by day he sought out the works He had come to do (Jn. 5: 19, 30). He could thus say "the prince of the world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me" with confidence both in present and in future. When temptation fiercely assailed Him in Gethsemane He armed Himself with prostration in prayer. Thus in all these ways He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4: 15).

Editors

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. From Kilmarnock Could the disciples have healed the sick had they not anointed them with oil first (Mk. 6: 13)?

There is not a single specific case in the whole of the New Testament of the Lord or His disciples anointing with oil. Only this scripture and the more restrictive practice of Jas. 5: 14 speak of the anointing of oil in connection with the miraculous. We are unable to say, therefore, what the correct procedure was. The fact that this is so is a great encouragement today, for it confirms to us that we are not living in an age of miracle-working, for we have been given no instruction in how to do it.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8905

HE HATH DONE ALL THINGS WELL

Any miracle presents a challenge to **faith**. The Lord said to **the** apostles, "**Give ye them to eat**". Their minds immediately contemplated **the** fabulous expense. How they thought of **the** actual resource of food **He had urged them** to discover, **and how the Lord regarded it** proved very **different the** one from **the** other.

As for **what happened next, the natural mind** could no more deny **what was taking place than explain it. Yet with an acceptance of the miracle it was** all too easy to **experience a hardening of heart** (6: 52). Slow to **appreciate the divine power being exercised over material things, their response to perfect love was inclined to be inadequate and earth-bound in its scope. Yet His disciples were safe with Him. He had seen their need** for rest (6: 31). He prayed (6: 46). He saw **their distress (6: 48), and after He had gone up unto them into the boat the wind ceased** (6: 51).

Faithful also **in His shepherd care for the multitude, He had taught and wrought wondrously, one with the Father and the Spirit in action and in the communion of prayer. The very fringes of His garment were a channel of healing for many who were sick in Israel.**

The Pharisees **and** scribes who challenged **the disciples' apparent neglect of the tradition of the elders, found the word of Scripture trained** directly onto themselves **regarding the question of whether they were truly honouring the Lord by their tradition. The statement of 7: 14, 15, as explained in v. 20 onwards shows that defilement connected with eating compared with the real defilement which arises from the human heart. Proper understanding of the laws of cleanness as in Lev. 11 must bring about the realisation that a strict code of conduct regarding physical matters would be of slight importance unless due attention was paid to matters affecting the heart of man. A slavish imposition of ordinances for their own sake was making the Pharisees and scribes lose sight of the purpose of those ordinances in the first place; which was to cause the Israelite to reflect on the importance of guarding the heart above all things.**

The **intent of the ordinances was unchanged, but the disciple of Christ needed** no longer to **be bound by the literal observance of them,**

having appreciated the true issues involved and sought cleansing where alone it could be found. This was a difficult lesson for the Jewish disciple to absorb even with the passage of time. Nothing short of revelation from the Lord could cleanse Peter's conscience (Acts 10: 15), or remove his prejudice.

We have to be careful to keep the gospel record vividly before us in all its wonder, and with deepening faith to learn to honour the Lord more completely. Separation is rewarded by promises (2 Cor. 7: 1).

The Devil was active in the borders of Tyre and in Galilee of the nations, and yet those fruitful "branches ran over the wall", reaching out to faith, and causing the deaf to hear and hearken, and the dumb to speak His praise.

E. A.

MIRACLES AND CRITICISM (Mark 6: 30 - 7: 37)

From Aberdeen: The disciples returned from the field of service full of themselves. "Come ye apart and rest awhile", said the Lord. The Lord proceeded to show by His example that His work was carried out in humility and in glorification of the Father. There was no vain glory with Him: but the glory of God was manifest as "He came forth", and "He had compassion" and as "He taught" (6: 34).

The disciples in their natural earthly wisdom "advised" the Lord to send the multitudes away as the night drew near. But they were reproved by the Lord's care for the masses when He said "Give ye them to eat". Their reply was perhaps sarcastic but certainly one of incredulity: "Shall we go and buy ... ?" (6: 37). These were the men who had just returned from performing miracles! Even after the miracle of the loaves their hearts were "hardened" so that they understood not concerning the loaves. The turning-point for the disciples was when the Lord said, "How many loaves have ye? Go and see". The Lord, knowing how to handle His sheep, was hereby intimating that He was about to manifest His glory. There is not glory apart from His. What we do for Him does not reflect honour on ourselves; we have no glory. All the glory comes from Him, and that glory He will not give unto another (Is. 42: 8).

Once again, having rejoined His disciples and arriving at the other side with them, we find that the people ran to touch "the Lord". The disciples must have looked on in wonder. Then came the haughty Pharisees with their harassing questioning about not keeping "the tradition of the elders". The Lord was not intimidated one whit but boldly exposed their folly. The disciples witnessed glorious answers by their fearless leader, who was able to handle any person and any problem.

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: We noticed that certain guiding principles underlaid all the miracles that were performed. First and foremost, they were all necessitated by compassion (6: 34, 50; 7: 32, 33; Mat. 14: 14; 9: 35-37). It was not an attempt at gaining popularity through His marvellous display of miraculous powers; rather it was a confirmation of His deep concern for the physical welfare of the people. It was not a spontaneous outburst of emotion, but an indication that the physical needs of a people were of as much importance as the spiritual [Comment 1].

Secondly, these miracles were performed, notwithstanding the apparent unbelief of the disciples (6: 36, 37, 49, 50, 52). This is not to say that faith is not an essential element in the performing of miracles [Comment 2]. We suggest it is not always a criterion in miracle-working (6: 40-42, 51; Jn. 9: 1-14; Jn. 5: 13; Acts 3: 1-9). Also, those for whom the miracles were performed were profoundly satisfied (6: 42, 56; 7: 30, 35-37). There was absolute restoration of health to those involved (7: 35-37; Acts 3: 12; 4: 5-9).

We also noticed that they were aimed at confirming the authenticity of Christ's messages and claims (Jn. 10: 25, 38). A suggestion was made that a principle could be seen in Jesus' calling the Syrophenician woman a dog, in relation to miracles. Knowing full well that dogs refer to evil (Phil. 3: 2) and ungratefulness (Mat. 7: 6; 2 Pet. 2: 22), could it be that Christ is here saying that miracles should be meant for the saved, considering the fact that the unsaved might be unable to appreciate? [Comment 3].

Anon

From Birkenhead: The Lord spent time teaching the multitude and as the day wore away there was concern about the provision of food for them. The situation highlights the fact that the disciples were still not showing the measure of faith expected of them. They concluded that it was not possible to purchase sufficient food with the money available, and also that one lad's meal was inadequate for the purpose. This disregarded the fact that the Lord of Creation was on hand. The Master used the disciples as His servants to provide abundantly for all those in need.

The crowds were so moved that they endeavoured to take the Lord Jesus forcibly and make Him king (Jn. 6: 15). He, knowing this was to happen, had already constrained the disciples to go away in a boat so that they could not become involved. It was the Father's intention that the Son should suffer death by crucifixion and no purpose of man was allowed to prevent this happening. At a later stage the disciples learned of these things (9: 31).

The disciples, crossing Galilee, were caught in a severe storm. In Mark 4 there is word of a previous experience from which they could have drawn help but their conduct shows that they did not, and the recent feeding of the multitude had also failed to impress them (6: 52).

A. Hyland, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: The traditions of the Jewish elders had taken pre-eminence over and above the laws of God (7: 13). This is always a danger where laws are required to be kept, that they become modified in some way and those modifications become more important than the law itself. Evident amongst those Jewish leaders was an obstinate intolerance of all that sought to threaten their long and well-established practices. Thus, in the face of such overwhelming evidence in those miracles that the Lord so mightily wrought, the Jewish leaders criticised and in their unbelief and ignorance opposed a great work of God.

It is not clear how their tradition of washing prior to eating originated. Perhaps it was an extension of those commands which required the individual to wash himself and his clothes on those occasions when he became defiled (Lev. 11: 25). This was, however, an occasion of some prominence, being the revelation of the Lord that it is not what goes into the man that defiles him but what comes out of him (7: 14). For though their hand washings were spurious, becoming unclean through contact with certain meats was not, or rather not until this point in time. The Jews were expressly forbidden contact with certain animals (Lev. 11: 4, ff); to touch or eat them made them unclean (v. 24). Thus the Lord on this occasion is not only putting the record straight concerning traditions but goes on to introduce something new which would ultimately find its fulfilment in the inclusion of the outcast Gentile dogs under the grace of God (7: 19; Acts 10: 9-16, 28; Mk. 7: 27; Rev. 22: 15).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand was an occasion of testing for the disciples (see Jn. 6: 5, 6). They were to learn that in Him was the source of all sufficiency. How often we, too, are prone to limit the Lord's power to work, by saying for instance that these are hard days, and there is no longer any interest in spiritual things! We also must learn Christ's all-sufficiency, the secret of supply.

The occasion of Christ's walking on the sea appears to be another test and process of learning for the disciples, for it was at the Lord's behest they set out on their journey across the lake (6: 45). Here we see faith tested in adversity, for their distress came at a time when the Lord was absent from them. As the disciples had to learn, so must we, that in the deepest, darkest trials, the Lord is truly with us. The disciples' amazement at their Master's walking on the sea demonstrates that the lesson of who He was, conveyed in the feeding of the five thousand, had not been grasped by them (6: 51, 52).

After Mark's statement: "This He said, making all meats clean"(7: 19), and the connecting import of this, given by Peter in Acts 11: 1-18, that the Gentiles also had been granted repentance unto life, it struck us as instructive, that the next person to receive blessing at Christ's hand was a Syro-phoenician or Gentile by race. This woman exhibited two characteristics which were the opposite of those displayed by the Pharisees. These were

humility and faith; illustrating the principles of conversion: "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20: 21).

Alex Reid

From Derby: In the second miracle of Mark 6 (45-52) we saw the disciples were not in any danger but "distressed in rowing", working hard and getting nowhere even though they were there at His bidding. They were doing His will. Their struggle was not of their making, but was it according to His will? We did not find a conclusion easy to reach [Comment 4]. It is quite probable His praying in the mountain was as much for His disciples as for His own need of strengthening by His Heavenly Father.

We never cease to marvel at the stamina of our Lord. In verse 30 He must have been tired, yet He taught the people to let His disciples rest. He sent His disciples across the water and spent the night in prayer. We would probably have done the same as the disciples in Mark 14: 37. Then He walked out to them, five or six miles across the water [Comment 5] and still the words from His weary body were "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid".

Still He tested their faith even in the night hours. He would have passed them by. He cared: by being there He showed His care: nevertheless they must acknowledge their need. Even a cry of fear was sufficient for Him to go with them and get into the boat with them. The disciples (v. 52) had not understood that the power which helped them yesterday was still available. Of course, it is still as great for today's problems.

S. Wymer

From Dulwich: The miracle of the loaves and fishes in Mark 6 is also recorded in the three other Gospels. We have a wonderful parallel to this miracle in the Old Testament, where Jehovah fed and provided for over two million people in the wilderness for forty years.

The pre-requisite of love in service (1 Cor. 13: 1-3) is seen in the Lord's compassion for the multitude (6: 34). His wisdom also is displayed in the layout of order and utility in distributing effectively with such a large gathering. The green grass was also wisely chosen as convenient in a very warm country (6: 39). There was no waste. They were all filled and the fragments were gathered into twelve baskets [Comment 6].

If we understand criticism as judgement (Greek *krinein*, to judge) in Mark 7, judgement is given by the Pharisees and the scribes against the disciples (v. 2); the Lord Jesus against the Pharisees and scribes (vv. 9-12); and the Lord to the Syrophenician woman (v. 27); and the approval of the multitude for the things that the Lord had done (v. 37). The criticism of the Pharisees and the scribes had its base on the tradition of the elders. The law of Jehovah, instead of being a guide to the elders and a legislator of principle and practice, was not only set aside, but also transgressed (7: 8-13).

Do we understand from Mark 7: 14, 15 that there was a change in the law of Leviticus 11 (Mk. 7: 9)? [Comment 7]. In the light of the Lord's statement of vv. 14, 15, in what way was Israel defiled by such eating? What also is the implication of the statement to Peter in Acts 10: 15? (See Editorial).
W. Townsend

From Edinburgh: We can understand the despair of the disciples when they saw that the persistent crowd had followed them. The Lord had great compassion, however, seeing that they were like "sheep without a shepherd". The people had no spiritual leader; they were easily lost and easily endangered. They had disturbed His rest, but He was concerned for their spiritual welfare, and taught them many things. We should have the same concern for those who come under our care, and should draw near to help them.

The disciples' objections seem very practical, but they had forgotten that the Lord was not bound by human reasoning. He reminded them that they could meet any need simply by using whatever they had, if it was offered willingly for His service. God does not lead us to recognise a need unless He also intends to use us to satisfy that need; He will give us the resources, and in abundance, to meet the needs of those around us [Comment 8].

The walking on the water can be seen as an illustration of the life of the disciple, a continual experience of testing and delivery for it was through obedience to the Lord's command that the disciples found themselves in such problems. It seems that God had intended that they should face the storm.

The disciples had hard hearts and little faith, a fault common to all of us. They had failed to appreciate God's work in the past and so they were unable to apply that experience to present problems. We read that the Lord was "about to pass by them". He did not intend to ignore them, for it was because of their need that He had come. Rather they must first acknowledge their own helplessness before He was to bring peace. We must also learn to recognize our inadequacy when faced with trials; when we cry to Him in faith we can be sure that He will bring comfort and deliverance.

J. D. Williams

From Innerleithen: The Lord issued instructions for orderliness in the ranks of the multitude facilitating distribution. Precision, planning and execution were all important (cf. the spiritual order required in 1 Cor. 14: 40). He kept on giving (imperfect tense) of the loaves and fishes into the disciples' hands. No waste would be allowed. The remains collected would be the next day's fare for the Lord and His disciples [Comment 6]. The second incident (contrast Mk. 4: 35-41) saw the Lord on the land in prayer. On the water the wind against the boat caused no small difficulty to these seasoned mariners. He arose to their need, passing alongside them (6: 48). Their terror was dispelled by the voice of the Eternal One, "It is I (AM)". The Saviour who spoke to them is the Lord Jehovah of Exodus 6: 2, the Lord of all creation

who treads upon the high places of the sea (Job 9: 8). This was no sea phantom which had mysteriously appeared. Yet spiritual perception of the previous miracle had dissipated; they should have recognised Him.

The illustration of *Corban* (7: 11) drives home the utter moral ruin of those so-called holy men who forsake the command of the law of God to honour parents, especially when there is financial need. All evil actions spring from the heart. Defilement has not to do with the stomach but with a man's mind: "as he reckoneth within himself, so is he" (Prov. 23: 7).

The tests of faith of a Gentile woman is the only account of exorcism where the Lord does not address the demon spirit directly. Her understanding of His mission and person (she is the only one who called Him 'Lord' in Mark's gospel) is remarkable. The "dogs" to which she refers are not those that stalk the streets food-searching, but domestic-trained puppies. This directs thought to the aspect of God's care for all His creatures as well as the priority for Israel in the Lord's ministry.

R. B. Fullarton

From **Kilmarnock**: We can see in the feeding of the five thousand that it was not a haphazard operation: rather, all were fed and filled both physically and spiritually. No one but the Son of God could have had the authority and strength to perform such a task.

Prayer was such an important factor in the Lord's life that He went alone into a mountain and prayed for some nine hours (i. e. at least from "even" until the end of the third watch (Mat. 14: 14) - Eds).

The conversation between the Lord Jesus and the Syrophenician woman is at first difficult to understand. Comparison with Mat. 15 makes it easier to understand. The reference to the "children" is to the Israelites, for they had to have the good news first. This was the Lord's commission at that time. This woman, not being an Israelite, was not entitled to be helped; but through her reply and humility a small portion of God's love was shown to her; her daughter was cured. Through this action the Lord was showing that the Gospel would eventually go out to all nations.

In the healing of the deaf man the Lord Jesus sighed [Comment 10]. The man's faith was so low that the Lord found it more difficult to heal him. Faith plays an important part in a person's dealings with God.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From **Liverpool**: *A Further Lesson*. Alone in the middle of the lake and straining against the wind, the disciples may well have felt disappointed that the Lord was not there to help them. Unknown to them He knew all about their predicament. He could actually see them from where He was praying. Moreover He had another lesson to teach them. Perhaps in their tiredness or perhaps through natural human failing the disciples had failed to grasp the

main point from the feeding of the five thousand, that the Lord Jesus is Lord of Creation. Coming to them as He did gave them another opportunity to do so. With all the help at our disposal today we still need an ongoing confirmation of our faith. In giving the appearance of being about to pass them by the Lord was demonstrating to them, as He did later at Emmaus (Lk. 24: 28), His desire to be invited into their problem situation (see Rev. 3: 20).

Two More Healings. The Lord Jesus **had been** hailed by Simon as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk. 2: 32) and spoke Himself of "other sheep" (Jn. 10: 16). Although His ministry was primarily to Israel it is clear from the start that Gentiles were not excluded. That being so we wondered why the Lord did not just heal the woman's daughter. The answer is found in Matthew's account where the woman is recorded as appealing to the Lord as "Son of David" (Mat. 15: 22). She could not lay claim to His power on that basis, and had to be shown her true place. Without taking offence, she took the point and appealed to Him as an outsider on the basis of His kindness. We noted the practical consideration on the part of the Lord in dealing with the deaf and dumb man. He could not hear but he could see and so, instead of a pronouncement unperceived by the man, the Lord used sign language to show the man what He was doing (touching his ears and tongue) and from where His healing came (looking up to heaven) [Comment 11]. The reaction of the people impressed us: they were overwhelmed.

D. J. Webster

From Middlesbrough: It is clear that the disciples had become well known as a result of their preaching and the miracles they had performed (6: 12, 13). This work effectively identified them with the Lord Jesus Christ. We too as disciples should be recognised as being identified with the same Master by our words and deeds.

The work of preaching resulted in the disciples being too tired. The Lord Jesus recognised this and proposed that they get some rest (6: 31). Their being recognised by the crowd made this impossible. Their tiredness caused them to be unsympathetic towards the crowd [Comment 12]. This wrong attitude may occur among disciples today. The Lord Jesus taught them, however, that the attitude should be to strive to make disciples, even when they were tired. When He called them in Mark 1: 17, He had told them that it was so that they might become fishers of men.

The crowds appeared to recognise the Lord's authority over demons, and His power to heal (6: 54, 55) but there does not appear to be any evidence of their recognising Him as the Messiah.

A. A. McIlvenna, C. N. Williams

From Newcastle upon Tyne: The disciples had returned from their mission full of a sense of adventure. Perhaps the Lord was disappointed to compare the commitment and self-sacrifice of John the Baptist with the immaturity of His disciples. These were ordinary men who had suddenly been thrust into

the limelight and were not handling it well [Comment 13]. They were faced with five thousand hungry people and could only think of sending them away. In contrast Jesus' heart went out to the crowd [Comment 12]. The exercise of compassion (6: 34) would be rewarded by the spiritual resources to act effectively. Having to gather up the left-overs served to impress the lesson further and reminded the disciples that no task is too menial for someone who wishes to serve.

Soon afterwards, the Lord Jesus gave a lesson in confidence. They had no doubt exhibited plenty of confidence with demonstrating their new found powers on the mission but the sight of what they thought was a ghost caused them to be terrified. They needed to exchange self-confidence for a confidence that Christ could give them. The excitement of the disciples changed to their being dumbfounded and their previously closed minds being opened.

When the deaf man was given a hearing, his first clearly perceived sounds were the words of the Lord. Having heard the Lord, the man was able to speak correctly. The disciples were no doubt considering a career ahead of them in preaching and teaching and would perhaps be thinking of how they could improve their speaking. The link between poor speech and deafness may have been a pertinent reminder of their need to start by listening.

T.

Sands, P. Stoner

From Paisley: The feeding of the five thousand occurred at the end of the second year of Christ's public ministry (Jn. 6: 4) and was clearly not according to the Lord's desires of that time, which were to sit with the apostles in a place apart (v. 30) [Comment 14]. As in Mark 2: 2, the emphasis is on the teaching given by the Lord (v. 34) although it is clear from Mat. 14: 14 and Luke 9: 11 that all who needed to be healed were healed. It was suggested by some that it was likely to be only those who were able to walk who would have been able to be healed in view of the distance the multitude would have had to travel.

Three points were thought particularly relevant: firstly, there was a lesson for the multitude; the multiplication of food was a work of creation (Jn. 1: 3). It was not to feed the multitude although this was one result, it was to show His eternal power and divinity (Rom. 1: 20). The multitude failed to understand His purpose [Comment 15].

Secondly, there was a lesson for the apostles, to have faith and trust in God who is able to supply all our need and to do more than we ask.

Thirdly, there was an unwelcome, although not unexpected, result. Mark 1: 45 shows the result of a healing where the healed person proclaimed the testimony contrary to the way commanded. Christ was not only prevented from proclaiming the Kingdom in the city, He was virtually besieged by people needing a miracle (of healing). Jn. 6: 15 shows the result of the miracle under consideration; the multitude wished to make Him a king. *J. C. N. Craxton*

COMMENTS

1. (**Ajgunle**): The manna was sent to teach that man "doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8). The relative importance is laid on the spiritual. At the same time we cannot lose sight of the principle, "First that which is natural, then that which is spiritual", although we see that the elder serves the younger.

2. (**Ajgunle**): The proportion of faith on the part of those seeking such miracles was sometimes remarkable in the eyes of the Lord, sometimes very small and in all cases His own power were crucial and unailing.

3. (**Ajgunle**): This matter kept in its time and setting relates to the lost sheep of the house of Israel who by another figure are the children, while the Gentiles whose time would come were the dogs. A domestic scene is portrayed rather than that of stray dogs with their evil connotation. The contrast of saved and unsaved is not reflected exactly in this verse except insofar as the woman exercised remarkable faith.

4. (Derby): The Lord permitted the wild restless sea to impede their progress, and thereby they learned that apart from Him they could do nothing. Their hearts were opened to appreciate the Lord's character in a new light and to feel the effect of His presence in whom faith is well founded.

5. (Derby): "Five and twenty or thirty furlongs" (Jn. 6: 19) would be a little less than four miles, if the furlong was the equivalent of one eighth of a Roman mile, but still represents an astonishing distance. *E. A.*

6. (**Dulwich and Innerleithen**): It is good to underline this point, as a reminder to be careful about the world's 'throw-away' trend of recent years. Friends in Edinburgh add the balancing point that the Lord gave in abundance. In support, we observe Matthew's precise expression, "that which remained of the broken pieces" (similarly Luke and John) — i. e. not crumbs. The accounts read as though these were pieces the Lord had given to be distributed.

M. A.

7. (**Dulwich**): Yes. V. 19 records the Lord's statement "making all meats clean", which had not been the case before. As the Editorial points out, the true defilement was spiritual, but until the Lord abrogated it the physical injunction to Israel remained valid.

p L H

Perhaps friends have in mind determining when the Lord's disciples were to stop distinguishing between "clean" and "unclean" meats. Heb. 9: 8-10 are the key scriptures here and show that such carnal ordinances were connected with the service of the material house of God of the Old Covenant. They thus ceased to be required ordinances at Calvary, when observance of the Law of Moses ceased. After an inter-regnum of 50 days or so, they were replaced by the spiritual ordinances of the New Covenant (Heb. 9: 1). Observe how the words "making all meats clean" (Mk. 7: 19) are not presented as having been said by the Lord at that time, but as a comment by the Holy

Spirit, through Mark, written in the time of reformation. As the Acts of the Apostles and later scriptures show, the old habits died hard. So we conclude that Mark tells how the Lord laid down the principle upon which the subsequent practice was founded. We note, too, that this shows that the spoken word of the Lord in His earthly ministry was equivalent in authority to the law given through Moses which the Lord's teaching replaced.

LE. P.

8. (Edinburgh): This would be true in a spiritual sense. Discretion would be necessary in the application of the miracle to material needs of the present day so as not to be irresponsible or irrational. Faith changes things in God's own time. *E. A.*

Surely the saint may recognize needs that are beyond the reach of the resources God may have given him or her personally? Kindly support is an immediate duty, using what we can spare after other responsibilities have been met, and where giving materially will in fact help. But meanwhile, prayer may show us that God wishes to use others, and other methods of help than our own. This is one way He may choose to "do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think". *M. A.*

9. (Kilmarnock): Doubtless He also sought strength for the tasks which lay ahead of Him.

E. A.

10. (Kilmarnock): Others have understood the sighing as a sign of compassion, perhaps evoked not only by the individual's need but also by the way in which his condition represented the needs of the people; failing to listen to the Word of God, and therefore enfeebled in praise and witness.

M. A.

11. (Liverpool): This is a valid point, but one cannot help thinking that the touch of the Lord Himself had a more powerful significance, and that the directing of His eyes to heaven is recorded also in other circumstances.

E. A.

12. (Middlesbrough and Newcastle): This is too harsh a judgement. The accounts of Matthew, Mark and especially Luke 9: 12 seem to me to record not just common wisdom, but signs that the disciples had learned something of the Lord's care from Him; yet they had left the Creator's power out of their reckoning.

13. (Newcastle): If the record in 6: 12, 13 and Luke 9: 6 is one of obedience and service, is it right to read such criticism into Mark 6: 31? Further, Mat. 8: 23-9: 37 and Mk. 1: 36, 3: 2, 7-8 show how the disciples had already been given experience of public attention. The case of the seventy is somewhat different (Lk. 10: 1-24). *M. A.*

14. (Paisley): Calm and patient and all-sufficient, the Lord made provision for the multitude; and after all that the apostles had done and had taught, they for their part knew the refreshing experience of having the Master with them once again and in perfect control. *E. A.*

15. (**Paisley**): The reasons given in Scripture for this miracle are those of compassion and physical need (8: 2, 3). It is well not to over-spiritualize the Lord's practical care for others.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

From Paisley: Since neither the A. V. nor the R. V. puts a capital H at the beginning of "Him" and "His" when they are referring to Christ, why do the editors insist on it?

This practice of editors is not confined to quotations. The very fact of comment on Scripture introduces a party not explicitly involved in the text, which results in more frequent use of the third person pronoun and its possessive to represent those mentioned in the text. In the circumstances it becomes useful for clarity to be able to distinguish references to the Lord from references to merely human characters, thus avoiding the overloading of the commentary with proper names. In the text itself the translators did not face a problem of the same dimensions, and consequently used the lower case letters. For consistency editors opted to use capitals even in quotations. This also is consistent with previous practice in the magazine. Bound up with the matter of more frequent use of the third person is the feeling of respect which the use of the capital letter helps to assert in a world where human opinions and actions are often assumed to be of equal consequence with divine authority.

What our fellow-editor says is quite true, but a major factor is that, largely based on the above considerations, a common policy was agreed by Editors of the publications of the Churches of God in 1970. This will be maintained unless there is agreement to do otherwise. *P. L. H*

From Kilmarnock: Were the disciples sent out (Mk. 6: 7) because the Lord, Himself was not accepted? [See B. S. 8904, pp. 46 and 52].

The Lord's rejection, recorded in the earlier part of Mark 6, refers to that of His own home-town. At this stage in His ministry, the rest of the common people heard Him gladly and later, after the feeding of the five thousand, they would have made Him King (John 6: 15). Only the leaders opposed Him and so we would say that this was not the reason for the sending of the Twelve. Rather, this was the Lord's way of spreading the Word just as it was later to be His way to spread the gospel from a single church of God in Jerusalem out to Judea, Samaria and the rest of the Roman Empire. In both cases He first trained the men, then sent them out on their own.

I. E. P.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8906

GIVE US A SIGN !

The passage of Scripture this month shows that the thinking of the Jewish people, and even of the disciples themselves, was for the most part thoroughly earthbound. They wanted "things that sell newspapers"; things to marvel at, to give physical proof of the Lord's claims. But the things of real importance could only be revealed by the Spirit of God (Mat. 16: 17) to those who came with a genuine faith. It is ironical, though, that the signs were all around those who sought them, yet they seemed to be completely unmoved. Their attitude was like that of the rich man's relatives (Luke 16: 30), who would not listen to the evidence they had. Doubtless they had all kinds of 'rational' explanations for the miracles, such as sharing out existing provisions and psychosomatic healing, which enabled them to dismiss the Lord Jesus as "that deceiver" (Mat. 27: 63). Thus the Lord simply sighed when the Pharisees asked for a sign again (8: 11), and refused to give them anything else. All they would have would be "the sign of Jonah" (Mat. 16: 4); the resurrection of Christ, the great bedrock fact of Christianity. On this fact we still stand; if there was no real resurrection, Christianity is fraudulent and founded on a lie — but it was so, and our faith is placed on the leader and captain (*archegos*) of our salvation.

Thus we do not need to, and should not, ask for signs. We have had what we need, and the more pressing and difficult thing is to follow the signposted road of Mark 8: 34, 35, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it".

P. L. H.

LACK OF PERCEPTION (Mark 8: 1- 9: 32)

From **Birkenhead**: To identify the location of the events of "those days" (8: 1) we turned to Mark 7: 31 and concluded that if this was the scene of the miracle then it was likely to be a predominantly Gentile audience. This contrasts with the incident in Mark 6 when mainly Jews would be present. It is therefore clear that the Lord Jesus broke down the barrier between

Jew and Gentile — showing compassion to all. It may be that the ministry of the demon-possessed man in Decapolis (Mark 5: 20) contributed significantly towards the generation of interest in the Lord's activities.

The Lord Jesus, as He journeyed with His disciples, sought to know from them who men considered Him to be. It must have been a grief to **the** Lord that after such a time, and in the light of His words and works, so many failed to comprehend. Peter's declaration, "Thou art the Christ", was a conclusion (Mat. 16: 17) only reached by divine revelation, but Peter, and presumably the others, could not imagine that the One they looked to for a lead in the overthrow of all their enemies should speak of suffering, rejection and death. The Lord then declared that the coming of the kingdom of God with power was shortly to take place. This seems to have a relevance to events on the day of Pentecost [Comment 1].

After six days Peter, James and John went with the Lord apart to the mountain top to pray (Luke 9: 28). Whilst there they saw and heard things aimed at helping them further. Moses, the law-giver and Elijah the prophet spoke with the Lord about His decease (Gk. *exodus*) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9: 31).

When the cloud removed, Jesus was left alone with the three, who were told to remain silent until after the resurrection. The idea of a resurrection puzzled them and also the saying of the scribes about Elijah coming. The Lord said that the latter event had already taken place with the coming of John the Baptist — a point they did grasp (Mat. 17: 13).

The person with the dumb spirit caused problems for the disciples in that his affliction was intractable. Did the disciples fail because of their failure to pray and to depend wholly on God, or was the malady of such a type that only the Lord would be able to deal with it? [Comment 2].

F. Cannings, R. D. Williams

From **Birmingham**: It was to the crowd as much as the disciples that the Lord spoke of a vital Christian principle, denying self; not easy with a sinful nature which craves its own. Paul said "I... count them but dung that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3: 8). It is as though the two are diametrically opposed: to pursue one, be it Christ or self, is to the detriment of the other (see Mat. 6: 24).

It would be difficult to say that there is inherent spiritual benefit in self-denial but it will be vital if spiritual things are to be pursued with consistent vigour [Comment 3]. For akin to self are pleasure, ease and sloth, which are incompatible with cross-carrying (2 Tim. 3: 14; Prov. 20: 4; 6: 6-11). Self does not naturally lend itself to shame and persecution, the accompaniment of the cross. There are eternal implications too. For the

Christian, to save his life is to lose it. In other words, to do our own thing rather than His is to suffer eternal loss (1 Cor. 3: 15).

Chapter 9: 1 is part of the same discourse and we discussed the setting of "in no wise taste death". It is at a time immediately preceding the millennial advent and we wonder if this alludes to the loss of life (service) (1 Cor. 3: 15; Mk. 8: 35) at the judgement seat. The A. V. reads "till they have seen the kingdom of God" and we wonder if the context may be entirely different and refer to the persecution and death in the post-Pentecost era [Comment 1].

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The comment of the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 1: 22 that "Jews ask for signs" is particularly relevant to the Lord's ministry. Earlier in John 2: 18 and several times later, even, in the light of the most wonderful miracles performed by Him, it was quite clear that "seeing they would see and yet in no sense perceive" (Mat. 13: 14). It would appear that now the Pharisees were seeking something additional, a token or indication from heaven, audible or visible. His reply does not even direct their attention to Jonah as formerly — no sign was forthcoming!

The opening words of chapter 9 have given rise to varying ideas as to their fulfilment [Comment 11]. It does seem, however, that the transfiguration scene in all its splendour and glory provides the answer, when He appeared in exceeding white garments (Mark), but Matthew notes also the change upon the Person — "His face did shine as the sun". The coming millennial kingdom will bring together saints from the Old and New Testaments, as seen in Moses and Elijah associated with Peter, James and John. Their conversation was relative to the all-important issue of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke). But here He is seen in glory, indicating a future majesty of 1, 000 years wherein all will rejoice at the recollection of Calvary!

The Lord's revelation (Mk. 8: 31) relative to His rising again does not seem to have made any impression upon the disciples. He made reference to this very important issue a second time as they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, which raised a temporary questioning among themselves. In chapter 9: 31 the matter is again propounded, and both Mark and Luke record that they did not understand, and they were afraid to ask Him. Matthew says that they were exceeding sorry. They may have had some indistinct sense of what He meant, and their perception was not extended by being afraid to ask Him.

BUI Paterson

From Derby: It is quite clear that the disciples had a distinct lack of perception about who Jesus was. Even though He had been with them for over two years the disciples did not know Him fully. When they came to Bethsaida it is of great significance that a blind man was brought to Jesus. It was most likely that it was the disciples who brought the blind man to Jesus. If so, he was physically parallel to the state in which the disciples were spiritually before He was made known to them.

The second part of the blind man's encounter, when he could see people as trees walking, was parallel to what the disciples were spiritually at that time. Then, after the final act the blind man could see perfectly. Surely this was parallel to what the disciples were going to be like after the Lord's death and resurrection.

If we could not see or hear our voices would be of limited effect and we would have great difficulty in communicating with each other. The same thing had happened spiritually with God's people. They could not see the beauties of the Old Testament writings and they could not hear God speaking to them through the Scriptures. Therefore they had lost communication with God.

In chapter 9, the Lord concludes by telling them that there are some who will not die until they see the kingdom of God. This was to be the introduction of the power which the disciples had after He was taken to heaven [see Comment 1].

The unclean spirit could not come out by anything but prayer. Was this because the disciples who were left below when the other three went up the mountain, had had their hearing impaired spiritually and therefore could not pray with sufficient power? We only have to look back at chapter 8 where the Lord said, "Having ears, hear ye not?" If, therefore, physical deafness makes our own voices useless, the disciples' prayers would also have been useless if they were spiritually deaf.

However, the Lord showed great patience with the disciples afterwards by continuing to tell them about His death and resurrection. But, even so, they could not understand it and they were afraid to ask Him. But, eventually, after death and resurrection, they were to have their eyes and ears opened fully for the service of their Lord and Master and they were given power they had never known before.

R. J. Foster, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: The perception the Lord expected from the multitudes, and the disciples, which is also expected of the world at large (Rom. 1: 19, 20) is in contrast to revelation, which seems to be something unfolded to the mind of the believer (Is. 53: 1). The lack of perception in the disciples

involved their reason, their understanding and memory (Mk. 8: 17, 18). In Nazareth, the Lord could not do many miracles because of their unbelief (Mk. 6: 5, 6). Is it possible there was a degree of unbelief in the partial restoration of the blind man? (8: 22-26) [Comment 4].

God's sovereignty in revelation is tempered by what we are able to bear and though the disciples' vision was limited, yet they would later see from Pentecost the establishment of the kingdom of God.

As the glory revealed on the mount of transfiguration is included in the synoptic gospels, but omitted in John, does it suggest the glory of the Son shining through His manhood? In this also would be glory and honour affirmed by the Father of His beloved Son (2 Pet. 1: 17).

W. Townsend

From **Edinburgh and Musselburgh**: After the people had been satisfied, seven large baskets of fragments were collected. At the feeding of the five thousand a much smaller basket (Gk. *kophinos*) was used, meaning a basket for lunch or small provisions. Here, however, the word *sp(h)uris* [which could be as large as a hamper-Eds], emphasizes the abundance of the Lord's provision. The latter word is used for the basket in which Saul was lowered over the city wall to escape from Damascus (Acts 9: 25).

Having provided bread for four thousand, the Lord now speaks of bread on a spiritual level. The Lord uses leaven to illustrate the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, an unseen pervasive influence. It is interesting that the Lord has restored hearing and sight, and provided bread for four thousand; miracles which were all interrelated with His teaching.

What did Satan understand of the Lord's purpose in going to the cross? Later we can see how Satan took possession of Judas, leading him to betray the Lord, and then how Satan urged the crowd to crucify Him. Furthermore Paul tells us that it is impossible for the minds of Satan's kingdom to comprehend the divine wisdom associated with the crosswork of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 2: 7, 8). So why did Satan try to deflect the Lord Jesus from going to the cross? [Comment 5].

The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida can be compared with a similar miracle at Siloam where the Lord put mud on the man's eyes (Jn. 9: 1-7). The Lord used His touch to encourage faith, and as an outward sign to those who looked on. Healing in this case was gradual rather than instantaneous; the Lord did not always operate in the same way.

We debated the meaning of the Lord's words in 9: 1. Was the Lord referring to the vision that three of them would be given on the mountain-top or was He speaking of that expression of the kingdom of God in

churches of God that would commence at Pentecost? Our general mind favoured the latter view [Comment 1].

For a short time three privileged disciples were able to see the intrinsic glory of the Lord. On the Mount of Transfiguration they saw the outshining of the glory that was veiled in His humanity. As He came down from the mountain we have a picture of His descent to earth, laying aside His glory and splendour to meet the needs of fallen mankind.

J. D. Williams

From Innerleithen: The disciples' lack of bread resulted in the lesson about leaven. Mark speaks of "The leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" whilst in Mat. 16: 6 it is described as "The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees". The leaven, or teaching, of the Pharisees was hypocrisy (Lk. 12: 1), something which always brought forth the Saviour's strong condemnation.

The region of Caesarea Philippi, about 120 miles from Jerusalem and the most northerly point of the Lord's journeyings, was an area of idolatry and superstitious worship. It is not without significance that the Lord spoke there of the building of His Church. The Lord's reply to Peter's avowal is not recorded by Mark or Luke. If, as is generally accepted, much of what Mark wrote was what he had heard from Peter, then this absence of the Lord's testimony to Peter may be attributable to the latter's humility.

On hearing that the Son of Man must suffer, die and rise again Peter, with characteristic presumption, sought to rebuke the Lord and in return received His severe rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan", a similar rebuke to that which the Lord gave to the Devil in the wilderness when he sought to divert Him from the great purpose for which He had come.

Peter, James and John were taken by the Lord to Jairus' house (5: 37) and also into Gethsemane (14: 33). It may be that they were being specially prepared for their future work, and in the transfiguration they were given a specific preview of His coming glorious reign. The voice that had so spoken at the Lord's baptism spoke again in the Father's declaration of His beloved Son.

In Moses, whom the Lord buried no man knowing of his grave, and Elijah, who had never tasted death, we see a representation of the Law and the Prophets, respectively. A further example of the disciples' lack of perception is seen in 9: 11. The Lord's reply in v. 12 about Elijah refers in our view, to a time which is still future and the reference in v. 13 is to John the Baptist.

K. Reilly

From Kilmarnock: The Pharisees sought **after a sign from the Lord**. **In the transfiguration Peter, James and John were witnesses to a great sign**. **The Lord Jesus was shown to be no ordinary man — rather the spotless and sinless One, greater even than Moses and Elijah, who were great men of God and highly respected by the Jews of that age**.

Peter, not realising what he had said, was overcome with fear (as were the other two disciples). The physical **aspect of the event** — seeing Moses and Elijah — **overcame the disciples**. They could not **take in the spiritual meaning of the transfiguration**. They too would **be changed and made perfect in a future time**. Their lives **were affected by this event**.

The disciples **were unable to cast out the evil spirit because of the fathers lack of belief and the disciples' lack of spiritual perception**. Can a believer lose his belief in **the Lord through trials and failures**? **The failure of the disciples must have discouraged the father; thus weakening his faith in the ability of Jesus to help**. **It was only when the Lord Jesus said "All things are possible to him that believeth" (9: 23) that the father realised that He was the Christ!**

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *The Lord's Concern* We are sometimes apt to play down **the problem of physical hunger and well-being**. The Lord showed **by His concern that we should not do so**. **He could have just fed the people, but He didn't**. **Instead He challenged the disciples to think about the problem**. Praise God our Lord was **(and still is) concerned when people are hungry**. How **great His concern must be today as millions go hungry, and we should be challenged to do something about that physical hunger**.

Dullness and Hardness We wondered why the disciples, having witnessed **the feeding of the 5, 000**, should find **it so hard to believe that the Lord can supply the needs of 4, 000 here**. The **answer is in the human tendencies (a) to forget, (b) to think in human terms with human limitations**. Acknowledging **the power of our Lord will widen our vision of possibilities; leaving Him out of our reckoning will reduce things to what we can do in our own strength!**

The disciples were dull; the Pharisees were hard-hearted and would not be given an additional sign. **Why not? Because they had the Lord Jesus and their condition was such that they wouldn't have believed whatever sign they were given!** (cf. the comment of Lazarus in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16: 31)) **Thus the condemnation of "This generation", i. e. this kind of generation, which Matthew additionally reports the Lord describing as a wicked and adulterous one**. The only

signs they would get were the prophetic ones available from the Word of God (see Mat. 12: 38-42).

*"Some who... shall in no wise taste of death"*¹¹ There were two views on what the Lord Jesus meant by this strange statement. (1) That He was referring to the coming of the Kingdom of God in power at Pentecost which they would naturally live to see. (2) That He was referring to His (still) future Kingdom which some (i. e. Peter, James and John) were to see in preview at the Transfiguration (see 2 Pet. 1: 16-18) — the next story in the narrative. In any event the Transfiguration reveals the supremacy as well as the glory of the Lord Jesus [Comment 1].

Failure From the spiritually high spot on the mountain the Lord came down to face problems, failure and faithlessness. We wondered to whom the Lord's words in 9: 19 were addressed: to the disciples or to the teachers of the law? [Comment 6].

D. J. Webster

From Middlesbrough: The Pharisees were once again asking for a sign from heaven. This seems rather strange, particularly after having just seen the Lord performing the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand men, plus women and children. Trouble-making rather than ignorance caused the Pharisees to ask such a question. Besides this particular sign they had had previous signs, for example the "heavenly sign" of the dove descending from heaven and resting on the Lord, and the accompanying voice. This was different from the attitude of the disciples in their slow response to and understanding of the authority and power of the Lord, who warned them not to be like the Pharisees. With only one loaf of bread among them, the disciples were worried about how it would divide out, having forgotten the recent miracles with the loaves and fishes.

The main point of the passage is the recognition of Christ for who He was and is. The Lord generalises the matter by asking "Who do men say that I am?" The disciples obviously knew what the people thought, but when faced with the question as to who they thought He was, it hit them quite hard and it was Peter who, led by the Holy Spirit, replied "Thou art the Christ".

It was not until after the Lord knew that the disciples recognised and understood exactly who He was that He started to tell them about His death and subsequent resurrection. It was necessary that He should be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, because they belonged to the people who had turned their backs on God necessitating the Lord's presence on earth. The disciples found it distressing that their Master should speak in such a way, so Peter rebuked the Lord

for saying such things. It was obvious that the message was not getting through to the disciples, and that the devil was getting the better of them, and so the Lord took control of the situation.

C. N. Williams, J. McIlvenna

From Newcastle: It is a puzzle to wonder what was done with the bread after it had been gathered into the baskets. It certainly was not kept for long in the boat, for we find the disciples once again without bread [Comment 7]. The speed with which the disciples link the warning of the Lord concerning leaven to the lack of bread may indicate a feeling of guilt at their repeated carelessness to make proper provision for food.

What would the disciples understand by the reference to leaven? The sentence indicates that it is something that the disciples can be affected by and is to be avoided; something that both the Pharisees and Herod have — although possibly in different forms. The preceding context implies that it must have to do with the request for further signs and the opinion of the Lord that it was something sufficiently serious to require the Lord to abandon the Pharisees (8: 13). Leaven of the Pharisees is mentioned in Mat. 16: 12, "... the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees", and Luke 12: 1, "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy". We might deduce that the Pharisees were teaching the people a scepticism which asked for signs. The ordinary people saw the signs as fulfilling all that the teaching of the Pharisees had demanded. However the Pharisees, rather than accept the signs themselves, just asked for greater and greater signs. The failure to believe and requests for greater signs multiplied like leaven [Comment 8]. Where does Herod come into this? We know that he was also infected by this curiosity and later hoped that a miracle would be performed.

The danger was that the disciples might also be corrupted by a desire for greater and greater signs which would defer an exercise of greater faith in the Lord. In a series of questions during which there was scarcely a break to receive answers, the Lord challenged the disciples to face up to the facts they had witnessed. Although further miracles were possible, they would not be helpful for the purpose of strengthening faith.

The Lord Jesus uses quite typical irony to distinguish between the uselessness of the "leaven of the Pharisees" and the usefulness of power to multiply a quantity of bread to feed the ordinary people.

P. J. Stoner

From Paisley: One important lesson to be learned from the passage is that a lack of perception in a child of God today is due totally to the disciple and not to our God, who has promised to reveal Himself to all who earnestly seek Him (Deut. 4: 29, Lk. 11: 9, 10).

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (8: 15). This is also applicable today. Christians should heed the warning to beware of hypocrisy (Lk. 12: 1) and worldliness. If we do allow such things into our lives then the leavening effect will gradually distance us from the path which Jesus has set for us and thus also from our daily relationship with Him. The Pharisees were hypocritical in that they had God's law but did not practise it. To avoid hypocrisy and false teaching every action must be measured against God's written word (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17); by this method the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod is soon weeded out and replaced by the seed whereby a Christlike character may grow and develop.

A number of passages show that at this point the disciples still did not fully understand the purpose of Christ being on earth (e. g. 8: 31-33; 9: 10, 31, 32). No wonder the Lord was moved to quote the prophet Ezekiel (8: 18) because He was stating the matter plainly (8: 32). What matter? The matter of His death and resurrection. The disciples' misunderstanding comes again from a lack of perception regarding the Lord's words. How could the Lord be victorious if He was to die? Do our minds not still work in the same manner today? The task to hand seems impossible, or the method of carrying out the task seems so contrary to human logic that we forget "All things are possible to him that believes" (9: 23). Let us also set our minds on God's interests, not our own (8: 33).

W. F. McKaig

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead and others): The words "taste of death" were the common euphemism for the blunt "die", and it is not likely that they can be interpreted as referring to spiritual death. Some of the early disciples might have thought that some apostles literally would not die until the *parousia* (cf. John 21: 23), but by the time that Mark's gospel was written this could not be sustained, and certainly cannot be now. Hence the phrase "some... shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" must relate to something which happened within the lifetime of the apostles. Various events have been suggested, including the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, or the establishment of the kingdom of God as a group of churches. However, the event must be associated specifically with the kingdom of God and its power. Although the account of the Transfiguration directly follows in Mark, and shows the glory which the Lord will have in a future kingdom, it does not actually relate to the coming of the kingdom. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of

Pentecost, as suggested by Birkenhead friends, seems the most likely. The kingdom of God can be defined as 'the rule of God among the people of God', and Pentecost was the event which inaugurated the kingdom among the New Covenant people (Mat. 21: 43), based on the power of the Spirit.

2. **(Birkenhead):** 9: 28 records the disciples' question, and v. 29 the Lord's answer, implying that there was insufficient prayer in this case.

P. L. H.

3. **(Birmingham):** We agree that if self-denial is to be profitable it must be clearly linked with purpose to follow and serve. But are there not times when the saint, with a vision of the task God calls him to, finds he must first purify himself? We may have to find ways of overcoming self-indulgence, or concern for personal status, before we can serve in true imitation of Christ. Yet meanwhile we should fill our hands with steadfast service, both devotional and practical, that we might exercise ourselves "unto godliness".

M. A.

4. **(Dulwich):** It seems that the Lord's question to the man as to whether he saw anything does denote some hesitancy in his faith. *P. L. H.*

P. L. H.

5. **(Edinburgh and Musselburgh):** It is the "rulers of this world" that do not know divine wisdom, not Satan. Satan influenced Peter to give men's way of thinking precedence over God's. Peter had tried to argue that the rejection, crucifixion, resurrection process was not necessary; this whole process is not the same as solely the crucifixion. Satan clearly sought to have the Lord crucified right up to the end of His life, e. g. John 13: 27, where Satan entered into Judas. Satan cannot have understood that his final victory was his crushing defeat: "He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3: 15).

P. L. H.

The wisdom of Satan is corrupted (Ezek. 28: 17). We are sure that the father of liars, in whom there is no truth, both deceives and is deceived, like his instruments (2 Tim 3: 13). The Lord taught that Satan was a murderer from the beginning. Wielding the power of death, and binding men with its fear (Heb. 2: 14, 15), he sought to subject Christ to that power, but was himself bound through the work of the Cross (Mat.

12:

²⁹>-

M.

A.

6. **(Liverpool):** V.23 seems to show that the father's faith was deficient, but v.19 refers to the disciples' inability, so maybe both were at fault.

7. **(Newcastle):** The bread gathered up after feeding the four thousand (8: 8) was presumably taken to Dalmanutha (v. 10), where the length of the stay of the Lord and the disciples is unspecified. There would, presumably, be others there who would also take the food.

8. **(Newcastle):** 'Leaven' is nearly always used figuratively in scripture in a bad sense (Mat. 13: 33 excepted), to indicate a pervasive and insidiously

increasing corrupting influence. **What** was common **between the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod** was **the attitude which gave lip** service to religious observances, **while** believing **at heart that the** only solid reality lay **in** things, money, power **and** influence. The Lord warned His disciples **that it** was easy for this **attitude to creep in** among **them**, as **the** subsequent history of Christendom shows only too well.

P. L. H.

CORRESPONDENCE:

THE TEMPTATION OF THE LORD

The comments by Editors on this subject (**BS 8904** pp. 51, 52) do not satisfy readers who were unhappy **with** Liverpool's suggestion **that there must have been a** possibility of **the** Lord succumbing (to temptation). Editors' statement; **that** knowing something will **happen and making it happen** are not **the same thing**, does not address **the proposition that** Christ's sinlessness was not simply **a** matter of **divine** foreknowledge. For **it was the determinate** counsel of God **which** required **that the** Lord could never fail under temptation. The outworking of **the plan** of salvation, **which** must presuppose **the** sinlessness of **the** Saviour, was **determined** beforehand **and** recorded **in** Scripture by **the** prophets under **divine** inspiration. The Lord said, "How **then** should the Scriptures **be** fulfilled, **that** thus **it** must **be**?" (**Mat. 26: 54**), and "All **things** must needs **be** fulfilled **which** are **written...** concerning Me" (**Luke 24: 44-48**). There is **a** fixity **implied in** these scriptures **which** transcends foreknowledge.

Furthermore, is not this **view** supported by **a** consideration of **the** indivisible **divine-human** personality of **the** Lord? **He** was, **even in** His incarnation, truly **and** absolutely God. **It** is utterly impossible for God to sin, so **the** same must **be true** of **the** Lord **in** His earthly ministry. **But the** certainty of **the** outcome could not **affect the** reality of **the** temptation (Heb. 4: 15).

This approach to **the** problem may appear to **have internal** contradictions, **but** are there not many other matters **having** to do **with** **divine** things **which** are similarly difficult to reconcile by logical analysis? Some things **need** to **be accepted** by faith.

L. Burrows (Kingston-upon-Thames)

We are glad to print these comments from our esteemed contributor **but**, prior to responding, **we await further** contributions from fellow-students.

Editors

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8907

MINISTER OF ALL

Mark's record of the Lord's last journey impresses us with its pace, its activity and its direction. It also impresses us with the range of persons the Lord encountered, the problems He dealt with and the ministry He gave. No doubt, the incidents chosen were characteristic of the Lord's ministry as a whole. In the face of such diversity, the constantly recurring features must be all the more significant.

The most obvious such theme during the journey was the question of position that seemed to dog the disciples. It occurred at the very outset of the journey (9: 34) even though the disciples dared not speak of it. It continued to be seen in the attitude towards those such as the miracle-worker (9: 38) and the children (10: 13) who were outside their own circle. Perhaps the seriousness of its consequences was demonstrated in the self-important superiority of the Pharisees who presumed to tempt Him (10: 2) and by the rich man who, though taking a lowly posture, could not empty himself (10: 17, 22). It was seen in the disciples' mistaken belief that earthly riches (10: 26) eased a man's passage in the kingdom of God. It culminated in the naked ambition, artfully put, of James and John (10: 35-37).

The Perfect Servant had the perfect answer. To be first, the servant must be last and servant of all (9: 35; 10: 31, 44). The reason given for this is most compelling. It is not that it is a matter of abstract principle, but it is because the Lord did it (10: 45) and was about to practise it as no other could at the appointed place to which He journeyed.

I. E. P.

GOING UP TO JERUSALEM (Mark 9: 33 - 10: 52)

From Aberdeen: The Lord laid to rest the disciples' dispute over who was the greatest disciple by drawing their attention to the all-pervading greatness of His own Person. The Majesty from on high set a little child in the centre of the Twelve, and, taking the little one in His arms, reproved them with the words, "Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in My

Name, receiveth Me". He is the important One!

What is the link between the "unquenchable fire" (9: 43-49) and the salt (v. 50) which the disciples were to have in themselves? Perhaps the link is found in the fact that salt speaks of truth: truth will trouble the lost for eternity for they are "salted with fire". As for believers, they are to let truth form their characters; thus "have salt in yourselves". As the believer lets the "salt" into his life, he will be conscious that he is "nothing" and so he will not be puffed up against his brethren. Believers who have salt in themselves will thus be at peace with one another, since each gives due consideration to the other; all accounting themselves as brethren under the authority of their Master in heaven [Comment 11].

In a similar vein, James and John came with a request (10: 37) which evidently arose from their own aspirations. However, it is by grace that we are saved. The Lord chose us: we did not choose Him. So also He will choose whom He wills, by His grace, to sit with Him in the coming Kingdom. The Lord reminded all the disciples that He had not come to institute a kingdom in which self-aggrandisement and self-exaltation are approved but rather the opposite, self-abasement and lowliness. He reminded them of His own example of lowliness: that He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister". Such an example is possible because He owns the title of Son of Man.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: The ministry of the Lord continued unabated as the time of His suffering and death drew near. His teaching, however, has a relevance to disciples in every age because there are certain difficulties which are ever present. One of these the Lord Jesus identified as pride, the very thing which prompted the disciples to reason among themselves as to who was greatest. Maybe those who had accompanied the Lord at such times as when He was transfigured, considered that they were the favoured amongst the Twelve. The disciples were called to observe the ways of a child and told that true greatness belonged to those who gave wholehearted service to others. At a later stage (10: 37), James and John, when they requested positions of greatness to be reserved for them in the future, were caused to realise that those positions would be for those whose earthly lives were committed to others. The Master, too, had to point out that the criticism of those who acted sincerely in Christ's name was to be condemned (9: 39). The service of all will be rightly evaluated by God [Comment 1].

In the Christian life it is possible to stumble oneself or stumble others with serious consequences. The Lord declared that there is to be the savour and preserving effect of salt apparent and all relationships must be peaceful (9: 50) [Comment 11].

When the Lord Jesus was taxed by the Pharisees on the matter of divorce, He outlined the Divine pattern and declared that any human tampering with the arrangement is abhorrent to God (10: 9). Those things which were introduced in Moses' day were on sufferance because of their hardness of heart and should not be regarded as options for the disciple of Christ.

The disciples, though considering that the children were a nuisance, were prevented from sending them away. The simple faith of children is highlighted by the Lord, and such faith is declared to be vital for those who would be in the Kingdom of God (10: 15).

When a rich young ruler met Him, the Lord was caused to question the use of the word 'good' in his approach. The word has a meaning which is displayed perfectly in God. Its careless or improper use is to be deprecated. In response to the question about inheriting eternal life, the Lord Jesus was able to point out that nothing or no-one should have priority over the expression of God's will in the disciple's life (10: 21). There lies the route to fulness of blessing.

P. E. Turner, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: The Corinthian church came behind in no gift (1 Cor. 1: 7); they abounded in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Here in Mark (9: 39) the disciples witnessed a similar mighty work (A. V. 'miracle') performed by one not numbered with them. Perhaps he was a disciple of John, but one who had learned of the Lord Jesus and the power in that Name. We wondered if this at the least might illustrate what we see in Christendom today with its diverse array of believers.

This person was in a different category from those of whom the Lord Jesus said, "other sheep I have which are not of this fold" (John 10: 16). We saw this group as being consistent with the little flock (Luke 12: 32) and that "nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Mat. 21: 43) whose duty it would be to bring forth fruit or, in other words, be obedient to the truths concerning the Kingdom of God. This the Jews had failed to do and so lost their privileged position as the people of God (see Mat. 21: 33-45).

That little flock and that nation were initially seen as being outside the mainstream of religious service yet were used of God for the establishment of His New Covenant House and the foundations for His New Covenant teaching (see Eph. 2: 20-22). This of course, was all very much in keeping with God's perfect plan, "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second" (Heb. 10: 9) [Comment 2].

But where does this leave our friend in Mark? We do not accept that there are several foundations for New Testament teaching upon which one

can build; nor again that God has something again outside the little flock [Comment 14]. The New Testament, like the Old, clearly speaks of a pattern to which disciples are expected to conform (2 Tim. 1: 13; 1 Tim. 1: 10).

The Lord, of course, does not give His disciples leave to join with all believers but nevertheless the Lord permits a tolerance of them that we might find hard to give; "He that is not against us is for us" and "whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because ye are Christs... shall in no wise lose his reward" [Comment 1].

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The passage opens on a rather sad note, that of the Lord giving His disciples a rebuke and a lesson in humility. There had been no reply to the Lord's question; a rhetorical question, as the Lord already knew that they had been disputing as to "who was the greatest", so well might they hold their peace [Comment 3]. Could it be in self-defence of their disputing that John changes the subject to the right of someone using the Name of Jesus to cast out demons, and tells Jesus that the disciples forbade him because he was not a follower? The Lord Jesus told him that they had no right to do this and said "He that is not against us is for us" (9: 40) [Comment 4].

This led to the question of our association with other Christians who are not in the Fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who testify sincerely in their lives to the saving power of the Lord as the Son of God. Indeed, many have given their lives for the sake of His Name. We have to differentiate between separation and isolation. The dividing line would really be in collective service, whereas friendship would be quite acceptable. There should be no hindrance to any good being done. This is again borne out in v. 40 and also in Luke 11: 23 [Comment 12].

There follows a clear warning for us to examine ourselves to see if there is anything in our lives which might hinder us from being subject to our Lord Jesus Christ and living a life well pleasing to Him. Can we say that, as the Lord was teaching His disciples and since this would be applied to believers today, that the Lord was using metaphors? We did not think that this was literally hell and could see that the hand would speak of that which we handle and touch, the foot of where we walk, and the eye of that on which we look [Comment 5].

The journey to Jerusalem continued with the Lord telling His disciples what would happen to Him (10: 32-34). Yet, despite this and the admonition given previously as to who was the greatest, James and John asked the Lord Jesus that they might be allowed to sit next to Him in His glory. Thus we are brought back full circle to the discontent among the disciples.

What grace the Lord showed as He gathered them to Himself, to teach them to be humble and minister to one another, reminding them that He Himself came "to minister, and give His life a ransom for many" (10: 45).

W. Paterson, Jnr

From Derby: Upon arriving at Capernaum, the Lord asked "What were ye reasoning in the way?" (9: 33). They held their peace, but the Lord knew what the problem was: it was pride, and that is sin. So the Lord provided an object-lesson with the child (v. 36). The lesson here is that the Lord works with the humble. In our deliberations we considered the fact that we regard many of our prominent brethren as great. Maybe they are, but there are those who work in the background out of the public ^feye^f. These may be doing just as great a service.

In verses 38-41 it would appear the Holy Spirit is trying to teach us the lesson that there are other Christians who also may do "mighty work" in His Name.

The Lord then moved on to issue dire warnings to those who cause others to stumble. The thought was expressed that we are not to do these things literally, but to put away from us that which causes us to stumble or falter in the way. The disciples were in danger of causing others to stumble by their behaviour described in v. 34. The words "because ye are Christ's" (v. 41) bind together the last two paragraphs in chapter 9. Because we belong to Christ, we should give strength and succour to the weaker ones among us.

The pace of events described in chapter 10 seems to speed up as the Lord Jesus comes nearer to the Cross, the climax of His life on earth. The use of the word "and" at the beginning of each paragraph seems to denote this.

In vv. 1-12 the Pharisees questioned the Lord on divorce. The Lord in turn gives them (and us) a reminder of the importance of Christian marriage.

In Mark 10: 13-16 the underlying message here is not so much to receive the Kingdom of God while of tender years, but rather with a *childlike* trust. This is the trust that says 'No matter what happens I trust the Lord'.

In Mark 10: 35-45 the message is that any who ask of the Lord to be close to Him in the Glory must expect to suffer with Christ. It was pointed out that James was killed with the sword (Acts 12: 1, 2) and John was confined to the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1: 9).

L. E. Foster, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: The intensity of the Lord's work did not diminish as He moved towards Jerusalem for the last time, as we see from these chapters which are characteristic of the whole of Mark's Gospel. Thus, although Mark's account is shorter than Matthew's and Luke's, it is full of activity. Neither this activity, nor the grim prospect ahead obscures Mark's extra touches of attractiveness such as the gathering the children in His arms (9: 36), the running and kneeling of the young man, (10: 17), the look of affection (10: 21).

In contrast to this we have the faithful candour of the Lord to the disciples; to those who would stumble the young; to the rich young ruler; and to the Pharisees. His gracious, gentle, kindness and skilful flexibility with the difficulties and diversities of people are glories in the perfect Pattern Servant. This is also seen in the matter of strife among the disciples, the Master's solemn warning against child-stumblers, or against the exploitation of the law regarding divorce by the Pharisees. In this latter incident, the law-giver was challenged by an implacable religious group, who would use the law for their own immoral ends.

The building block of Israel (Ex. 6; 12: 21, 22; Num. 1) was the family and so we can appreciate that divorce was something which God hated (Mai. 2: 16). It was the breaking of a divine bond of love (Mk. 10: 9). Adultery constituted the breaking of this bond [Comment 6] and, though separation was allowed where married life had become intolerable, yet separation to marry another was adultery in the case of both parties (Mk. 10: 11, 12). That the Lord so concisely dealt with such a subject with the shadow of the cross before Him, reveals to us the One who was wisdom personified (Prov. 8: 30).

Though the disciples, at first, equated the expression "enter into the kingdom of God" with being saved, yet to enter the kingdom of God would seem to be a sacrificial and continuous progress (10: 28, 29; Acts 14: 22) [See Comment 8]. It is remarkable that Bartimaeus is named (Mk. 10: 46), in contrast to Matthew's account (20: 30) where we have two unnamed blind men. The words and the approach of the blind man in Luke 18: 38, 39 are very similar, but that incident happened as He drew near to Jericho (Luke 18: 35) [Comment 13].

In Luke and Mark we have two different views given of the movement and activity of the Lord to Jerusalem. First (Luke 9: 51) "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem", but in Mark, His journey seems to be almost obscured by His activity and ministry.

W. A. Townsend

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: Moving southwards through the land, passing through Capernaum, Judaea and Jericho, the Lord made His way towards Jerusalem. He strode resolutely onward, the speed of the narrative increasing as He neared the culmination of His work.

Although the Lord spoke of His forthcoming death, the disciples failed to understand His words. Still anticipating a reigning Messiah, they disputed amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Sitting down, the Lord began to instruct His disciples; taking a child, He taught them a lesson in humility. Those who desire spiritual greatness must choose the lowliest and most humble place, the place of service to others. Those who seek a position of authority and privilege will be given the lowest place. If we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and used by Him, we must first be emptied of self (9: 33-50).

The story of the rich young man (10: 17-22) illustrates the danger of placing material gain before spiritual wealth. The young man had received the Lord's gracious and loving advice, but his wealth was such that he chose to spurn it. Turning away in sadness, the man went his own way.

Discerning a great weakness of the human heart, the Lord "looking upon him, loved him" loving the sinner but not the sin.

The Lord used the incident to illustrate to the disciples just how difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. A camel will find it easier to go through a needle's eye. The disciples, by their astonishment, obviously found the proverb difficult to grasp but He reminded them, and us, that all things are possible with God.

Set in marked contrast to the attitude of the rich man is the commitment and sacrifice of the disciples. Their sacrifice may have been costly, but their compensation would be far greater. Those who sacrifice material possessions for His sake are promised a rich spiritual reward.

J. D. Williams

From Innerleithen: Mark's gospel always gives a sense of movement and this portion highlights the fact that the Lord and His disciples "were in the way, going up to Jerusalem". Two men joined Him on "the way". The first came running alongside bearing in himself all that the world sets forth as desirable: status, ability, achievement and wealth. He went "away" from the Lord sad and empty-hearted.

As for the first, the Lord "stood still" for the second, the divine will being fulfilled in inaction as well as action (a lesson for all who have no time to cease from doing). This man had a disability so he could not run. He came at the Lord's command from his lowly beggar's position, empty in himself and leaving behind perhaps his only earthly possession. Thus faith, the gift of God, was able to fill his heart and bring with it the blessing of the Lord in restoration of his sight. He "followed Jesus on the way", no doubt rejoicing at seeing His day. What a contrast in response to this "still" Christ! Well might one have written that "money cannot buy one necessity of the soul".

A. MacDonald

From Kilmarnock: From the story of Bartimaeus (10: 46-52) we can learn that sustained requests will receive an answer. The divine superiority of the Lord was obvious to Bartimaeus, although he was blind. Humility is prevalent. We cannot serve God with a mind and heart full of our own ideas and our own importance. We must humble ourselves and always be prepared to lower ourselves in all aspects of our lives. If we do humble ourselves, God is able to work through us. Just as Bartimaeus was led to the Lord, so we must ensure that the way is not blocked by ourselves and those things which we find important. As children learn and are led, so we must hunger after the things of God without fear and with receptiveness to His teachings [Comment 7].

The disciples had earlier disputed who was greater (9: 33-34). It is here that we learn that being great in men's eyes means nothing to God. When James and John asked their question they had not learned the lesson of humility before God. We could say that in the manner of their request they were being selfishly assertive (10: 37).

The rich man was seeking the best of both worlds. He wanted to use his earthly wealth alongside any spiritual wealth that he was given. He still had too much faith and trust in his earthly riches to have a full and free trust in Jesus. After the confrontation with the young man, the Lord explained to His disciples, and to us, a way in which we can attain eternal life. All things are possible with God, for although it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, it is not impossible. "Who then can be saved?" Anyone can be saved for by His grace God has given everyone an opportunity to accept the free gift which is offered to them [Comment 8].

So we see that by humbling ourselves, and coming to God in readiness for teaching, discarding any faith which we have in earthly riches, then God can use us and we will be elevated to a new position by God. When this happens we too can help to lead others in their Christian lives.

Andrew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *Hard Teaching* The Lord's mention of welcoming someone "in my Name" (9: 37) seems to have reminded John about someone, who was not a close follower, driving out demons in Jesus' name. The disciples told him to stop, but the Lord Jesus taught that such a person who does not scatter, carries on a work complementary to that of the Lord and His disciples, and is to be distinguished from the one referred to in Luke 11: 23 who is against the Lord and does scatter [Comment 9].

The language of the Lord in 9: 43-47 is hyperbolic. Nevertheless the point is very real: better the reality of eternal life even at great personal cost than to hang on to everything in this life and face hell hereafter. This is a general spiritual point of principle — the Lord is not suggesting that His disciples, most of whom He later pronounced 'clean' (Jn. 13: 10), could endanger their salvation. Hell, too, is a reality though the word "Gehenna" is figurative, as is the fire, referring literally to a smouldering, worm-infested rubbish dump outside Jerusalem, but used to refer to the eternal abode of the damned [Comment 10].

Divorce In the Lord's day everybody accepted that there could be divorce. It is said that some allowed it only for some sexual wrong, but others allowed it for almost any cause. Perhaps the Lord was suspected of belonging to the more liberal camp, following His less rigid interpretation of the Sabbath laws, and that may have been what motivated the question. In fact, His answer not only confounded His critics, but shocked His disciples too (who seemed to regard marriage with no possibility of divorce as a dreadful prospect!) See Mat. 19: 10. In avoiding the trap, the Lord went back to God's original purpose of one man and one woman in marriage, with no divorce and no polygamy. In so doing He set the standard for today. We noted that He did not say divorce is impossible but rather "let not man put asunder" (10: 9) which is a command, not a statement.

D. J. Webster

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead and Birmingham): The disciples had gone beyond criticism and were at the stage of laying down the law in an area in which they had no authority. As friends point out, such a tendency is one the people of God need to guard against. The Apostle Paul put the same issue very pointedly when he said, "What have I to do with judging them that are without?" and "them that are without God judgeth" (1 Cor. 5: 12, 13).

2. (Birmingham): It is true that the kingdom of God, as seen in the churches of God replaced that which was expressed in the earthly nation of Israel

and constitute the "one flock" (Jn. 10: 16), but the expression "other sheep", does not imply that the disciples were outside the 'mainstream of religious service' i. e. Israel's earthly service. The disciples whom the Lord had gathered round Him were of Israel, and, in particular, had been in the fold of which John the Baptist was the porter (Jn. 10: 3). To those sheep, the Lord would add others to form the one flock. Thus the latter were those who came to know the Lord other than through the established route of John's baptism. Such no doubt were the Samaritans and Gentiles who eventually formed part of the New Covenant, spiritual nation.

3. (Bolton and Leigh): Since the Lord knew the answer to every question He asked, it might be argued that all His questions were rhetorical! In this case, however, the Lord's question was to reprove prior to giving instruction in righteousness. It is to the disciples' credit that they were too ashamed to answer.

4. (Bolton and Leigh): This may be true but perhaps it is more in keeping with John's character that he was genuinely exploring the rights and wrongs of what was done in the Lord's Name.

5. (Bolton and Leigh): It might be better to say that the Lord uses the figure of speech known as synecdoche: that is, a part is named but the whole is intended. As friends in Liverpool point out, Gehenna is used of believers and therefore cannot refer to Hell or the Lake of Fire. Indeed of the twelve occurrences of Gehenna in the scriptures, only in two, Mat. 23: 15, 33, is it expressly said to be the portion of unbelievers though it may be implied elsewhere. Friends in Liverpool also allude to the origin of the word, which derives from the municipal rubbish-dump outside Jerusalem where continuous burning was necessary to render the city's waste harmless. Applying this to its spiritual usage in the Scriptures, as regards this dispensation, we suggest that it indicates the same destructive process that the Lord must apply to those who are worthy of such spiritual destruction. It is easy to see how this applies to such a man as the rich man who was in anguish in the flame of Hades (Lk. 16: 22, 25) though it must be pointed out that, unlike Hades, both body and soul are subject to Gehenna; but it is more difficult to apply it to a believer. We suggest the case of Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3: 1-10) is helpful here. He is described as "a brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech. 3: 2). How had Joshua been in "the fire"? Clearly this has nothing to do with punishment of an unbeliever. Rather, we suggest, Joshua had just returned from Babylon (Ezra 2: 1; 3: 2; 5: 1, 2) where, as far as his birthright to be high priest and the service of God were concerned, he was on the spiritual scrap-heap. Following this, we would further suggest that as far as the service of the believers in this dispensation is concerned, scriptures such as John 15: 6 and Heb. 6: 8 speak of a similar casting forth of the believer onto a spiritual scrap-heap. In these things we speak by way of suggestion.

6. (Dulwich): We are uncertain what friends mean here. A marriage is a marriage whether love be in it or not. Adultery does not break the marriage bond anymore than intercourse creates it. What counts is that a law of marriage was given to humanity whereby a third party, the Lord God, joined the two together. Ever since, the part played by the Lord God, is to be played by "the powers (or their representatives) that be" (Rom. 13: 1-7). *I. E. P.*

It has sometimes been argued that adultery makes void the marriage bond, but this is perhaps not what Dulwich friends are saying here; they are simply saying that it ignores the divine tie of marriage in favour of another connection. 1 Cor. 6: 16 does refer to the act of sexual intercourse with a prostitute as constituting 'one flesh', on the basis of Gen. 2: 24, which refers to marriage, so it does seem that this is at least a necessary part of a valid marriage, even if it does not constitute it.

P. L. H.

7. (Kilmarnock): Bartimaeus illustrates the case of the believer coming to Christ for mercy and salvation, not the disciple seeking spiritual food.

8. (Kilmarnock): Entering the kingdom of God is a thing for disciples to do. Thus the Lord was speaking to the disciples about the salvation of the life, not the soul. The Lord used the occasion of the rich man's riches preventing the salvation of his soul to show how riches may prevent the salvation of the believer's life.

I. E. P.

When the disciples asked about being "saved", we conclude from the Lord's ministry prior to Mk. 10 that they were aware of several aspects of spiritual salvation: e. g. being saved from the burden of guilt (Lk. 7: 48, 50); to repent ("turn again"), be forgiven, and become fruitful in service (cp. Mk. 4: 12, 20 with Lk. 8: 12, 15); being saved from judgement and receiving spiritual life (cp. Jn. 5: 24, 34, 40). It is reasonable to suppose that salvation of the life for service in the kingdom was foremost in the disciples' minds here.

M. A.

9. (Liverpool): "Complementary" is the wrong word here for it implies that the Lord's work with the disciples was incomplete without the efforts of the man who was evidently pursuing a work outside the circle of the Lord's fellowship. Note the difference between being "for" the Lord and "with" the Lord.

10. (Liverpool): Hyperbole is not really the figure of speech here. See Comment 5. *I. E. P.*

11. (Aberdeen and Birkenhead): A further property of salt is its anti-septic or cleansing power. 2 Kings 2: 19-22 illustrates this use, in purifying a spring (albeit by a miracle). As friends in Aberdeen point to the

link between purity and peace, we recall Jas. 3: 17, 18: "... the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable".

12. (Bolton and Leigh): A complementary point is that friendship can be allowed to lead to association. Spiritual truths that are not appreciated by some friends can be passed over and come to be obscured unless we actively invite consideration of them. We note the gracious, purposeful example of the apostle in Acts 28: 30, 31, who "received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ".

13. (Dulwich): A commendable case can be made for the three passages cited referring to the same incident. Mark may well have focussed on Bartimaeus as the more active and vocal of the two mentioned by Matthew. Luke may refer to the new city of Jericho built by Herod the Great under a mile south of the Old Testament site. Matthew and Mark would thus describe the Lord journeying southwards through old Jericho and meeting the blind men between there and the new city.

M. A.

14. (Birmingham): How can we say whether God has 'anything outside the little flock'? That is His business. We have simply to try to do what we are instructed to do.

P. L. H.

Additional Comment: BS 8906, p. 71 para. 4 *'The Lord's Concern'*

This is a positive, practical lesson from our study, which we amplify by relating it to other responsibilities. 1 Tim. 6: 17, 18 and Eph. 4: 28 have immediate application among saints in churches of God (see Eph. 4: 25, 32). Both texts further show that giving to a wider sphere of need must be well-pleasing to God. To both texts, however, the guidelines of Gal. 6: 10 are relevant: "as we have opportunity" and "especially toward them that are of the household of the faith". Finally, 1 Pet. 2: 12 reminds us that good works should support our testimony as pilgrims, since our first responsibility towards all men is to preach the gospel and make disciples.

M. A.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8908

THE LORD AND THE WORD

We begin this issue by paying tribute to the remarkable support given by the Lord in Mk. 12 to faith in the comprehensive truthfulness of the Scriptures. Here is His reference to "the book of Moses" as a historically factual source. By citing "the place concerning the Bush" the Lord implies the literal truth of the account of the miraculous burning that did not consume. Further, He rests His argument on the tense of one statement, showing that we also may depend upon the detailed accuracy of the original words of the Holy Writings.

From this chapter (12: 36) we are assured that the author of Psalm 110 was David, and we are instructed that he wrote as led by the Holy Spirit. Here again, is the Lord's demonstration that the truth of the life of the soul after death, and of resurrection, can be established from the Old Testament books of Scripture. Well may the Father say, "This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him".

M. A.

CONFRONTATION IN JERUSALEM (Mark 11: 1 - 12: 27)

From **Aberdeen**: We find the Lord confronting the buyers and sellers who were misusing the temple. Although He quoted the scripture, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mk. 11: 17), yet it is true that He was at the same time making His own personal statement, since all that belonged to the Father belonged also to the Son (Jn. 16: 15) [Comment 1].

The disciples would wonder at the authoritative presence of the Lord as they saw how those traders had to obey Him. This manifestation of divine rule would also reinforce the reverence the disciples already had for Him. John was later to write concerning this One that His "voice was as the voice of many waters" (Rev. 1: 15).

Why were the multitudes astonished at His teaching? No doubt they were astonished at this manifestation of divine authority proceeding from "Jesus of Nazareth". But also, Israel of that day had grown used to the wrong practices and distorted teachings of the Pharisees and other leaders, so that when the Lord taught the clear mind of God, such was the contrast, that they were astonished.

The chief priests, scribes and elders thought they would confront the Lord with their question: "By what authority doest thou these things?" However, they found themselves confronted by a question from the Lord which they were afraid to answer. When the Pharisees and Herodians confronted Him with their hypocritical questioning they found themselves met with such a prudent question that they were silenced. The Sadducees asked an ignorant question and were faced with wisdom beyond their ken when the Lord manifested His complete grasp of the Scriptures by bringing out the full meaning contained in the Scripture: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". Here we see how intimately the Lord knew the Scriptures. With assurance He could say, "Ye do greatly err" (Mk. 12: 27). It is worth comparing the Lord's example here with Titus 1: 9 in which a man appointed as an overseer must be able to convict the gainsayers.

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: The portion under review is closely linked with Mat. 21 - 22: 33. We noticed that three events resulted in confrontation.

Allowing Praise for Himself: The Pharisees **were irked by the** contents of praise rendered to the Lord Jesus (Mat. 21: 15), because of their unbelief. They could not identify Him as "the son of David". Although some welcomed Him into Jerusalem, the whole nation shall receive Him in a future day (Mat. 23: 39).

Clearing of the Temple: The word "**ye**" (Mk. 11: 17) tends to associate the chief priest and scribes with turning the temple into a den of robbers. A similar reproof was made against the nation of Israel before the captivity and destruction of the temple that Solomon built (Jer. 7: 11).

The Parable of the Vineyard and the Husbandman: The Pharisees perceived that He spoke these parables against them, and therefore sought to ensnare Him in His talk, particularly His socio-economic view (12: 14), and His doctrine on resurrection (12: 23), with the aim of creating a division among the people and setting Him against the Roman rulers.

We noticed also three things reflected in this passage, similar to events before the captivity in Babylon: (a) unbelief (11: 18; Mat. 21: 15);

(b) negligence in the things of the Lord (11: 17; Jer. 7: 11); (c) an unrepentant attitude (12: 12, 13). Probably these led to the Lord's statement in Mat. 21: 43.

F. Ntido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: In these last few days before His crucifixion the Lord continued to face His detractors and point out the error of their ways. The incident with the fig tree serves to highlight the fact that God looks for fruit from His people and Israel had ceased to be fruitful — they were "nothing but leaves".

The people's behaviour in the temple was outrageous. God's house was being profaned as "the house of prayer" and had become a "den of robbers". This must have been condoned by Jewish leaders who portrayed themselves as righteous.

The Lord Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard and the Jewish leaders recognize that it related to themselves and hate Him the more. God, in successive generations, had sent His messengers to His people and now had sent His Son. The reaction of the people is in line with the parable as they sought to lay hands on Jesus. The rejection of the beloved Son will lead to their privileged position being forfeited (Mat. 21: 43) and the "vineyard" being given to others, i. e. the "people for God's own possession" in this dispensation, who recognize and honour the Son, as spoken of in 1 Pet. 2.

A fresh line of attack took the form of a deputation composed of Pharisees and Herodians, a strange alliance established to face a common foe. With smooth tongue they sought the Lord's judgement on whether it was right to give tribute to Caesar. He knew their hypocrisy and declared their enquiry to be, in truth, a temptation, for a "yes" or "no" answer would alike have caused offence. As they studied the coin, He answered that by using the coinage with Caesar's image and superscription they recognized an earthly power; an obligation placed upon us today (Rom. 13: 1-7). The Lord's answer was then extended to point out their obligation to "render... unto God", a matter in which they failed significantly.

Thereafter the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, sought to ridicule the Lord by outlining an unlikely situation and seeking His comments. The Lord affirmed the truth of the resurrection but states that since earthly arrangements for family life do not operate in the eternal state then there would be no difficulty arising from their supposed problem. Again His answer extended beyond the question to underline the fact that God is the God of the living and amongst that number He includes Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A. E. Sands, R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: A prophetic theme pervades both chapters 11 and 12. We have the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, "... behold thy king cometh... just, and... lowly" (Zech. 9: 9) which probably has an allusion to that future day when the King will come to His temple (Mai. 3: 1), except that in that day He will come to a broken and repentant nation (Zech. 12: 10-14).

Meantime their Hosannas were somewhat fickle. The nation looked for their Messiah (Jn. 1: 41; 4: 25) but were sadly misguided as to the time of His reigning in God's prophetic calendar. The Lord referred in the parable of the fig tree and the parable of the vineyard to events which must precede His acceptance by the nation as their Messiah. There has been a time of fruitlessness in the nation (Mat. 21: 41) which leads to Israel's destruction (v. 20; 12: 9), their hardening (Rom. 11: 25) and their casting away (Rom. 11: 15) but only until such times as the "fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11: 25). The sign of its fulfilment is when the fig tree's branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves; then we know the summer is near, the return of their Messiah (Mat. 24: 32), and that the season of the figs is come (Mk. 11: 13).

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: The incident of the cursing of the fig tree is recorded by only two of the Gospel writers (Mat. 21: 18-22; Mk. 11: 12-14, 20-25). For Matthew, the main point of the incident is the lesson Christ taught His disciples about faith, for he relates the incident of the cursing of the fig tree and the consequent lesson about faith without interruption. Mark, however, divides the actual cursing of the tree from the teaching on faith by relating the incident of the second cleansing of the temple. Although not ignoring the lesson on faith, Mark presents us with the thought that the cursing of the fig tree was a symbolic act [Comment 2].

Mark tells us that the Lord found no fruit on this fig tree, because it was not the season of figs (11: 13). This fact would have been known to the Lord, therefore He must have come to this tree looking for fruit knowing full well He would not find any, therefore this must have been a symbolic act on the Lord's part [Comment 3]. What then did this act symbolize? We judged that the fig tree represented Israel and, as the Lord presented Himself before the fig tree looking for fruit, so He clearly presented Himself to Israel as their Messiah, looking for fruit in the form of their national acknowledgement of Him, yet knowing that no such fruit would be forthcoming.

The Lord's formal presentation of Himself to the nation as their Messiah, is set forth in His riding into Jerusalem on the ass's colt in fulfilment of the prophecy of Zech. 9: 9. Although some acknowledged who He was, the nation as a whole rejected Christ's claim, thereby refusing the fruit that was God's due. This refusal of the nation to render fruit

and their hard-hearted reasons for refusing to do so, are graphically set forth in the parable of the vineyard (12: 1-12).

The fig tree despite its fine show of leaves, was subject to a curse as a result of its fruitlessness. So also Israel as a nation were subject to a curse, brought about by their refusal to render to God, despite their outward show of doing so, the fruit that He sought. The realisation of that curse fell upon the generation of Christ's day when Israel's capital city and national shrine were destroyed by Titus and his legions in A. D. 70. So also the terrible repercussions of their national rejection of God's Son have followed the Jewish nation down through their history to the present day.

Alex Reid

From Derby: It may have been expected but confrontation did not take place when the two disciples sent by the Lord untied the colt. The men who asked them the question may themselves have been followers of Jesus and so have realised the full significance of the statement made to them. Mark gives the exact location of the colt but does not mention that its mother was with it. No other man would have been able to ride an untried colt but this incident clearly shows that the Lord Jesus is Lord of all. Mark alone tells us that as He rode, the crowd shouted: "Blessed is the kingdom that cometh...".

In a previous parable (Lk. 13: 6-9) the cutting down of the fig tree had been delayed but in His hunger the sentence He passed on this tree signified the doom about to fall on an unbelieving people. From the answer given to Peter's exclamation about the dead fig tree we learn that prayer is heard when it is asked in faith by a forgiving person. It is in harmony with the will of God and is subject to divine judgement.

When He entered the house of prayer a scene of intrigue and noise like that in an eastern market met Him. After He moved the offenders, Mark alone tells us that He also stopped men from using the Temple courts as a shortcut from one part of the city to another. It is not surprising that the chief priests and scribes feared Him. He had done what they should have done.

The Lord in telling the parable of the vineyard, used the image from Isaiah 5: 1, and ended with a quotation from the very psalm which the crowds had quoted from when He was riding in triumph into Jerusalem. The chief priests, scribes and elders knew He had seen into their hearts and had been speaking directly to them and they were incensed against Him, but were powerless to do anything because they feared the people. So they changed their tactics and sent a small group of Pharisees and Herodians with flattering lips and a trick-question. As the Pharisees and Herodians held different views about Rome, they reasoned that

He was certain to offend one of them. He recognized their hypocrisy and gave them their answer from the coin which they showed Him.

They marvelled at His answer and then the Sadducees came with their hypothetical question. They did not believe in the resurrection as it is not mentioned in the Law. The Lord told them that they had an imperfect knowledge of the Scriptures and of the attributes of God. He quoted to them from the Law which they recognised as of supreme authority although He could have used many other scriptures when giving His answer. The Lord Jesus Christ was able to refute all His enemies with answers taken directly from the Scriptures. We in our day need to know the word of God so that we can use the sword of the Spirit when answering questions put to us by friend and foe alike.

G. W. Conway

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: As the Lord made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem the day of His crucifixion was drawing near. By the end of the week His journey to the cross would be complete. We can sense the mounting tension as He confronted the authorities, openly criticizing their hypocrisy and selfrighteousness.

Having arrived in Jerusalem, the Lord made His way to the temple. Looking around at everything and assessing the situation, he was disturbed by what He saw. He recognized the task which lay ahead of Him but, owing to the lateness of the hour, nothing was done until the next day.

The "house of prayer" had deteriorated into a "den of robbers", a place of exploitation and dishonest business [Comment 4]. The people had "exchanged the truth of God for a lie". God was given so little where He deserved so much.

Zealous for the honour of God's House (Ps. 69: 9), the Lord cleared the temple area, overthrowing the tables of the moneychangers. The Lord had already driven out the moneychangers at the beginning of His ministry, but they had shown little regard for His reproach.

The cursing of the fig tree was an acted parable, symbolizing the judgement of Israel and the rejection of the temple (cp. Lk. 13: 6-9). The tree had given the outward promise of fruit, but had disappointed. Thus it was to become fruitless. The Lord had come to His Father's house and people, looking for fruit. Though there was an outward profession of devotion and a promise of obedience, He found none. Israel was now to become blasted and fruitless.

Israel, like the fig tree, had withered away from the roots. The beginnings of the problem had been undetected, but the effects were far-reaching. The Old Covenant would soon be superseded by the New,

and the house would be left to them, desolate. Yet God had been more gracious with Israel than with the fig tree [Comment 5].

J. D. Williams

From Dulwich: The graphic presentation of the meek and lowly One appears in contrast to the One who shall come in great majesty and glory (Zech. 9: 9; Rev. 19: 11-16).

In the withering of the fig tree we have the unique case [in the Lord's ministry - *Eds*] of a miracle of judgement (11: 21). Though the Lord used it as an example of faith, yet it may also symbolize fruitless Israel.

In John 2: 15, the Son is dealing with disorder in the Father's house, but in Mk. 11 the Servant of Jehovah is dealing with a transgression of the law (Deut. 5: 19) against fellow Israelites, and also the Gentile nations (Mk. 11: 17). In both cases we have extortion for monetary gain under the cloak of religion. This nefarious trade could not have been practised without the authority of the chief priests and elders; doubtless to the lucrative advantage of those lovers of money (Lk. 16: 14). Thus their delegated authority, bereft of principle, was confronted with the One who, with divine authority (Isa. 42: 1, 6), righteously defended the moral character of the house of God. It is notable that though driving out the sheep and oxen with a scourge, in contrast He addresses those who sold doves (Jn. 2: 16). Consistent with Isa. 53: 9, He did no violence.

We have a parallel to this in Isa. 56, where the eunuchs and the sons of strangers will be brought to "my house of prayer for all peoples" in contrast to the behaviour of the blind and greedy "watchmen" in 56: 10-12.

In the gospel of the servant and in the parable of the vineyard, the word "sent" is prominent (Mk. 12: 2, 4-6). In the head of the corner we see a serviceable feature of the Pattern Servant being fulfilled.

"Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" In this question the Lord was confronted by the Pharisees and Herodians with a religious and political issue. Though the things of God are distinct from the things of Caesar and can be in conflict, yet the paying of tribute is not a case in point.

W. Townsend

From Innerleithen: Prophecies of Genesis 49, Daniel 9 and Zechariah 9 come to fulfilment in the last week of the Lord's life and ministry. Mark 11 covers a period of three days. The Lord's instructions to the two disciples, possibly Peter and John, are fulfilled to the letter. They simply obey, remember and repeat His word when questioned as to the colt's loosing.

Spontaneous praise and adoration accompanied garments and branches being thrown to form a suitable ascent for the King of Glory, who shall return in splendour to the same city to establish His earthly kingdom (Ps. 24). In the addressing of Hosanna ("save us now") to the Most High (11: 10), there was an expectation of a then present kingdom.

The Lord's humanity and deity are clearly expressed in His hungering and pronouncement upon the fig tree (vv. 12, 14). He knew there was no fruit. His declaration signified God's removal of Israel as a holy nation because of fruitlessness and despising His goodness (cp. Mic. 7: 1). The shrivelling of the fig tree is mentioned by Peter; the eye-witness account of these events most probably came from this disciple.

There was provision in the Law for money-exchange for animals where distance precluded transportation of offerings (Deut. 14). Fraudulent dealings with disregard for the sanctity of God's dwelling, where even the high priest was reputed to be the proprietor of certain stalls, produced the Lord's actions, motivated as He was with heart-zeal for the holiness of God's House.

The Lord is teaching in the hyperbole of 11: 23 that faith can accomplish the impossible, as can prayer when uttered for the express purpose of doing the will of God and seeking His glory.

Brian Fullarton

From Kilmarnock: More than anyone else, the Lord Jesus had the authority to discipline the money-changers and traders. He said, in quoting the scripture "My house shall be called..." (v. 17) that the temple was His house; thus making Himself equal with God [Comment 1].

When the priests heard this it would seem more natural for them to be angry at His actions. Instead they feared Him because of the authority which He had; an authority they had not, and in no way could ever have. The priests had made the Temple of God more of a market-place than a place of worship.

The religious leaders asked a question of the Lord, "By what authority ... and who gave...?" (v. 28). The question was the bait in a condemning trap. They hoped to denounce Him as a blasphemer hoping for the answer, "By God's authority". Just as the Lord would not answer their question, so they dared not answer Him. They were so set in their ways as to be blinded to the truth. Not having learned their lesson, some of the leaders returned to "catch Him in talk" (12: 13) once again. This time, instead of a blunt question, they attempted to patronise Him. But the Pharisees and Herodians did not know the way of God. This question was for the people. Many would obey what the Lord would say rather than obey Caesar. In His answer "... render unto God..." He was saying that men

must live by the law of the land; which includes rendering the taxes when asked. The Lord knowing their hypocrisy and temptation, did not give the rebellious answer they were looking for. We are to obey the commands of God while still obeying the law of man.

At all times God's law must be obeyed first and foremost. Peter's calling to remembrance of the fig tree shows us that when we pray it must be with a forgiving and believing heart and so we shall receive whatever we ask for.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *A Prophecy Fulfilled:* This deliberate messianic act inaugurates the final phase in our Lord's ministry, which takes place in Jerusalem, and prophetically is the end of Daniel's 69th week. It is a public declaration of His right to be King, yet on His terms, which are those of Zech. 9: 9-10, viz. bringing salvation (victory is pre-supposed) and peace (breaking the battle bow). There is also stress on the lowliness of the Christ, obvious with the benefit of spiritual hindsight, and we noted the control of the Creator over an unbroken donkey. We wondered about the owner of the animal. Had the Lord a standing arrangement with him that He would, one day, require the use of his donkey? Or did the Lord know that this man would be willing to respond on the spot to such a request? [See Derby's paper *-Eds.*]

Controlled Anger: The Lord Jesus did not lose His temper, as some insist, at what He saw in the temple. It was a controlled action; He had looked around the previous night and then returned the next day to clear the temple. Sometimes evil is so bad that it calls for drastic and dramatic action. The Lord was angry because of (a) the exclusion of Gentiles by this market from their place of prayer at God's house — the Jews tended to see the temple as a purely Jewish institution [Comment 6]; (b) the racketeering and petty cheating by the stall-holders, who provided products required for the ritual sacrifices, and money-changers, who took advantage of the restriction against using Roman money to pay temple taxes; and (c) the use of the temple courts as a thoroughfare and short-cut.

Again in relation to the fig tree the Lord showed the same controlled anger, only this time by way of an acted parable. The fig tree clearly stands for Israel. Although not the season for figs, it is said that the leaves "are accompanied by a crop of small edible knobs called *taksh* which drop off before the true figs form" and this is what the Lord Jesus was looking for [Comment 3]. The tree, despite its evidence to the contrary, had no fruit and so typified the nation of Israel, and the Lord's judgement fell, indicating their imminent rejection and loss of opportunity for fruit-bearing in favour of a nation that would bring the required fruit. This is a sobering contemplation!

Authority: The question of the teachers and elders (11: 28) was a reaction to what the Lord had done at the temple. They were questioning His right to teach and asking Him to name the Rabbi who trained Him. Why did He

not answer them? We judge that He did! His answer was, in effect, "Wherever John got his authority from, so did I", leaving them to work it out for themselves. The parable that followed was not a subtle one and they got the point at once. Again the Lord points to His own authority and intrinsic importance as the stone. The head of the corner is the stone against which all else must be aligned.

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: As the narrative moves closer to the crucifixion the authority of the Lord becomes more and more marked. We see in chapter 11 the authority of the Lord over villagers (v. 6), nature (v. 20), the money-changers (v. 15), the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (v. 23) and the disciples (v. 25). It was noted that in Mat 23: 39 the Lord prophetically spoke of His return and the words which would be spoken at that time. It was these self-same words which the multitude had cried out during His triumphal entry.

According to Mark the Lord entered Jerusalem, went to the temple and then went to Bethany. The next day He returned to Jerusalem and purged the temple. According to the parallel passage in Mat. 21 it appears that the Lord purged the temple on the day of His triumphal entry and that this was not left until the next day. However it should be noted that there is nothing to say that Mat. 21: 12 cannot be separated by an interval of 24 hours from Mat. 21: 11 [Comment 7]. It was agreed that Mark's gospel generally is in a chronological order whereas the others are not necessarily so. It is instructive that the purging was done during the day following the triumphal entry. On the first day, the Lord would have had a crowd of wellwishers around Him whereas on the second day it is more likely that He entered with the disciples only (vv. 14, 15).

The incident of the fig tree was discussed. It was agreed that there are two aspects to the withering of the tree. Firstly the curse had an immediate effect showing the power of God over nature. Secondly the fig tree spiritually can be taken to mean the people of Israel. They had produced no fruit (Isa. 5: 6). A comparison was also noted with Mat. 3: 10 and Jude 12. Some felt that it is possible to attempt to read too much into incidents such as this.

Physical attitude in prayer was discussed and (with the help of *Needed Truth*, J 968, p. 88) it was noted that scripturally the following attitudes have been adopted: standing (v. 25), bowing or kneeling (Acts 20: 36; Eph. 3: 14), with raised hands (Ps. 28: 2; 1 Tim. 2: 8), and sitting (2 Sam. 7: 18). The nature of prayer was discussed. Some said that prayer is only petition (see e. g. Lk. 11: 5-13, Lk. 18: 1-8). It was also pointed out that Paul appears to separate thanksgiving from prayer (Phil. 4: 6). Others thought that intercession, petition, confessing, thanksgiving were all aspects of prayer (Mat. 6: 9-13).

The question posed on 11: 28 was also discussed and it was decided that the questioners were referring only to the events of chapter 11.

Chapter 12. Many attempted to spiritualize every aspect of the parable of the vineyard while others thought that this was inappropriate. It is clear from Mat. 21: 43 that the parable relates to the Kingdom of God. Some felt that the fruit (v. 2) was fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22, 23) and others that it was fruit of the Kingdom (Isa. 5: 7; Rom. 14: 17). It seems more sensible to apply Kingdom of God teaching consistently to the whole parable, so the latter view should be preferred.

J. C. N. Craxton

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen and Kilmarnock): The Son, as one with the Father, had a right to call the Temple "My house", but the Lord, by simply quoting exactly what Isa. 56: 7 said, was not claiming that "My" referred to Himself. The men He spoke to would think naturally of the God of their fathers, whereas we may be sure the Lord wished His disciples to see the connection with His claims made elsewhere.

M. A.

It is generally true that when the Lord said "Father" it is God the Son speaking of or to God the Father. The point at issue here is clearly seen by comparing the Lord's words when He cleansed the temple at the outset of His ministry with His words when He performed a similar action at the close of His ministry (John 2: 16; Mk. 11: 17). In John's gospel which emphasises the Lord's deity, He speaks from Himself concerning His Father. In Mark's gospel, where His servant character is emphasised, He rests on the authority of the Law by quoting the Old Testament scripture. The same is true of the King (Mat. 21: 13) and the Perfect Man (Lk. 19: 46).

2. (Bolton and Leigh): Yes, this is important. The cursing of the fig-tree is emphasised in Mark as an action in itself. As such, the first action in the Lord's final week of ministry prefigured as well as illustrated the barrenness and hypocrisy which He found in Israel and which was so prominent in the final week.

I. E. P.

3. (Liverpool and Bolton and Leigh): It is fair to say that some scholars claim that the early fruit or *taksh* is so disagreeable that it is *not* eaten. But we rather trust the evidence of Scriptures which speak of "the first-ripe fig" (Mic. 7: 1; Hos. 9: 10; Jer. 24: 2; Nah. 3: 12). These show that the fig-tree bears fruit in two seasons, the first being early even compared with other trees, explaining why the Lord hoped for fruit in March/April. But a logical explanation of the comment "it is not the season..." is that this particular tree was exceptional in being so leafy that it could be expected to have fruit, even when it was not yet the season. The Lord would of course know its condition from afar, but would readily be followed by the disciples in looking more closely.

Would the Lord use as a symbol of fruitlessness a species whose natural season was yet to come, and that therefore could hardly represent failure? Rather, He made the state of this particular tree symbolic. *M. A.*

It is not so much the absence of figs that is important, as the abundance of the leaves. The tree promised what it was not, just like Israel (and especially the Pharisees) who made a show of what they were not, see Romans 2: 17-20. Alas the Lord hungered for the fruit which such a display heralded and instead found Israel, the fig-tree barren, as is seen in "thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?... [note this] thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples?" (vv. 21-22).

4. (Edinburgh and Musselburgh): We should observe the deterioration which took place during the Lord's ministry. The "house of merchandise" (Jn. 2: 16), bad though that was, deteriorated in three years to the "den of robbers" (Mk. 11: 17).

5. (Edinburgh and Musselburgh): This sentence may be worth amplifying in these days when men have "discovered" the "environment" for it raises the question, how could God be "gracious" with a fig-tree? The Scriptures teach that the things of nature are given by God for the service of man. So we see the tree being used as a participant in a parable in action. The Lord did not come to judge men though they well deserved it. Instead, in His only miracle of wrath, He judged the tree. Not only is the grace of God seen in this, but it is also seen where the parable falls short. Unlike the fig-tree, Israel will not be cursed for ever but will, one day, be restored.

LE. P.

6. (Liverpool): We support this understanding of "a house of prayer for all the nations". Both the Hebrew in Isa. 56: 7 and the Greek in Mk. 11: 17 indicate that all nations were to have access to this house, i. e. as a place *for them to pray in*, if they would honour the God of Israel. (Cp. 1 Kin. 8: 41). This does not detract from the Tightness of prayer on behalf of all nations, as in 1 Kin. 8: 43.

M. A.

We need to be careful that we don't do away with the Law altogether. It and the temple were primarily for Israel. Such things were not to be made made available to Gentiles till after Calvary although, as with Joseph, it was also intended that blessing should "run over the wall" (Gen. 50: 20). Such a thing could not be without a wall in the first place. The emphasis in what the Lord says in Mk. 11: 17 lies not so much in blessing to the Gentiles but in the double contrast between "My house" and your "den", and in praying as opposed to robbing. *I. E. P*

7. (Paisley): A clear sequence is gained from Paisley friends¹ observation that Matthew may pass over a lapse of 24 hours between the day of entry on the colt and the cleansing of the Temple, without mention of that night's lodging at Bethany. The same explanation could apply between Luke 19: 44 and 45. Matthew and Luke present the cleansing specially as a kingly act of rule and as a directive from the Prophet.

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Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

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WATCH

The Lord Jesus told His disciples about some signs they should look out for, in response to their questions (Mark 13: 4). What was the purpose of this? It was not to enable them to predict the timing of future events, since they were specifically told that this was not possible (v. 32). Rather, it was to reassure them that in the midst of religious and secular persecution God was still in overall control of events, and that His Son would in the fulness of time assert His authority. Therefore, their sufferings were not to be regarded as the precursors of endless night, but as the harbingers of the summer of the Lord's presence.

All of that generation were, in fact, to find the Lord's presence by their going to Him, and not His coming to them, and some of the things the Lord spoke of have still to see a fulfilment (see Comment 14 later, for a possible explanation, in this context of 13: 30). It is suggested that 13: 9-20 was fulfilled in the experience of the first generation Christians, although it has a further application at the time of the coming of the Son of man. The Lord's promise to give them power to speak by the Holy Spirit was kept, and it is still available to us.

The Lord told His disciples particularly to watch for His return, a thing which must be even more apposite to us than it was to them, because of the time which has elapsed. It is true that there are other aspects, concerned with the Lord's gathering to Himself, which have a place in the Lord's return prior to His reigning on earth, but we must not lose sight of the fact that both by the Lord Himself and in the Epistles Christian believers are warned to look for His coming and heed its signs. It affects our attitudes, for we are servants waiting for the return of a master, and we have work to do while He is away.

P. L. H.

TEACHING AT JERUSALEM (Mark 12: 28 - 13: 37)

From Birkenhead: A scribe, possibly encouraged by others, tested the Lord Jesus (Mat. 22: 35) by asking Him to declare which was the greatest commandment. The Lord's answer directed them to the scriptures (Deut. 6: 4, 5;

Lev. 19: 18) and points **out** that on these two commandments hang the whole law, and the prophets. The nature of the scribe's reply as **he** mentioned whole burnt offerings may well indicate that the conversation had touched his heart, **for he** recognized that God looks for a true response from the heart and not a ritual observance of laws. The Lord Jesus, who knows the true state **of** every heart, declared him to be not far from the kingdom of God.

The Lord then asked His audience that they declare His true identity. Many concurred with **the** statement that He was the son of David. Severe problems arose when **the** Lord drew attention to the fact that David, moved by **the** Spirit, addresses Him as Lord (Psa. 110: 1). His claim to deity was blasphemy in the view of the rulers, but the common people did not demur [Comment 1].

The incident of the widow who cast nil her living into the treasury seems to sum **up** all **that** had gone before. Here was a woman who demonstrated her readiness to give a full commitment in practical terms. There were many who in the eyes of men gave far more, but the Lord declared that they only gave that which was surplus to their requirements. It was no sacrifice for them.

It is encouraging to see the love the Lord had for His disciples in outlining something of the future distresses of the Jewish nation. As they stood together and surveyed the glory of the temple the disciples were told that very soon, within the lifetime of this generation, it would be destroyed. This was the building that they had grown up to recognize as God's house. The warning is given that there would be times of sore trial for the Jews and they would also have to contend with false messengers trying to lead them astray. Certain signs are given so that those living in those days will be alert and flee for safety. Dan. 9: 27; 11: 31; 12: 11-13 and 2 Thes. 2 were amongst passages considered helpful in clarifying the days of which the Lord spoke, but He declared that the timing of these latter events is only known to the Father [Comment 2].

The Lord used the fig tree to indicate that as it has its stages of growth each marked by signs, so God's unfolding purposes will be recognizable by certain signs for which disciples are to watch.

G. H. Roberts, R. D. Williams

From Bolton and Leigh: The portion divides into several sections; the first section dealing with the greatest commandments. The scribe would already know which commandment was first; the Shema (meaning 'hear') was repeated daily by the Jews. He may have been impressed with the answer Jesus had given to the Sadducees, although the account in Mat. 22 states the lawyer was tempting Him. The answer the Lord gave to his question was perhaps more than he expected. Jas. 2: 8 gives the 'royal law'

to love our neighbour as ourselves (see also Rom. 13: 10). To love ourselves there has to be self-respect. Is there any other relevance in this for us today? The scribe was so near to, yet so far from, the kingdom of God (v. 34). Was the Lord referring to Israel or to the House of God today? [Comment 3]. The spirit of the law is seen to be more important than the letter of the law.

There follows the question of vv. 35-37; a similar portion being written by Matthew in 22: 41-46. The Jews did not attempt to deny the conclusion given by the Lord's question, i. e. the Messiah is not only the son of David according to the flesh, but He is the Lord of David according to His divine nature. To invalidate the argument would deny that the prophecy related to Christ. It is interesting to note that Matthew's statement that from that day no one dared ask Him (the Lord) any more questions follows the portion, whereas in Mark's account a similar statement precedes the incident. Every aspect of their questioning had been silenced: in earlier verses the Pharisees and Herodians were defeated concerning paying of tribute, the Sadducees confounded in relation to resurrection, the lawyers and Karaites (or scribes) nonplussed in terms of the law and the Pharisees finally routed with respect to the Messiah. The wisdom of God triumphed over the cunning of men.

What a contrast follows: Having referred to widows being a target for these scribes to devour (extort) the Lord brings, face to face, a poor widow who casts her all into the treasury. One commentary gives the value (in 1925) of a "farthing" (Gk. *kodrantes* - Eds) as being about one 4, 000th of £1 — not a lot but it was her all. We must ask ourselves 'what are we giving to God?' "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9: 7). A little may be given cheerfully, but is that what is really meant? Surely we must give until it hurts. The Lord will be no man's debtor; "Seek ye first His kingdom... and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6: 33).

The first two verses of chapter 13 give a complete change as we consider the size of the stones and the splendour of the Temple itself. But "What shall be the sign?" the disciples ask. Although they had been so long in the Lord's company, seen so many miracles performed and heard so much of His teaching, yet their faith needed some physical event for them to accept His word.

W. Paterson Jnr.

From Derby: The scribe, in coming to the Lord, was doubtless sincere in his approach, for there is no evidence of a hostile spirit. The question raised previously, and the answers given had convinced him that here was a great Teacher who taught with authority and wisdom. He seized this opportunity to put to the Lord a question that the rabbis had long debated. Possibly it presupposed a difference in importance in seeking to divide the law and precepts into "weighty" and "light" matters, and to find a commandment which outweighed them all. The Lord's reply is a statement

of confession which every pious Jew recites daily. This seems to take on a new meaning when the ^Tsecond^f commandment is added to it. Mat. 22: 37-40 seems to indicate that these commandments are of equal importance. Also Lk. 10: 27 connects the two together, without any break between. In this we see their interrelatedness. Love of one's neighbour should spring from the love of God, this love being an active principle embracing the whole personality of men. 1 Jn. 4: 10 expresses the great truth that God Himself, and His love, are the source of that stream flowing as man's love to God and to man's neighbour.

On leaving the Temple one of the disciples drew attention to the magnificence of its structure. The Temple was the symbol of God's presence and nothing seemed so stable or durable as this structure. Yet our Lord's pronouncement that there would not be one stone upon another brings into focus references to the destruction of the Temple in the Old Testament (Micah 3: 12; Jer. 26: 18). Jesus was questioned about the time for all these things to happen (to be consummated), and what shall be the sign. Throughout the discourse, signs are given and warnings about the dangers, emphasis being placed on taking heed and being watchful. Verses 14-23 appear to set the scene for something which is imminent. The fulfilment of this must surely be the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. The fearful events of that time are graphically described as the 'abomination of desolation' when, according to contemporary history, pagan altars were erected and desolating sacrilege performed within the Temple precincts [See Comment 2].

It must be said that much of our Lord's discourse relates to future prophecy, and has yet to be fulfilled.

The answer to the question in verse 4 can be summed up as a summons to be watchful and ready. The parables of vv. 28-37 also press home this point. Whilst there are many things we cannot fully understand or clearly explain, we can discern the signs and in these recognize the great unfolding of God's purposes in the events of history and present day happenings.

A. G. Willis, G. W. Conway

From Dulwich: It would seem that the scribes could only see the outward sacrifice and not its inward essence of love. In what sense can the scribes be in the kingdom of God (Mat. 21: 43) and yet not in it? (Mark 12: 34) [Comment 4].

Though the word *Adon* can be used for an ordinary lord or master, in Psa. 110 it is Jehovah speaking to one whom the psalmist understood as God. So we judge that the Lord's quote from the Psalm has a much greater connotation than lord or master.

"Beware of the scribes". Who are the scribes; were they distinct

from the lawyers (Mat. 22: 35)? [Comment 5]. In the "woes" of Mat. 23, they are grouped with the Pharisees, and the expression "the chief places in the synagogue" would set them at the top of the Judean religious system.

In the prophetic teaching of chapter 13, the sure word of prophecy is from One whose word abideth for ever (Mk. 13: 31; 1 Pet. 1: 24, 25; Is. 40: 8). This chapter includes two parables; firstly, the fig tree; secondly, the man going into a far country. The shooting forth of the leaves of the fig tree would signify things preceding "the summer" — the coming millennium. In the second parable are the man, the porter and the servant. Both the porter and the servant are to watch, but who is the porter? [Comment 6]. Though the teaching and events of chapter 13 were in answer to the disciples' question, and though these disciples would become members of the church which is Christ's Body, it does not imply that the same church will go through the last week of Daniel's prophecy, including the great tribulation. Many other scriptures teach otherwise [Comment 7]. Although the gospel of the kingdom (of the coming King) shall be preached to all the nations (Mk. 13: 10; Mat. 24: 13) and those who shall accept it will be persecuted world-wide, yet these verses in chapter 13 seem to apply more directly to those disciples in Israel (Mk. 13: 19). After verse 14, we have the nation in flight to the mountains (13: 14; Rev. 12: 14). If the return of Israel (Rev. 12: 6) is after the gathering of the elect, and also the "sheep" of Mat. 25: 33, who are the elect? [Comment 8].

W. Townsend

From Edinburgh and Musselburgh: No doubt the Scribe enjoyed the outward honour which his profession brought to him as a teacher of the law. Whatever his motives, it seems that he had come to test the Lord with a question; but as he appraised the answer which the Lord had given, he himself was judged. As far as intellect was concerned, he was "not far from the kingdom of God", perhaps suggesting that his question was less than genuine, and that his heart was very far from what it should have been. The Lord knows the thoughts and motives of all men (Mat. 9: 4; Acts 1: 24) [Comment 9].

Knowing that the authorities would question His credentials the Lord answered their unspoken criticism. "How say the scribes that the Christ is the Son of David?" The scribes saw the Messiah as the Son of David but, as the Lord now revealed, this was not the most important aspect of His genealogy; He was also the root of David, and the one who now stood amongst them. The Lord argued from Psalm 110, a messianic Psalm, and a psalm of David. David spoke of the coming Messiah, and addressed Him as "my Lord". Naturally speaking, as an ancestor to a physical descendant, David occupied a superior position; but although Christ was born of David's line, He was still David's Lord.

As He taught in the temple courts, the Lord sat down near the treasury, looked up and watched the people giving their money. As He sat, a poor widow cast in two mites (a mite was the smallest coin in circulation). The Lord does not overlook small things; her sacrifice was unseen and unheralded except by one, who noted the true value and devotion of her offering. The widow could well have used the money for herself. Corruption was widespread within the temple, and it seems possible that the money was abused, but she looked beyond this. The Lord saw her heart and called His disciples to witness the event; in so doing He illustrated an important principle, for He Himself was soon to give His all. Giving is not measured by the amount of money we give, but rather by our motives for so doing. She kept nothing back, but gave her all. The Lord still sees our attitude, and our response to His generosity "Freely ye received, freely give" (Mat. 10: 8). God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9: 7).

J. D. Williams

From Innerleithen: Unlike Matthew, Mark does not say that this scribe came tempting the Lord Jesus. There would seem to have been something genuine in this man and at the end of the discourse he received a commendation from the Lord.

In both the first commandment (love of God) and the second (love of thy neighbour) the emphasis is on love. In Jn. 13: 34 the Lord Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment, "That ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" which also stressed the importance of love. Paul wrote, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another... love therefore is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom. 13: 8-10).

Mark does not record that great and momentous question, "What think ye of the Christ? Whose son is He?" but gives the Lord's answer, in which He cites Ps. 110: 1 as confirmation of His deity.

As He sat down over against the treasury He beheld and gave His approbation to an act of great giving as the widow cast in two mites. She gave her all and the Saviour gave His all.

On leaving the temple, never to enter it again, the Lord's attention was drawn to the magnificence of the building, in which some stones weighed over one hundred tons, and in answer He referred to the impending destruction of Jerusalem. This, we would think, took place in AD 70, within the lifetime of many of His hearers; but the remainder of chapter 13 deals for the most part with events which are still future, the Lord touching upon such matters as the gospel of the kingdom (v. 10), the great tribulation (v. 19) and the coming of the Son of man (v. 26). Time-fixing is within the realm and decision of the Father (v. 32). We are not to be taken up with it but do well to heed the Lord's exhortation of watching, with which the chapter ends.

K. Reilly

From Kilmarnock: The commandment that is greatest of all is a foundational one. The Lord Jesus replied in the words of Deut. 6: 4, 5 and Lev. 19: 18. If the scribes hoped for an unorthodox reply they were disappointed. The astonishing wisdom of the Lord silenced His opponents, but He was not finished with them. It is in strong contrast to the self-advertisement of the scribes that when Jesus watches them cast money into the treasury He tells the disciples of the great giving of the widow. We, too, must strive to put in the love and self-sacrifice this represents.

Many of the wars and rumours of wars which the Lord Jesus spoke of are happening today; and many deceivers have come, and will come, in His name to lead astray many people. So we must take heed of these things that are coming to pass [Comment 10].

It is through nothing amiss in us or done by us that we are hated, but for Christ's Names sake; we are called by His Name. The world hates us because we say that He loves it. Relation shall betray relation. This they would do to secure their own safety. By revealing the names and habitations or places of concealment of Christians this will come to pass. So great will be (and in some cases is) the hatred of Christianity that it will overcome all natural endearment of kindred and home.

Those days will be terrible for Jews, when they see the abomination of desolation; for they must immediately run for their lives, by leaving Judea; and be so earnest in this that a man must not go down for any clothing which he might take. If he does not flee quickly it might cost him his life. Verses 26-27: "Then... "; is this referring to Armageddon? [Comment 11]. The preceding verses would seem also to signal the desperate state in which the world will find itself nearing the end of the rule of evil.

However no matter how much we speculate, all things are in the control of God! We can talk about the possibilities of the future but we, as Christians, should be aware of world events, and the unfolding of God's word around us.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *The Greatest Commandment.* From Mark's account of this question and the Lord's response there is nothing to suggest that it was other than a genuine question. Mat. 22: 35, however, indicates that the question was asked as a test. How do we reconcile these two accounts? A clue lies in the questioner. He was a lawyer. We concluded that the test was to see if Jesus could handle a difficult question and, if not, to expose His lack of knowledge, rather than with the attitude "whatever answer he gives will be wrong" type of question, in

which case He usually refused to answer directly. In this case He gave honour where it was due (v. 34). The answer, commanded by the Lord, is very instructive, for there is more than just a numerical link between the first and second here. The first alone can be a very vague concept to human minds [Comment 12]. Only by the introduction of the "neighbour-as-thyself" concept can this love be measured and the great gulf of inability to do so brought by sin be appreciated. To love your neighbour as yourself is, of course, very practical, cf. (i) the Good Samaritan (ii) Jas. 2: 14 and 1 Jn. 3: 17-18. We can only do this having the mind of Christ (Phil. 2: 15), who alone fulfilled these two commandments.

David's Son and David's Lord. Only by virtue of the incarnation can this riddle be solved (see Rom. 1: 1-4). It posed a real problem to monotheistic Jews with no concept of the Trinity, a truth emphasized by the Lord Jesus in 12: 36. What puzzled us was the reference to Jesus as "Son of David" in the Gospels. To the people of His day He was Jesus of Nazareth. Was "Son of David" just a title used by those who recognized Him as Christ without realizing its literal truth in relation to Jesus?[Comment 13].

The Widow's Offering. How could the widow have possibly put in more than all the others? In absolute terms, of course, she didn't. To make sense of this we considered three points:

- (1) Love can only be measured by the cost to itself. She was a widow with no source of income and here was an act of faith in God's provision for tomorrow.
- (2) She had two coins and could have kept one. But she chose to give all.
- (3) God has no needs. We do not give to Him to reach a target figure or help Him out! He is, therefore, genuinely able to regard the attitude of the giver. What He looks for is spelt out for us in 2 Cor. 8 and 9 and the sacrifice involved.

In the affluent West we can learn great lessons from this dear lady.

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: The brief period that the Lord spent in Jerusalem prior to His betrayal was a time of confrontation with the religious leaders of Israel. They employed many devices to ensnare Him in His speech but were unsuccessful; such was the wisdom and understanding displayed by the Lord.

The quotations from the Old Testament in Mark 12: 29 show how far removed in heart the people were from the Lord, the God of Israel. Elohim was in their midst and they failed to recognize Him; far less to love Him. Yet the questioning scribe had some knowledge of the will of God contained in the law of Moses. Perhaps the reply of the Lord would guide the scribe into the kingdom of God as it was intended to do. The Lord's human and divine origin are contained in the citation from Psalm 110.

This Psalm will yet have its fulfilment; but the rulers of Israel failed to perceive this. They acknowledged David as their father, yet would not accept David's Son and Lord.

The true worth of giving to the Lord is pointed out by Him in relation to the widow's mite. He was able to put a true value on the measure of the giving and the sacrifice involved. He saw the motive behind the giving and that is important in His sight.

Chapter 13 is a private exposition by the Lord of the events which precede His coming to earth as Son of Man. Much of the teaching affects Jewish believers living in the land of Palestine, e. g. verse 14 relating to the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation (v. 19), but events recorded in vv. 24-27 have a universal application and are repeated in Rev. 6. Verse 30 presented us with some difficulty in relation to the generation to whom the Lord was speaking [Comment 14]. Though the signs mentioned by the Lord relate to His return to earth, we can see signs today which are leading up to His coming, particularly those recorded in 1 Thes. 5: 3 and 2 Thes. 2: 7. The Lord emphasized the need for daily expectation of His coming and this applies to believers of all ages.

J. Renfrew

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): The Lord was not so much seeking a declaration that He was the Christ, but challenging the Scribes and Pharisees to see in Scripture that the Messiah was both 'David's Son and David's Lord, an argument which reduced them to silence.

2. (Birkenhead): A number of these prophecies and warnings have more than one reference. Thus the "abomination of desolation" may well refer to the setting up of Roman standards in the Temple in AD 70, and the flight to the mountains to the exodus of the Christian community at that time; on the other hand, the Daniel scriptures clearly relate to a time still in the future, as does the coming of the Son of man. There will be times in the future when the same warnings will have to be heeded.

P. L. H.

"Prophecies with two or more applications" (all from the Old Testament) are the subject of a valuable study in *Bible Studies*, 1963, pp 142-144. May I suggest, however, that part of our Lord's instruction to His disciples is so specific as to refer to one period alone, whereas events in history which have been advanced as fulfilments have merely been similar in some ways.

It is generally agreed that vv. 24-27 of Mark 13 belong together and are yet to be fulfilled. Working backwards, the words "in those days" (v. 24) surely cover the days of tribulation of vv. 19-23. Again, those days of v. 19 must link through v. 17 back to v. 14 at least. The same result may be obtained in Mat. 24: 29, 22, 19, 15. It follows then that "the abomination of desolation... " must belong to the tribulation period. Does not v. 19, "tribulation such as there hath not been... until now, and never shall be", show that vv. 14-27 refer to a unique period of persecution, and therefore to the great "trouble" of Dan. 12: 1 and Jer. 30: 7? To the present writer this is also confirmed by the requirement of v. 10 that "the gospel... first be preached unto all the nations", especially as amplified in Mat. 24: 14: "in the whole inhabited earth (R. V. M.)... and then shall the end come".

The Lord's counsel, of course, could have a relevance and profit as applied to a crisis such as the desecration of the Temple in AD 70, having features similar to the above though some were on a lesser scale (e. g. than 13: 25).

M. A.

3. (Bolton and Leigh): It could not be Israel, since the scribe was already a member of that nation; the reference must therefore be to the coming kingdom which was to supplant Israel.

4. (Dulwich): Under the old economy, Israel nationally comprised the people of God, being so because they pledged themselves to obey His laws (Ex. 19: 8). However, by the time of the Lord's coming a great many people nominally within the national kingdom of God had effectively put themselves outside it because they rejected the King's laws. The Lord Jesus excoriated them with the words of Isaiah: "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mk. 7: 6). The reply of the scribe in 12: 28-33 seemed to show his thoughtful appreciation of what the Lord said, thus fitting him for entrance into the reconstituted kingdom.

P. L. H.

John 3: 3 shows how a man could be in the kingdom of God that was Israel yet not in the kingdom of God of which the Lord spoke. The latter is spiritual and pertains to the present dispensation. The Lord did not set up a kingdom within a kingdom else He would have been a sectarian man. See *Bible Studies* 8901, p. 11, Comment 6.

I. E. P.

5. (Dulwich): Scribes in New Testament times had the primary function of scholarship in, and the teaching of, the law of Moses, and the terms 'lawyer' and 'scribe' are synonymous. They belonged mainly to the party of the Pharisees, but as a body were distinct from them.

6. (Dulwich): One would not think **that any** single person corresponds to **the** "porter", **but** while **each** servant has his work to do, **there are** some whose particular duty is to **be watchmen** (Is. 21: 11), **preparing** the way of **the** Lord.

7. (Dulwich): This issue deserves **much** more detailed discussion **than** it is possible to give it in this context. It is **a pity that** friends in Dulwich **had** not given **the** other scriptures to which they **refer** since these scriptures, **and** those in **Mat. 24**, do seem to indicate **that** disciples, to whom these events **were narrated**, will pass through **them**.

P. L. H.

8. (Dulwich): The elect **at** this time comprise various groups of people such as **the 144, 000** of Israel (**Rev. 7: 1-8**) as well as **the** innumerable **multitude** of Rev. 7: 9.

LE. P

9. (Edinburgh and Musselburgh): Although **Matthew** says **that the** lawyer was tempting **the** Lord, **the** Lord seems to **have** perceived from **the** man's thoughtful response **that there** was some genuineness in him. One would think **that** his closeness to **the** "kingdom of God" was more **than** a mere intellectual approach; **he** recognized **the truth** of **the** Lord's teaching, albeit perhaps **rather** reluctantly.

10. (Kilmarnock): See Comment **2** for **the** suggestion of more **than** one application of these sayings. While not wishing to minimise **the** importance of looking for **the** Lord's **return**, **we need to be** a little cautious in the certain identification of signs, particularly as some do not seem to fit into our present situation; **the** point raised in Comment **7** is, of course, **relevant** here. **In** relation to wars, **are there at** present more than there **have** been in the past?

11. (Kilmarnock): 13: 26 specifically refers to **the** coming of **the** Son of man, although this is followed by **the** Lord's **battle** against His enemies **at the place called** Armageddon (**Rev. 16: 16 AV**), described in **Zech. 14: 3, 4**.

P. L. H.

12. (Liverpool): These matters are brought together in 1 John 5: 3 which is not vague about what the love of God is. "This is **the** love of God, that we keep His commandments".

LE. P.

13. (Liverpool): It seems improbable **that** a **man** such as Bartimaeus (Mk. 10: 47, **48**) would have any knowledge of **the actual** genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. **His** use of the title "Son of David" was **an** acknowledgement that Jesus was the Messiah.

14. (Paisley): It does not seem that the meaning of "This generation" (v. 30) can legitimately be extended outside its normal straight-forward sense of around 40 years from when the Lord was speaking, and in v. 31 the Lord placed particular emphasis on His words. There is difficulty, therefore, in the exposition of this passage, and the only explanation one can offer is that distinctions must be drawn between "these things" (v. 30) and "that day" (v. 32) or "those days" (v. 24). The former would refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Temple, which took place within the lifetime of some of His hearers, and the latter to the coming of the Son of man. Some go further, and S. S. Short in 'A Bible Commentary for Today' sees vv. 24-27 as 'an apocalyptic description of the fall of Jerusalem and its sequel', enabling all the events described to take place in a generation. However, this kind of interpretation does seem to do despite to the plain meaning of language.

P. L. H.

An alternative view is that the Lord has by this point in His discourse been speaking for some time about the period of the tribulation and His coming as Son of man, so far in the future that it is easier to accept that "all these things" has its normal reference, and that in the words "This generation" He speaks through the audience of the Twelve to His disciples of the time when "He is nigh, even at the doors". The point of the statement is then, that the same generation who endure (and have not been put to death, Rev. 13: 15) can have the sure hope of deliverance.

M. A.

The present writer has difficulty in seeing this difficulty. The generation in question is the generation Mint sees the fulfilment of the parable of the fig-tree. The Lord was speaking to His disciples and, as always, through them to all disciples. The aye-abiding nature of His words is specifically alluded to in the very next verse (v. 31). Had the Lord given an inkling that the disciples of His day might not see the fulfilment of the fig-tree parable then He would have given away something of the timing of His second coming.

LE. P.

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God [Acts 17: 11]

EDITORIAL

8910

THE ANOINTING OF THE LORD FOR HIS BURIAL

The striking similarities **and differences** of **the three** accounts of the anointing of **the Lord in Mat. 26**, Mk. 14 **and Jn. 12** **have again attracted much** discussion from our contributors, **and here we but add** to a helpful study of **differing** views in *B. S.* 1968, **pp. 22-24**.

First, as to **timing**, we note **that** Mark's "**after** two days was **the** feast of **the** passover" refers to **the** decision of **the chief** priests **and** scribes to **find** a way to **end** the Lord's life. The anointing is introduced separately **with** the words, "**And** while **He** was **in** Bethany... ". It is thus possible to understand **the** recounting of **the incident here** as explaining one reason for **the** leaders **being** determined to remove **the** Lord, namely **that** Judas **had then** chosen to offer his services. This is supported by **the** entry to Jerusalem on **the** colt **being** stated by John to **be** "on **the** morrow" after **the** anointing (Jn. 12: 12), while Matthew **and** Mark show **that** this entry **preceded** the ministry of **the** last **week in** Jerusalem, **and** **the** nights of lodging **in** Bethany.

The **next** chief difficulty **is** **the** anointing **in** Mk. 14 of **the** Lord's **head**, **and** **in** John, of His feet. This seems adequately resolved by **the** Lord's reference to His body **in** Mk. 14: 8 (**and** Mat. 26: 12). As for **the** house **in** Bethany, we may understand, **with** friends **in** Liverpool, **that** Lazarus **and** Martha **were** close enough either **in** friendship or relationship to Simon to **be** present **and** helping **in** his home. Judas, alone **named** by John, could **have been** a leader among other critics.

If, on **the** other **hand**, we assume two separate anointings, **is** it not considerably harder to explain why **the** Lord would **make** such very similar statements, **and** why **the** price set upon **the** ointment is exactly **the** same ?

This inquiry, however, is only contributory to **the** effort to **appreciate** **the** devotion **and** understanding **that** were so fragrantly shown. **We** search our hearts to **find** any such readiness to use our opportunities to express **the** grace **and** love of Christ.

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PREPARING FOR GOLGOTHA (Mark 14: 1-42)

From Birkenhead: With two days to go to the feast of the passover, the enemies of the Lord are actively seeking to capture and kill Him.

Judas Iscariot, poignantly described as 'one of the twelve'¹, who has known so much of the Lord's company, and seen such a display of divine love, enters into an agreement with the chief priests to deliver Jesus into their hands for thirty pieces of silver (Mat. 26: 15).

Jerusalem is crowded with Jews who have come to join with the residents in keeping the passover and the feast of unleavened bread. Two of the Lord's disciples are sent to prepare a place for the Lord to keep the passover with the twelve. They are given clear instructions as to how to set about their task. They would be helped in this because it was unusual to see a man carrying water. The request for the "guestchamber" (the same Greek word is translated "inn" in Luke 2: 7) brings the offer of the best room, the "large upper room" which Mark declares to be "furnished and ready". As with the anointing of the Lord, it may be that the offer was made by one with an understanding heart. The two disciples would need to be sure all leaven was removed. They would need to acquire the passover lamb and provide the necessary cups of wine and the loaves of unleavened bread.

The passover feast would occupy some hours and the Lord according to John's account (Jn. 13: 1 - 18: 1) spoke at length to His disciples. It seems likely that after the passover had been kept, Judas left the company aware that the Lord knew of his intentions. Thereafter the Lord uses the emblems before them on the table to institute a remembrance for them to observe which is a commandment for disciples of Jesus Christ to keep until He returns again for them.

The burden the Lord Jesus has for His disciples' welfare is evident. He warns that they would be scattered when He was taken captive. Peter's protest of unswerving allegiance brought the forecast that he would in fact deny the Lord.

Jesus in Gethsemane takes three of the eleven disciples apart with Him. The awareness of all that was involved in the carrying out of the Father's will caused such distress that His sweat became like drops of blood (Lk. 22: 44). Luke also tells of the appearance of an angel to strengthen Him. The Lord is burdened that the disciples are not supporting Him in His watching, nor are they vigilant in watching and praying on their own account.

The experiences of the Lord's agony are graphically stated in Heb. 5: 7, 8. In our study we are able to see the immense cost in terms of suffering of His obedience to the Father's will.

A. E. Turner, R. D. Williams

From Bolton and Leigh: The opening verse of the passage states that the scheming of the chief priests and scribes took place two days before the passover. Immediately after the record of the meal at Simon's house we are told about Judas striking his bargain with these men. Does this mean that the meal at Simon's house took place at the same time, that is, two days before the passover? Or do the words "and while He was in Bethany" (14: 3), indicate that it could have taken place at any time during the Lord's stay in the village? For we know from John 12: 1 that He arrived in Bethany six days before the passover (see Editorial).

Neither Matthew or Mark identify the woman who anointed the Lord, but from John 11: 2 and 12: 3 we know that she was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. Her action in freely using a very expensive ointment to anoint the Master, shows that she had a great regard and affection for Him.

Matthew and Mark record that Mary anointed the Lord's head, while John (12: 3) mentions His feet. If we add the Master's own words "She hath anointed my body" (Mk. 14: 8), we conclude that this was an all-over anointing; perhaps after a similar manner to that depicted in Psalm 133.

The Lord's words "She hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying" (14: 8) prompted us to ask the question: had Mary grasped the fact that He was going to His death, or was her action a spontaneous one that simply coincided with the soon coming event? Many of us thought that, since Mary spent time that others had not, sitting at Christ's feet and hearing His word (Lk. 10: 19) that she had a deeper insight into the purpose of the Lord's life and knew full well that He was going to die.

Some discussion arose as to exactly how the institution of the remembrance took place. Some maintained that since a cup of wine — according to Jewish tradition — was used at four different stages of the passover celebration, that it was the last of these cups that the Lord used to institute the remembrance. This argument was supported by citing Mk. 14: 26; the hymn sung there being the second part of the hallel, which traditionally concluded the passover meal. Others thought that the remembrance was totally divorced from the passover and being something new, took place after the passover meal was finished. This view was supported by citing Luke 22: 20, the bread and cup being taken after supper, that is, after the passover celebration. We would appreciate others' opinions on these points [Comment 1].

Alex Reid

From Derby: The days of our Lord's earthly walk are almost ended and as He ensures each necessary prophetic scripture about Himself is fulfilled so now His personal teaching to this small group must be completed before the Lamb of God permits Himself to be taken and killed. The thoughts and desires in the hearts of "the rulers" had now been converted

into actions. For our warning **and** edification **we** considered Philippians 4: 8; "whatsoever things are true..., **think** on these things".

We wondered how many works for God **which we/men** criticise will **in fact** receive **His** "Well done" (Mat. 25: 21). The Lord highly commended this woman (14: 8) **and the** woman of Mk. 12: 44, **and** commended Mary, who chose **the** better **part and** was grateful for **the** ministrations of Martha. How **the** Lord both loves **and needs the** work our dear sisters do for **Him and in His name!**

The disciples would see **the** two mites as **being** too small **a gift and the** ointment of spikenard **being** too extravagant, **but the** Lord accepts all our gifts **in** His own gracious way as **being** His by right, **and** searches our hearts to see **if** they are **given with** true **and** total devotion to Himself. The Lord loves **a** cheerful giver, not **a** cost-counting one (2 Cor. 9: 7).

We thought how Judas was known **as a** follower of Christ **and that** today **he** would carry **the name of** 'Christian'¹, **like Peter**. Those looking on saw **the** betrayal of Judas, **the denial** of Peter **and the** absence of **the** rest **and must** inevitably **have** blamed their Master. How careful **we, who** carry Christ's **name, need to be in** thought **and** word **and deed!** **We** were **glad that at this bad time** one **had** gladly loaned **an** ass **and** another **an** upper room furnished out of love; **it** was clear from verse 16 **the** Lord **knew** this man. [Maybe; **but it** is not shown certainly from v. 16 - *Eds*].

We compared v. 19 **when** "they **began to be** sorrowful" **and He** was there to help **them and** comfort **them, with** v. 34. The disciples **went to sleep and** left **Him** to bear His own sorrow — how **that must have added** to His sorrow, yet **He** dealt graciously **and** kindly **with them!** The **deep** sadness of **the** tender heart of **the** Lord is not shown **in v. 20, but in** Ps. 41: 9 **we** see how **He was affected, even at this act** of betrayal.

Again we see **His** grace as "**the** Son of Man", not drawing on **His** **divine nature** to sustain Himself **but being tempted in** all points like **we and** here receiving sustenance from **heaven as an angel from heaven** strengthened **Him (Lk. 22: 43)**.

The question was raised by **a** young one, **if the** disciples were asleep how could they know about this angel? [Comment 4].

We also considered **whether the** Lord **wanted** His **disciples** to pray for **Him** as well as for themselves **while in the** garden [Comment 2].

A suggestion was **made that the** amount Judas received was about **a third** the amount of Mary's gifts. **We** pondered "**the** house of Simon **the leper**" **and** many thought **it** unreasonable **that this man** should still **be a leper**; so was **this just a title he** carried **even when** healed [Comment 5]?

S. J. Wymer

From Dulwich: If the readings of the A. V. and R. V. are correct in 14: 1, the chapter would cover a duration of three days. The anointing in Jn. 12 by Mary, six days before the passover, would be a different occasion from that of the woman in Simon, the leper's house (See Editorial).

They kept the passover when even was come (Mk. 14: 17). In Ex. 12: 6 it was killed at even (Hebrew — "between the two evenings" - R. V. M.). Are these times fulfilled in the Lord's death? He was crucified at the third hour (Mk. 15: 25), and gave up the spirit at the ninth hour (15: 34) [Comment 3]. In the preparation made by the Lord for the passover, we see not only His meticulous care, but also His omniscience, a characteristic of the nature of Jehovah's servant (Mai. 2: 17; 3: 1, 2). It seems noteworthy that apart from the arrangement, we do not read much of the passover itself. Would the reason for this be that Golgotha in Mark presents the trespass-offering aspect of the death of Christ, depicting the work of Jehovah's servant in restoration and completion, rather than redemption? [Heb. 8: 13 may provide a more satisfying answer -Eds],

The knowledge of the forthcoming betrayal led the Lord to prepare His disciples for this sorrowful event (Mk. 14: 19; Ps. 41: 9). The words of v. 22 are most solemn — faithfulness, love and trust were going to be betrayed, a blow from within the ranks. This was a matter in which the Lord was deeply disturbed.

The breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, though only bread and only wine, was a proclamation in symbol of His death. The word "blessed" (*Eulogeo* — speak well of: Dr. Young) can be thought of as an eulogy, yet it can have a more extended meaning (Eph. 1: 3). The new covenant as well as the old has its blessings.

The smiting of Jehovah's servant shepherd would be on the cross, and the scattering, though previous, was related to it. Again in this the Lord is anticipating the event in preparation to His disciples.

The preparation at Gethsemane of Jehovah's servant in Mark, is in contrast to what we have in the other Gospels. In John it is largely omitted. In Matthew you have the kingly exhortation to watch and pray. In Luke we see the evidence of His true humanity — great drops of sweat falling down as of blood. But in Mark we have the humble request of the sent One of the Father, yet yielding in His obedient service according to the Father's will. The failure of His disciples to watch with Him, due to sleep, would suggest that it was in the early hours of the morning.

The reality of what was to come is revealed in the words "amazed" (greatly amazed - Dr. Young) [Comment 61, "heavy" ("weighed down" - Dr. Young) and "my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death".

W. A. Townsend

From Innerleithen: The motives of the Lord's antagonists are now fully exposed. They were jealous of His popularity, and fear of public re-action delayed their murderous plans. God's plan at the same time was being worked out precisely according to His timetable with regard to the Lord's death. Divine plans can never be nullified or modified by men's actions.

In the house in Bethany (see also separate article) we have another expression of sacrificial devotion (already witnessed in the widow's mite, Mk. 12). The flask was broken and all its contents outpoured. There was no calculated measure; everything was given, nothing spared. Such giving emanated from a cheerful heart and an understanding mind. This the Lord appreciated (Heb. 13: 15, 16). She understood (it may be *-Eds*) the prophetic word of Ps. 16: 10 with regard to the non-corruption of the body of the Lord, therefore her action was to anoint before His burial and not after (16: 1).

Sacrificial giving is often misunderstood and criticized. Worldly-evaluation of spiritual service is to be avoided. This worshipper was reviled and upset (14: 5, 6). The Lord's commendation is what matters. This was a good (lit. excellent) work. Every effort had been expended — perhaps a lifetime's savings gladly surrendered. The Lord expects no more and no less than we are able to give (v. 8).

A sad contrast we find in Judas' negotiating a financial deal with the religious hierarchy to betray the Lord by leading them to Him at a place and a time when the multitudes would be absent.

In 14: 16 we have another instance of disciples (Peter and John; Lk. 22: 8) finding exactly as the Lord had indicated.

R. B. Fullarton

From Kilmarnock: As the Passover approached one woman's love for the Lord shines brightly in the house of Simon the leper. She showed the highest reverence for the Lord when she broke that cruse of ointment; its smell very gratifying and the ointment itself refreshing to the head. Jesus, knowing the reverence and the purity of her action, spoke appreciatively of her sacrifice and strongly upheld her action. This was an act of faith in the Lord Jesus, that He was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed. She had anointed her King for the burying.

The upper room was made ready. This room would be at a place in Jerusalem where He was not known; not at a friend's home nor any house which He had formerly frequented, for the disciples were told to follow a man with a pitcher of water.

The Lord kept the Passover at the appointed day and time (Ex. 12: 6) and on that day was also delivered unto the priests. Jesus, knowing the things to come, said "One of you shall betray Me". Fear fell on the disciples and they began to ask, "Is it I?" (We rightly suspect more evil in ourselves than in our brethren). When the disciples asked the Lord "Is it I?" Judas must have hypocritically asked the same question for he knew that it was he. What must the disciples' thoughts have been when Judas dipped his hand into the bowl and then left! Could they have fully understood? We, too, must always take care not to act as Judas did; "betraying" (by behaving hypocritically) not only our Lord but those who are our friends, for earthly gain.

The order of the Remembrance is: the taking of the loaf, then the wine, the wine signifying the blood, followed by a hymn. (In our case praising and glorifying the great God of Heaven for such a gift as His only begotten Son). The old order too, passing* away, was to be replaced by the new — one sacrifice, one lamb and full atonement for ever through His death on the cross.

Then we are given a brief glimpse of what it must have cost Him to die for us: "... He began to be deeply distressed... overwhelmed with sorrow..." (NIV). Only the Son of God in human form could have overcome such sorrows and say "... not what I will, but what you will." What subjection! The Lord prayed three times — He fully experienced the frailties of the human form; for His subjection and humility, and His love for us overcame the weakness of His body. He was strengthened in His prayers and was able to "drink the cup" that the Father had given Him. "Rise! Let us go!" He said. Can we say "Rise! Let us go!" when faced by our persecutors? Do we have the subjection to God's will? The Lord knew what was to come. We don't. So it is imperative that we say, "Not what I will; but what you will!"

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *Anointed at Bethany* There is also an account of this story in Mat. 26: 6-13 and Jn. 12: 1-8 (the similar story recorded in Lk. 7: 36 *et seq* is a different occasion) though there are differences in detail. From the context of John's account (Lazarus' position and Martha serving) it would appear to be the home of Lazarus and his sisters. But Mark says it was Simon's house. Was it owned by another, perhaps a relative? John tells us the woman was Mary, and whatever the details of the home may be, it is clear that she spared no expense in her devotion for the perfume (possibly a family heirloom) was exceptionally expensive.

We took it that Jesus was saying something more than the fact that this story would come to be associated with His burial: Mary had grasped something that still eluded the disciples despite the Lord's plain

words, possibly obtained as a result of sitting **at Jesus' feet** (Lk. 11: 39).

Their spiritual dullness produced an undiscerning reaction **in the** other disciples. Mark tells us "some" **had** critical thoughts, Matthew tells us **it** was **the** disciples, **while** John names Judas. The Lord's **accepting** this **act** of devotion **with** its great cost **turned** this world's values upside down **and** seems to **have been** the final straw as **far** as Judas was concerned. **He** who **helped** himself from **the** common purse **had** listened to **the** Master speaking **in** praise of extremely small **giving** by **a** widow **and** now witnessed His endorsement of this "waste". Perhaps **he felt** there soon would **be** nothing left for his purposes, **and** found **a new** source of revenue!

A Special Supper **Having made the** stunning announcement **that** one of **them** would betray **Him**, Jesus **went** on to institute **a vivid** remembrance of **the** outcome of **that act** of treachery, **revealing it to be** part of God's **plan** of Salvation. The **bread** symbolises His body **and the cup (wine)** His blood poured out. Communion is established **in that eating and drinking**, not only **with the** Lord Himself as **the** participants discern **what** they are doing, **but** also **with each** other too. Because there is one loaf those who **participate** become one (1 Cor. 10: 17).

To Gethsemane Peter's declaration (14: 29) shows both intense loyalty **and** folly. **Peter meant what he said, and the** others protested **their** absolute loyalty too. **But in** contradicting **the** Lord **and** trusting **in** himself **he made** a great mistake, **and the** Lord's **rebuke** (v. 37) failed to alert him. **We need** to trust **the** Saviour, not our love for **Him!**

At Gethsemane **we** see **the** Lord **facing and** overcoming His final temptation as **Satan**, no doubt, sought to **make Him back** away from something **He** so **much** dreaded. The dread was not simply of **the** horror of **death** by crucifixion **but** of separation from God as **He** took upon Himself **the sin** of the world. [But see *BS. 1968, 56; 1981, 141-2, 161-3; 1982, 18-19.*]

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: **We** were **challenged in the** verse of hymn 386 (PHSS) to "**watch with the** Lord on **the** mountain top through **the** dreary **mid-night** hour" **and** count **the** cost of Golgotha **and all that went** before.

The woman **came** purposefully, undisturbed by **the fact** she was interrupting **a meal** (v. 3), **and** boldly carried **with her the** alabaster cruse of ointment worth **300 pence**, **the** wages for **a** whole year. **A lifetime** of saving broken **in a** second, poured out completely **and the** odour **filling that** whole house. **A beautiful**, fragrant picture, of **the life** of **the** Lord saved **up and** poured out on Calvary. Many

thought the ointment a waste, murmuring against the woman, but the Lord appreciated the action, the "good work she hath wrought". Praise be to our Saviour that His sacrifice and outpouring were appreciated by His God and Father — a good work (Mk. 16: 19).

Special note was made (v. 12) that the first day of opportunity was used to make preparations for meeting to keep the Passover and further that the room (or 'inn') was already prepared in readiness (v. 16).

A consensus was reached that the Lord participated in the Passover supper (v. 18) but not of the emblems (bread and cup of wine) referred to in vv. 22-25 [Comment 7]. In particular v. 23 was cited as illustrating the intimate personal involvement of the Lord in the creation of the new (margin, revised version) covenant and the free distribution of its blessings to all. "Take ye" (v. 22) - "He gave to them" (v. 23).

The use of the phrase "began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled" was expounded (in particular the word 'amazed') [Comment 6]. This sense of the occasion, now to hand, and the wrath and distress our Lord knew would accompany "the cup" (v. 36) were sufficient to require such strong language which could perhaps be rendered "appalled and grievously troubled" (W. L. Lane). The wine in Ps. 60: 3 "of staggering" may have been seen as synonymous with the anticipated outpouring of God's wrath.

Discussion on the audibility of our Saviour's prayers (vv. 35, 36) and the use of the same prayer-form of words on all three occasions (v. 39) remained unsolved. Definite assistance would be appreciated [Comment 8].

F. J. Reilly

COMMENTS

1. (Bolton and Leigh): Though the wine which was poured out in the institution of the Remembrance (Lk. 22: 20) may well have been provided as part of the disciples' preparations for the passover, I would gather from the following points that the Lord used it quite separately from that observance.

(1) Drinking wine is not mentioned in the ordinance either in Ex. 12 or Deut. 16, so that there would be no point in connecting the cups of Jewish tradition with the Remembrance.

(2) Lk. 22: 20, "after supper", as friends observe.

(3) The hymn sung is indeed thought to have been the *Halle*, but since Scripture does not specify the hymn, we cannot build upon the point. Further, Ps. 113-118 in whole or in part would not of themselves indicate that the passover-celebration was only then finishing.

2. (Derby): Linguistic scholars prefer to understand "that ye enter not into temptation" as the content of the prayer rather than the purpose of engaging in prayer. The disciples' request would then be for themselves. This is supported by the Lord's having earlier asked the disciples to watch rather than seeking their help; and by the words "that ye enter not...". This view is also taken by Birkenhead friends.

3. (**Dulwich**): On the very problematic subject of the hours of the Crucifixion, we note that the passover was to be kept "at even, at the going down of the sun" (Deut. 16: 6), and that the Lord observed this timing, no matter what the Jewish practice had become by His days. In Mat., Mk. and Lk., the Lord yields up His spirit after "the ninth hour", and sufficiently before evening for Him to be "dead already" when the Jews asked Pilate to act before the Sabbath. While the exact hour of evening would vary according to the season, a link can be made between the ninth hour and the evening offerings by reference to the hour of prayer in Acts 3: 1, 10: 30; to Lk. 1: 10, Ps. 141: 2 and to Dan. 9: 21. Josephus wrote about the Passover, that it was sacrificed between 3 pm and 5 pm.

M. A.

4- (Derby): Some of the Lord's words in His prayers were remembered and recorded, so not all the disciples can have been asleep for all of the time. Probably they would stay awake for some time after He first separated from them, and at this time the angel appeared.

5. (Derby): The Lord did not heal all whom He knew had need of it (cf. Lk. 4: 25-27), so there is nothing intrinsically unreasonable about Simon's remaining a leper. We have no more information about him, so we cannot know for sure, but the suggestion has been made that "the father of the house, though still alive, was well known as a leper, and that his household had therefore passed, for practical purposes, to his children" (A Cole, Tyndale New Testament Commentary).

6. (**Dulwich and Paisley**): In normal modern usage, the word 'amazed' conveys no more than 'filled with surprise and wonder', usually in fairly inconsequential contexts. The Greek word *ekthambeo* used here, found only in Mark's gospel, signifies intense emotional shock as the Lord viewed His approaching agony in suffering and sin-bearing.

7. (Paisley): It is difficult to substantiate any definite statement here on the evidence of the Scriptural accounts, but might not the Lord's statement that He would "no more" drink of the fruit of the vine (lit. 'from now' in Mat. 26: 29 indicate that He had done so for the last time in the institution of the Remembrance? See Comments by J. M. on pp. 173, 174 of *Bible Studies* 1961. PLH

Since the cup poured symbolized the blood shed for men, surely the idea of the Lord's drinking of it conflicts with such a significance.

M. A.

8. (Paisley): The record of Scripture was normally assembled by **men** who, under **the guidance** of **the** Holy Spirit, carefully collected **and** collated **the evidence** of witnesses to **the** activities **and** words of **the** Lord **and** His disciples (**Lk.** 1: 1-3). The **inference** is, therefore, **that** **the** Lord's words **in** Gethsemane were heard by **the** disciples (before they **went** to sleep) **and** subsequently recorded. As to **the** reiteration of **the** words, this was no **vain** repetition; **the** prospect of **the** cross filled **the** Lord's **heart and mind** to **the** exclusion of all other things. His prayer was **a** real prostration of spirit before **the** Father.

P. L. H.

The words recorded as spoken by **the** Lord **in** prayer **are** so **few** **and** **the** occasions selected so seldom **that** **we** are sure **that** readers will readily **be** able to compare **them** **and** give us **the** **benefit** of their **written** conclusions. **Jn.** 14: 26 is **a** key scripture concerning **the** disciples' remembrance of **the** Lord's words.

LE. P.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE ANOINTING OF THE LORD

Does John 12: 1-8 correspond to Mark 14: 3-9 **and** Matthew 26: 6-13 i. e. is **the** anointing **in** John's passage **the same** as **that** **in** Matthew **and** Mark?

While many similarities are observed **in** these three passages **certain** points found **in** Matthew **and** Mark are conspicuously absent **in** John's account. The conversations are similar, **the** actions are dissimilar.

1. The woman's **name** is omitted by Matthew **and** Mark. **She** is **identified** by John as Mary, **the** sister of Martha **and** Lazarus.
2. The house belongs to Simon **the** leper **in** Matthew **and** Mark. John's account speaks of Martha serving **and** acting as hostess **and** Lazarus **being** "one of **them**", confirming **the** **fact** of his bodily resurrection following **the** Lord's raising of **him** **in** John 11. Two **different** homes **are** referred to.
3. The Lord's **feet** are anointed **in** John, His **head** **in** Matthew **and** Mark.

4. Judas specifically mentioned **in** John as **the** speaker, while **Matthew and Mark refer to a group of disciples murmuring, Judas a leader here.**
5. Matthew **and** Mark's chronology of events places **the** Lord's entry into Jerusalem before **the** anointing. John's record shows **the** anointing before **the** entry into **the** capital city.

Mat. 21: 1-11 **the** entry (5 days before **the** Passover, i. e. Sunday).

Mat. 26: 6-13 **the** anointing (2 days before **the** Passover i. e. Wednesday).

Matthew **and** Mark's chronology **are the same.**

Mark 11: 1-11 corresponds to Mat. 21: 1-17. This took **place** on **the** Sunday.

At night times **He went** to Bethany (Mat. 21: 17; Mk. 11: 19)

Mk. 14: 1-9 — two days before **the** Passover, i. e. **the** Wednesday relates to Mat. 26: 1-13.

This agrees **with** John's **timetable where the** anointing (**different** from Matthew **and** Mark) takes place six days before **the** Passover (i. e. **the** Saturday). "**On the** morrow"... (Jn. 12: 1) **and the** other two days before (**the** Wednesday). Separate incidents alone would account for John's placing of **the** anointing before **the** colt-ride into Jerusalem.

Other events bearing strong similarities, yet very different **in** time-setting **are:**

1. The **temple** cleansing - John 2 **and** Matthew 21
2. The **blind man healed** - Luke 18 **and** Matthew 20
3. Storm scenes - Matthew 8 **and** Matthew 14
4. The Beatitudes spoken - Matthew 5 **and** Luke 6*

R. B. Fullerton, Innerleithen

* **Are the** differences **between the** passages **in each** of these pairs not **much greater than** those found above?

M. A.

Furthermore, **are the** similarities **in the** accounts **in** Matthew, Mark **and** John not so great **that it is better** to conflate **them** rather **than** to postulate such **an** intrinsically unlikely recurrence?

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EDITORIAL

8911

BETRAYING THE LORD

The Greek word translated "betray" comprises two parts (*para*, beside and *didomi*, I give) and literally means 'give up to'¹. Thus it betrays nothing in its composition of the idea of treachery which we associate with betrayal in its most virulent form. Indeed the same word is commonly translated as "deliver" when used in a formal, legal or judicial sense. (See, for example, Mat. 5: 25, 18: 34 and note especially such scriptures as Acts 6: 14, Rom. 6: 17 and 1 Cor. 15: 3). It is a case where the context has decided which English word has been chosen in translation. Examination of a concordance will show that the word 'betray'¹ is used almost entirely of Iscariot's betrayal of the Lord.

The verses before us this month fairly reek of betrayal, however, even if not so described or seen at its worst. Thus, there is a sense in which Peter, in his denial, betrayed both himself and the Lord as did the disciples who deserted Him. The young man, too, betrayed His earlier fortitude when he fled naked. The leaders of Israel betrayed their position of spiritual responsibility (and a whole lot else) when they 'tried' the Lord and delivered Him up to Pilate. Then Pilate, too, betrayed the responsibility that the powers-that-be have to judge righteously.

In a portion where there are betrayals great and small on every hand the actions of the Lord stand apart as He was true to Himself, His Father and His Word. In the light of all these things we can hardly fail to notice that the Remembrance was instituted "in the night in which He was betrayed" (1 Cor. 11: 23). The use of the word 'betrayed' here is surely correct since it is in the context of disciples being worthy or unworthy of the Lord. If they would be true to Him and do the opposite of betrayal, let them keep His Remembrance as He commanded.

LE. P.

BETRAYAL AND TRIAL (Mark 14: 43 - 15: 20)

From **Aberdeen**: It is a mystery how God in the person of His Son should enter a situation of trial in which sinful men must accuse Him. His ears

would hear the High Priest's accusing tone of voice; "Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?" (14: 60). The Son of God had made Himself of no reputation and thus subjected Himself to this presumptuous pretence of a trial by sinners.

Mark gives details of two occasions on which the Lord was spat upon; one when He was before the high priest, the other when He was before Pilate (14: 65; 15: 16-19), although both are also recorded in Matthew's gospel.

Mark tells us that Pilate delivered the Lord Jesus to be crucified, because he wished to content the multitude (15: 15). When God is left out of a man's reckoning, that man's judgement becomes vulnerable to the influence of the people. The same thing happened to King Saul who rejected the word of the Lord and ended obeying the voice of the people. He also "feared the people" (1 Sam. 15: 24). The motivating factor in Pilate's heart was to maintain his own position of power. By contrast the Son of God emptied Himself and was motivated by His desire to make sinners rich by His becoming poor.

James Johnson

From Ajegunle: The betrayal of Jesus Christ fulfilled the scriptures (Ps. 41: 9; 55: 12-14). It was a continuation in the series of events which had to occur before His eventual death on the cross (14: 49; Mat. 26: 53-54). The Lord Jesus knew who would betray Him (John 13: 11). Judas Iscariot was numbered with the twelve to fulfil scriptures (Jn. 13: 18) and perform his role of the betrayer. The Lord gave him several opportunities for repentance (Mk. 14: 21). We however agreed that God is sovereign over all things (Is. 46: 8-11; Rom. 9: 20-21). The circumstances prevalent in Jerusalem at that time made it necessary for a close acquaintance of the Lord Jesus to be used; it was the period of the feast when many visitors were in the city and the chief priests would not know His abode at this time.

Could it be that there was no marked distinction between the Lord and His disciples (Lk. 22: 27), hence the people sent could not recognize Him in the dark by lantern-light?

The trial was a mockery of the Jewish legal system. The custodians of the law flagrantly violated its ordinances. We observed that the composition of the court was unconstitutional. The law made provision for only one high priest at a time (Lev. 16: 32; 21: 10; Josh. 20: 6), yet at this time there were two living high priests; one was Annas, the legal high priest and the other, Caiaphas who, it is said, was installed by the Romans on deposing Annas (Jn. 18: 13, 19, 24).

The judges were biased (14: 55), the investigation was not meticulous

and was based on falsehood (14: 56-57; cp. Deut. 19: 18-21). The trial before Pilate was partial and based on sentiment (Lk. 23: 12; Mk. 15: 15).

Although, under the Jewish law, the Lord Jesus was found guilty because of the unbelief of the leaders, it is significant to note that it was the Romans who put Him to death (Jn. 18: 31-32). The Jews could have stoned Him or hanged Him (Jn. 19: 7; Deut. 21: 21-22) [Comment 1], but the Romans put to death by crucifixion (15: 15; cp. Ps. 22: 16).

F. Ntido, G. Okwena

From Birkenhead: It is solemn to consider that it was "one of the twelve" (Mk. 14: 43) who betrayed the Lord Jesus. There are signs that Judas, the keeper of the purse, may have developed a preoccupation with money and Satan, playing on this, caused him to agree to lead a band of soldiers to Jesus. It is amazing that the sign of identification Judas chose was fervent kissing of the One who was constantly loving [Comment 2].

Beforehand, the Lord had asked why He was not taken when in the temple teaching. Peter sought by violence to prevent His capture. The arresting party, expecting a struggle, had brought weapons. As all this took place the host of angels above remained unbidden from the Father's presence (Mat. 26: 53). As a lamb was led to the slaughter, He accompanied those who came to arrest Him on His way to 'drink the cup' of suffering which was according to God's purpose.

All the endeavours to find sufficient evidence to condemn the Lord to death proved fruitless until He, in the view of His Jewish accusers, condemned Himself out of His own mouth by declaring that He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed (14: 61-64).

Peter meantime had followed afar off "to see the end" (Mat. 26: 58). Fear took over from faith, and he was driven to deny all knowledge of the One to whom he had declared unswerving allegiance. This was marked by the cock crowing, surely the nadir of Peter's spiritual experience.

R. D. Williams

From Birmingham: Not only is a grave injustice present in these verses when the innocent Son of God was taken and slain, but the clumsiness in the prosecution's case makes it a debacle and sorely insults legal intelligence. "Many bare false witness against Him, and their witness agreed not together" (v. 56) and others, too, "bare false witness" (v. 57) "and not even so did their witness agree together" (v. 59).

Humanly speaking had the Lord not helped the prosecution by

maintaining silence (15: 5) we fear His case might have been won! [Comment 3]. But His purposes were loftier by far than those of those who sought His death, for "His hour had come"(14: 41) and "this was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled" (v. 49).

Pain yet greater than this befell the Saviour for "they all left Him, and fled" (v. 50). The Shepherd was about to be smitten and the sheep scattered (Zech. 13: 7); and the scripture fulfilled "all ye shall be offended in me this night" (Mat. 26: 31). "You shall be scattered, every man to his own home (AVM) and shall leave me alone" (Jn. 16: 32), "and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16: 32).

How much, too, did the suffering Saviour feel the "chameleon" nature of him whom the psalmist describes: "mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41: 9) [Comment 4]. 'Heel' may carry the thought of being tripped up by the heel. We would presume, however, that the Lord was never overtaken by circumstances, for He knew all things that were to befall Him, but in God's eternal counsels it seems the impression at least would be given of falling into a trap. If it was not an enemy... "I could have borne it" neither he that hateth Me... I would have hid myself... But it was thou, a man mine equal, my companion, and my familiar friend" (Ps. 55: 12, 13) [Comment 5].

R. Wood

From Bolton and Leigh: This was a dark night for Judas, whose name means "Praise of the Lord". This is a strange name (or meaning) for a man who performed such a deed as the betrayal of the One with whom he had associated for about 3 years. He had witnessed the power and the humility, the love and the gentleness of the Lord. Verses 10 and 11 of this chapter tell us of the arrangement made by Judas with the chief priests for the delivering up to death of the Son of God. The phrase "Judas, one of the twelve" seems to be emphasized when reference is made by the Gospel writers to this act of betrayal. Judas the treasurer, a thief, was indwelt by the Devil himself, and was called the son of perdition (probably implying utter destruction), which is a term also applied to the man of sin (2 Thes. 2: 3).

The Lord's timing was precise: He had only finished saying that His betrayer was at hand when, straightway, Judas appeared. He was not alone but came with a multitude carrying swords or staves as though for a wild animal or bandit. Yet it was a bandit they preferred in Barabbas. The Lord knew from the beginning what Judas would do in betraying Him (Jn. 6: 64; 13: 10, 11). The kiss was usually a sign of affection - a token of love [see Comment 2], and this was how Judas betrayed the Lord, bearing out the words "The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick" (Jer. 17: 9).

Despite the sorrow that the Lord must have experienced with this act of Judas¹ and all the sufferings in the garden, yet He still manifested love, grace and power in healing the ear of the High Priest's servant, one of the multitude who had come to take Him.

The denial of Peter brings to mind the words of the Lord (Lk. 22: 31-34). It seems amazing that Peter denied the Lord, for he was brought in by John who spoke to the maid (Jn. 18: 15, 16). When he denied, he was sitting with those who hated his Master. Peter must have felt the eyes of the Lord as He turned to look upon him. Peter "thought thereon" (14: 72); this means 'answering', but he did not set about trying to do anything. He went out and wept [Comment 6]. Later Peter showed true repentance; and how greatly he was used by the Lord to stablish his brethren! He followed afar off (Lk. 22: 54).

Pilate was a man who shirked responsibility and sent the Lord to Herod and his jurisdiction (Lk. 23: 7). The fear of man, of the Jews, of place and power within the Roman Empire led him to deliver Jesus up to be crucified. So Pilate delivered Him to death without even the decency to say His Name (see Jn. 19: 5). Did Pilate watch the scourging? Despite his belief in the Lord's innocence "he delivered Jesus... to be crucified (15: 15).

W. Paterson, Jnr.

From Dulwich: Characteristically of the book of Mark the betrayal is upon the reader immediately (14: 43) and gives the impression that the Lord and the disciples were quickly overwhelmed by the multitude and the profuse kisses of Judas. It is not so in John's Gospel where the Lord went out to meet them (Jn. 18: 4) and they fell in homage before Him. The striking off of the High Priest's servant's ear seems to have caused a diversion, allowing the Lord to address the chief priest, elders and the multitude (Lk. 22: 52; Mat. 26: 51).

The most notable feature of the betrayal is not the conspiracy of the leaders of Israel, nor the treachery of Judas, but the fulfilment of the Scriptures (Zech. 11: 13; Ps. 41: 9; Mk. 14: 49; Mat. 26: 56). From Lk. 22: 52, we see that the multitude were led by the chief priests and elders, who were reproved by the Lord.

Judas' motive for betrayal was covetousness (Jn. 12: 6). With the chief priests and the elders, it was envy (Mat. 27: 18) and the activator was Satan (Jn. 13: 27; Lk. 22: 3, 4).

Though it was the sword of Jehovah that was the cause of the scattering of the sheep (Mk. 14: 27; Zech. 13: 7), the forsaking by the disciples themselves, added to the betrayal and sorrow of their Master. If Mark is the author of the Gospel, then it may be that the young man who fled was Mark himself.

The accusers were those involved in the charges against God's Anointed Servant: Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel (Acts 4: 27). From this scripture we see the force of the opposition that was against Christ. The charges were blasphemy (Mk. 14: 64) and sedition (Lk. 23: 2). His witness that He was the Son of the Blessed contained the fact of His deity, and was unacceptable to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. Though the charge of sedition was implied, the real charge was blasphemy (Jn. 19: 7) [Comment 7].

The trial, if it could be called a trial, falls into six parts: before Annas (Jn. 18: 13), Caiaphas (Jn. 18: 24), the examination at daybreak (Lk. 22: 66), Pilate (Lk. 23: 1), Herod (Lk. 23: 7) and finally Pilate again (Lk. 23: 11). Mark omits the examination at daybreak and the appearance before Herod.

It is incredible that the condemnation was according to law (Jn. 19: 7) when they, the chief priests and the council were breaking the law in the face of Jehovah (Mk. 14: 55, 56; Deut. 5: 20; 19: 16-19). In this we see how the monster of envy distorted the legal, intellectual, and religious mind of the leaders of Israel and led them to exchange their Messiah for a murderer. Pilate's word, "Whom ye call King of the Jews" contained the charge that they made against Him.

The aspect of the trial we have in Mark is one of a servant. He was made to serve the convenience of Pilate to please the people (Mk. 15: 15). The barbarous scourging, the beating, the mocking and spitting, prefaced the act of judicial murder.

W. Townsend

From Innerleithen: This portion is dominated by the false action of men's mouths. Well might the Proverbs say (19: 28) "... a worthless witness mocketh at judgement: and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity". The mouth of Judas led him to take his own life. The mouth of Peter led him to promise to give his life for the One whom he denied and, in the event, he failed. Little did Judas appreciate that the seed of evil planted when he kissed his Master would rapidly multiply into the "thorn and thistle" of depraved mankind. Truth distorted in his intimate approach to the Christ was to give rise to an assault on all laws of natural justice [Comment 8] and on the law of God itself. Truth was to be denied, and He who could not maintain silence when challenged by the ultimate oath had to declare to that evil court "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power". Sitting where? At the right hand of "righteousness and judgement".

What a contrast to that coming judgement day when He who was judged shall judge His judges! If men's mouths could have been filled with the "wisdom not of this world" they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Instead, their mouths spat upon Him from whose

mouth proceeded only "words of grace", occasioned at least once by all bearing Him witness (Lk. 4: 22).

It is our submission that Peter's mouth did not utter profanities but in cursing and swearing he sought only to strengthen his false denial by invoking a curse upon himself if he was not telling the truth. (This was a Jewish practice - see Acts 23: 12). He also put himself under oath, no light action, for it was the action of God Himself in Hebrews 3: 11 [Comment 9].

K. Reilly

From Kilmarnock: Judas came that night not as a helper of his Master, but as a betrayer. He came to do a loathsome work for they came to arrest the Sinless One as an evildoer. That Judas had to identify Him with a kiss indicates that they did not know Him. Where does the kiss of Judas occur in the order of events? (See Jn. 18). (See Paisley paper and Comment 14].

At the trial there were no defence witnesses; only false witnesses who could not agree. When the High Priest asked the Lord to reply to the witnesses, His silence spoke of the calm of the haven that He found in His Father, the Blessed. When He did reply to the haughty High Priest He answered with meekness that He was indeed the Son of God and, in addition, that they would see Him sitting at the right hand of power (14: 62).

As soon as it was light the Sanhedrin consulted and bound Jesus and delivered Him to Pilate. Under Roman rule the Jewish rulers could not carry out the death sentence [Comment 1]. The Jews considered the Lord a blasphemer, but this charge was irrelevant as far as the Romans were concerned and so they changed the charge to the capital offence of treason, alleging that the Lord was a rival king to Caesar.

The chief priests themselves were guilty of blasphemy, the sin of which they accused the Lord. They incited the crowd to shout, "Crucify", many of whom, no doubt, had shouted "Hosanna" when He rode into the city. The chief priests may have thought they were achieving their purpose but instead the Lord Jesus was doing what He had come to do in providing mankind with an escape from eternal death.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: We asked the age-old question, why did Judas betray his Master? Some have sought to present Judas' act in a less reprehensible light by saying he wanted to force the Lord to be more like the Messiah they were expecting. Scripture does not give this view much support, presenting Judas as an unsaved man (Jn. 13: 10, 11), and a greedy one, who stole from the others and saw another opportunity to make money.

His treachery was treachery indeed as he was found not only on the side of the enemy and working for him, but actually indwelt by Satan himself! It would have been better for him if he had not been born. The Lord indicated to Pilate that Judas' sin was worse than that of Pilate. Covetousness is a dreadful thing; this shows where it can lead. We had greater difficulty in understanding why the Lord chose Judas to be in the close circle of the Twelve [Comment 10].

The Sanhedrin found the Lord guilty of blasphemy at their highly irregular trial, but were powerless to enforce their verdict. Pilate was not likely to be at all interested in a detail of their religious law and so the charge of treason was trumped up. Pilate, a stubborn man, saw through this and proposed release, but was prevented from doing so by threats (of a report to Rome) and political pressure. So he stands condemned for all time as the man who declared the Lord Jesus Christ "Not Guilty", but then had Him executed.

We reminded ourselves that Satan was attacking Peter and sifting him [Comment 11]. Peter, still trusting his own instincts, had followed the Lord out of loyalty and found himself warming himself by a fire in the courtyard. Perhaps the conversation of those around that fire was fiercely against the Lord or maybe there was talk of how easy the whole operation had been. Peter cracked under pressure but was still able to weep tears of remorse and repentance.

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: Mark underlines the solemnity and sorrow of the Lord with, "one of the twelve". Judas was one of that privileged band who companied with Him for 3 years. Ps. 41: 9; 55: 12-14, and 109: 8-18 were understood as fulfilled in Judas [Comment 12]. We wondered which scriptures were fulfilled in 14: 49 [Comment 13].

Mk. 14: 51, 52 are inglorious verses. The young man (Mark?) wished to be close to the Lord and followed Him, but his courage failed in the crisis and he ran away. We, too, shall fail in the crisis situation, the public occasion, if we fail in little things in our private lives.

All the disciples fled. Peter followed Him "afar off" thinking no doubt, that he was safer "afar off" but found that, not only did he lose the blessing of following with the Lord but, worse, self-preservation led to his denying the Lord. We agreed that, among other things, following afar off leads to seeing more faults in our brethren.

As to the sequence of the events, Mark says, Judas straightway came to Jesus and kissed Him, but John says, "Jesus, therefore... went forth... 'Whom seek ye?'... 'Jesus of Nazareth'!... 'I am He'!... Judas... with them... ". We suggest that Jesus, the Lord of all (including

every situation) first "went forth... " and afterwards Judas kissed Him [Comment 14].

One of the maids refers to the Lord as "the Nazarene, Jesus" and, in her case, the words imply hostility and contempt. The young man (16: 6) also speaks of "Jesus, the Nazarene" and for him the words identified One who was loved and adored for His grace. The same words mean such different things still! Compare Saul's experience when he heard the words, "I am Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 22: 4-8; 26: 9).

Pilate marvelled at the silence of the Lord in the face of "many accusations". The Lord had a dignity, a calm, a majesty that could not be hidden throughout His sufferings at men's hands. Pilate also "perceived that for envy the chief priests had delivered Him up". Men are exposed for what they are in the presence of Christ. Finally Pilate wished to content the multitude, a fatal wish for Pilate and for us! Paul said "If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1: 10).

In the soldiers' mockery there was cruel, derisive laughter. It was laughter in that they were making the Man look a fool (as they thought), and laughter that they were inflicting pain on Him. This, and the crown of thorns, the purple garment, the smiting of the head with a reed followed by the bowing of the knees and the mock of worship were all intended to provoke to anger. They expected feeble attempts at retaliation. They looked for a last, loud laugh of "triumph" when the Victim was provoked. The expected "triumph" never came. They mocked, but the Lord is not mocked. In their mocking they were in effect saying, "You are the last person we would ever have as King! You are the last person we would ever worship as God!" But for us, He is the King, eternal, incorruptible. He is the King of Grace. For us He is God, beside Whom "There is none else"

John H. Johnson

COMMENTS

1. (Ajegunle and Kilmarnock): The Old Testament law made provision for the stoning to death of someone who committed blasphemy (Lev. 24: 16). This was cited by the Jews: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (Jn. 19: 7). However, they admitted that under the Roman administration they did not have the power to impose the death penalty - "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (Jn. 18: 31). This power lay with the procurator, Pilate, and for this cause the Lord Jesus was taken to him. As Kilmarnock friends say, before him the charge had to be one of sedition, rather than blasphemy.

P. L. H.

There were two occasions, both in the Temple in Jerusalem, when the Jews sought to stone the Lord (Jn. 8: 59; 10: 31) and one at Nazareth when

they would also execute summary judgement (Lk. 4: 29). Paul, too, they sought to kill (Acts 21: 30, 31) in a similar fashion. If they were prepared to plead a reason (Jn. 18: 31) that they were happy to ignore on other occasions and declined Pilate's invitation to carry out the sentence themselves (Jn. 19: 6, 7) then their delivering the Lord up to Roman Law and its cruel punishment for treason is all the more sinister and wicked.

2. (Birkenhead): British people, who tend only to kiss those to whom they are bound by birth or marriage (or prospective marriage), are apt to get confused here. One suspects that citizens of countries where kissing is a form of greeting (and lips, for example, may never touch flesh) are not so. This was a greeting and the love that was simulated by Iscariot was the love that underlies the hearty greeting of friends. I E P

An example of a kiss either as a special greeting between friends or as a mark of honour between host and guest is Lk. 7: 45. (Could it be reasoned from Rom. 16: 16 that, since the verse immediately preceding includes salutation to two sisters, a kiss was customary even between sexes for this purpose?) Further, Rabbinic sources show that a Rabbi was saluted in this way by his pupils, and Judas uses this title. But we agree that his conduct was made worse by the profuseness of the greeting (see RVM). M. A.

3. (Birmingham): This might have been the case had He been subjected to a fair trial before a judge who impartially weighed the evidence, but this was not the case; political considerations were much more important than juridical ones. P. L. H

We add that later, when the case reached Pilate, our understanding is that by Roman law, the accused was deemed guilty until a defence was accepted. It is most touching that not one person was found to speak in defence of our Lord.

M. A.

4. (Birmingham): "To lift the heel" generally means to kick, and expresses violence and contempt.

5. (Birmingham): Although the expression "my familiar friend" appears in both Ps. 49 and Ps. 55, it is difficult to see in the latter, within the context of the whole psalm, an explicit prophecy of the behaviour of Judas. P. L. H.

6. (Bolton and Leigh): Scholars have found the Greek word here very difficult, hence the wide difference between RV text and margin; but the version most favoured since the RV has been "he set to and wept". This underlies RSV and NIV "broke down". *M,*

7. (Dulwich): See Liverpool's paper. The charge was changed to get the verdict they wanted.

8. (Innerleithen): We assume that by "natural justice", friends mean "Gentiles which have no law" doing "by nature the things of the law" (Rom. 2: 14).

9. (Innerleithen): This implies that Peter was in control of himself and acting deliberately. Surely the opposite is the case. Impetuosity and desperation got the better of him.

10. (Liverpool): At the level of the sovereignty of God, this is impossible for us to answer, but at a simpler level, Judas was chosen that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

11. (Liverpool): Note that the 'sifting' of Lk. 22: 31 refers to all the disciples collectively, of whom Peter was one.

*I. III. **

12. (Paisley): Perhaps a distinction should be made between scriptures that are 'applicable' to a certain person or event, and those that are 'fulfilled'. The former implies that they can legitimately be used in reference to an event occurring later than the time of writing, the latter predictive intent relating to a specific incident. While Ps. 109: 8 can properly be applied to Judas, according to Acts 1: 20, is there any reason why vv. 9-18 should be applied to him especially? The first part of the Psalm seems more to be a general malediction against wicked men of whom Judas was a particular, and serious, instance.

P. L. H.

13. (Paisley): The companion verses in Matthew's gospel (26: 50-56) show that the Lord was speaking generally of those scriptures which foretold His being taken and crucified.

14. (Paisley): The conclusion is true, but Iscariot must have given his sign, the kiss, before the Lord identified Himself.

LE. P.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE TEMPTATION OF OUR LORD

It is cause for concern that Mr. Burrows, and others appear to have difficulty in accepting a complete incarnation (BS 8906 p.16).

Heb. 4: 15 says "One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are". This verse is for our consolation and encouragement. It is not a challenge of faith and although the writer qualifies the words by the words "yet without sin" we can only conclude that "without sin" would not diminish the experience of the temptation in any way. Otherwise there would be no point in writing the verse.

If Gethsemane teaches us that Christ did not rely on the certainty of the outcome but faced each temptation as a battle to be won, this should be our primary approach to understanding His temptations. The temptations could not be complete unless the Lord could experience the threat posed by the temptation and therefore we must assume that He would feel the strain of the possibility of defeat and failure. This is an essential part of human experience. Heb. 4: 15 would be meaningless if it excluded this.

We can note the Lord's experiences were very real to the disciples. They had no doubt that he was a man like each one of them. Their doubts were whether He was also God. Could he sustain his command of each situation? "Don't go to Jerusalem" they pleaded. They believed it possible that our Lord might succumb not just to sin [Comment 1] but also to death - both utterly impossible, but we would surely accept the latter. All things are possible to God.

We can accept that there was foreknowledge of the outcome and that the certainty of the successful outcome to God's plan could have been deduced by the Lord as well as the disciples. However, the remarkable thing is that neither was swayed by such certainties. Neither should we be swayed or we will spoil the excitement of Christ's victory and we shall fail to understand its significance.

P. J. Stoner (Newcastle upon Tyne)

Comment 1. No scripture says that the disciples said this, or that they ever thought the Lord might succumb to sin. Indeed, John 8: 46 might suggest the opposite. Mat. 16: 22, perhaps gets nearest to the first, but we know that Peter spoke as the mouth-piece of the Devil. *J E P*

Editors invited correspondence on this issue, and the above letter gives the opposite point of view to that previously expressed. The matter has aroused controversy since at least the third century and still does. It is such a profound and difficult matter that Editors have thought it best to give their separate comments. *Ed*

Those of the contrary view (see also Editors' statement BS 8904 p. 52, including scriptures cited) still maintain that the temptation of the Lord was profoundly felt, and was "complete", even although, because He chose day by day to live in perfect harmony with the Father's counsel, it was not possible that His will could be moved. In the wilderness temptation the strain came from the effort to resist the deceitfulness of the Adversary, while physically alone and in hunger.

In the Garden, the conflict included overcoming dismay at the nearness of His bearing sin and its judgement, the prospect of being forsaken, desertion by His own, and more. Are we not taught that, when under trial, to think of the possibility of failure is to *invite* defeat; and rather we should seek the perspective of the sanctuary (Ps. 73), take heed to our own steps (1 Cor. 10: 12), resist the devil (Jam. 4: 7) and reckon with the joy of patience having its perfect work (Jam. 1: 2, 3)?

As to the last paragraph contributed above, in a trial of strength, a contestant who is in no doubt about having the power to overcome can nonetheless be tested in the extreme to direct all his faculties, understanding, skill and determination to the given purpose. As applied to our Lord, we would understand that He consistently, trial by trial dispelled fears, doubts, and allurements by ardently pursuing God's purpose in each task, with unbroken faith in His Father in heaven.

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Bible Studies

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EDITORIAL

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FORSAKEN

The Lord Jesus knew the weakness of His disciples only too well, but only gently upbraided them for their lack of faith when they showed it. When His crucifixion approached He told them they would desert Him, but still went to Jerusalem, knowing what awaited Him there. He was taken by the chief priests' mob "and they all left Him, and fled". Thus He was without human support while He was humiliated and tortured by the soldiers; as He looked round He, who was so well versed in the Scriptures, must have thought of the Messianic psalm "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Ps. 69: 20). In all this, though, He found his support in His God and Father. He gave comfort that men could never give.

There was worse to come, for this support was to be withdrawn, and in its place was to be put that implacable opposition against sin — the divine wrath — that was directed against Christ because He was "made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5: 21). The nature of His suffering here is beyond us, but if we accept that the suffering of hell is that of separation from God, we may perceive a little of the anguish of His cry in the Aramaic tongue "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

Though we are sorry that our sins reduced the Christ to this, yet we can be glad because of the great miracles of divine transposal. He who was rich became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich (2 Cor. 8: 9). He shared our place that we might share His; "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb. 2: 10). The Lord Jesus knew separation so that we might never know it, and we rejoice that He who was forsaken will never forsake us (Heb. 13: 5).

P. L. H.

DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION (Mark 15: 21 - 16: 20)

From Aberdeen: Before crucifixion the Lord was offered alcohol (drugged with myrrh — ~~Ed~~ to dull His senses. He refused the mixture because

He was about to experience the full cost of bearing sin. Both His body and His mind would remain fully sensitive to the pain of the cross (King David had said he would not offer a burnt offering to the Lord "without cost". "For the full price" he bought all that pertained to the burnt offering in the place of the threshing floor of Oman the Jebusite; 1 Chr. 21: 21-25). At the place called Calvary our Lord Jesus experienced the full cost of purchasing our redemption.

The onlookers saw Him as a defeated man hanging on a cross, between two others in a similar plight. So they mocked Him: "Ha! thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself". At the end of those hours of pain and mocking we hear the cry of pain from the eternal Being: "My God, my God, why didst thou forsake me?" (Mk. 15: 34 RVM). It was not a cry of dissent but of anguish — for He had known the full price of bearing away the sin of the world.

James Johnson

From Birkenhead: We can grasp the toll that the physical suffering had taken by seeing Simon compelled to take over the bearing of the cross. We read of Jesus' refusal to accept an anodyne so that His mental powers could remain unclouded as He ministered lovingly to the needs of others. We recognize His obedience to the Father's will as He failed to respond to the taunts of those challenging Him to display His power and come down from the cross. He knew that to respond to their provocation was not possible if He were to be the Saviour of the world. We can sense the agony as He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, by meditating on His cry of dereliction. We marvel at the unbelief of the Jews who, had they been alert, would have recognized prophecies fulfilled concerning the promised Saviour. We can be clear that Jesus "gave up the ghost" (Greek 'expired') no one took His life, He laid it down. We notice the veil rent, marking the departure of the divine presence from the temple [Comment 1].

There were women "beholding", carefully observing all that happened and their involvement in events continues. After the burial by loving friends who clearly showed their allegiance to Jesus, these women make their journey to the tomb to anoint their loved one's body with spices, and are startled to find the stone rolled away and hear the angel declare "He is risen; He is not here". Paul declared to the Corinthians that if Christ has not been raised they were still in their sins. With this in mind it is good that we can rest on the testimony of so many (1 Cor. 15: 5-8) that Jesus is alive.

R. D. Williams

From Bolton and Leigh: Mark's record of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ shows some interesting details exclusive to Mark's account. These are:

1. He names Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus (15: 21).

2. He records **Pilate's surprise at the speedy death of Christ and his action in having the death verified** before **granting the body** to Joseph of Arimathaea (15: 42-45).
3. **The burial cloth and spices brought by Joseph, the two Marys and Salome, were not items already in their possession but were specific purchases made at the time of the Lord's death (15: 46; 16: 1).**
4. Peter in particular **was to be told of the Lord's resurrection and intended appointment with the disciples (16: 7).**

We speculated as to **what Mark's reasons were for giving the above details. With reference to No. 1 above, we noted that the R. V. Bible and others give a cross reference to Rom. 16: 13, where the name Rufus occurs again. If this is the same Rufus who was Simon of Cyrene's son, then we have a tenuous link between Mark's gospel and the church of God in Home. Since early Christian writers — Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria — suggest that Mark's gospel was written in Rome, might this be a small piece of internal evidence to support that claim? In similar vein, the same early writers and others suggest that Mark's source of information for his gospel was the Apostle Peter. Would the specific mention of Peter in No. 4 above be a pointer to this being so? Be that as it may, we felt that this particular message to Peter showed the Lord's compassion towards him as Peter was no doubt filled with remorse at his recent denial of his Lord.**

In most countries today, **a signed death certificate must be registered to verify officially that a person is dead. We might view No. 2 above as a certified record of the death of Christ. This statement by Mark rules out any possibility of the Lord's death and resurrection being contrived; Jesus did not just swoon on the cross, He was certified as dead.**

No. 3 above **is a detail wholly in keeping with the character of Mark's gospel. He consistently presents Christ as the One who served and ministered to others, so here Mark, himself a servant and minister to others (see Acts 13: 5), records that they, some at cost to themselves, were carrying out what they thought were their last acts of service for their dead Master. Perhaps the lesson for us in this is that service for Christ will involve some personal cost.**

Alex Reid

From Derby: Later in Mark 16 we see the unbelief of those who had not seen, but after they saw Him their belief was unshakeable. It was this strength the disciples were given in Mk. 16: 17, 18 to help the inception of the kingdom of God on earth. Note Mk. 15: 43 "looking for the kingdom of God". In Mk. 16: 17, 18 we have an account of the gifts which were to be with those who believe; for instance, "speak with new tongues". This is *not* another language or a heavenly language, but rather it is a manner of speaking with boldness and clarity when filled with the Holy Spirit [Comment 2].

It is interesting to note that Mark is the only one who records the incident of Simon of Cyrene. It was not just anyone there at the time but obviously someone who was known to Mark. It is possible that the Rufus mentioned in Rom. 16: 13 could have been the son of Simon of Cyrene. It is most likely that carrying the Lord's cross had a lasting impression on Simon, and he was able to pass it on to his children. In Mark 15: 40, 41 it records "there were also women beholding from afar". They were the women who "ministered unto Him" and here we see the unseen side of service to the Lord. It was they who gave Him His physical needs such as food to eat and water to drink.

In Mk. 15: 36 it was noted that the reason why "one ran, and filling a sponge full of vinegar [sour wine —Eds]... gave Him to drink, " was because, as we see in John 19: 28, Jesus said "I thirst. " It was also noted that there was a practical reason behind this because Jesus needed water to wet His lips in order to utter the triumphant cry, "It is finished: ". However, it was also done in order to fulfill those words of prophecy in Ps. 69: 21, "And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink".

When the "veil of the temple was rent in twain" it brought an end to one era and started another era [See Comment 1]. Now God does not live in buildings but His Holy Spirit dwells in hearts of men. No other person could have torn the veil in the temple, therefore it indicates that it was an act of God.

When the women came with spices, it proves they were not expecting the Lord to be raised. We only have to think of the rich man in Hades who yearned for someone to rise from the dead to warn his friends. As we see when Christ arose from the dead, there were still people who did not believe. Today of course it is the Spirit of God who reveals this wonderful truth of the resurrection.

In Acts 8: 13 it speaks of signs and miracles, but in 1 Cor. 13: 10 the signs were done away [Comment 3]. The gifts were used for a short time only. R. J. Foster, CIV. Conway

From Dulwich: The question from the Lord on the cross "Why hast thou forsaken Me?" is recorded in Matthew and Mark only. As the four gospels depict four aspects of the Lord's death, seen also in the early chapters of Leviticus, we would gather that Matthew and Mark emphasize sin and trespass, and think that the question "why" is to do with sin and trespass.

Though this is quite in contrast to Job's experience, which was a trial of faith and a challenge to Satan (Job 1: 8), yet in Job 29, 30 and 31, as

he sums up his case, the question "why?" arises. God is justified in His judgement, and so Job had to rest on that. In these chapters there is a parallel to the question "why?". We enter not only into his physical suffering (Job 30: 17) and his sufferings from those who had contempt for him (Job 30: 9, 10), but above all, the silence of heaven (Job 30: 19-23; 31: 35). In the very depth of his being he cries out to God.

The joy of fellowship between Job and his family was only a memory (Job. 29: 1-9). This last is very significant, as the cutting off of fellowship with His God was the greatest suffering of Jesus on the cross. Of course the parallel is inadequate; the depth of sorrow of Christ on the cross goes far beyond the humanity of the sufferer [Comment 91].

The words in Mk. 15: 37 "that Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost", are translated in the N. I. V. "Breathed His last". This expression is not consistent with other scriptures which imply that Jesus went into death (27: 50; Lk. 23: 46; Jn. 19: 30; Rev. 1: 18; RVM) [Comment 4].

That Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, (Mk. 16: 9) is emphasized in v. 2 as very early. He appears to Mary Magdalene first. Was this appearance to Mary Magdalene previous to that in Mat. 28: 9? [Comment 5] and that in 1 Cor. 15: 5?

W. Townsend

From Innerleithen: We are not told much about Simon of Cyrene. Whether his son Rufus was the same Rufus as the one to whom Paul sent a salutation in Romans 16: 13 seems questionable. On the other hand the fact that Mark, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, mentions him must have been of some significance. Simon was pressed into service, not because the Lord Jesus was unable to carry the cross but because it was a Roman custom to lay hold upon someone to perform this act [See Paisley paper].

Golgotha or Calvary is sometimes described as a hill or a mountain but such a description is hardly justified, it being no more than eighteen feet high [Comment 61]. Mark does not give so many details of what took place at the cross as do the other Gospel writers but like them he relates numerous incidents which were in fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures. Had the Saviour come down from the cross in response to the taunts of the chief priests and scribes (v. 32) it would have made no difference [Comment 7]. Belief must come first, not seeing first followed by belief. At the Lord's birth, the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds as they kept the night watches but at His death, from the sixth to the ninth hour when the sun would be at its highest, darkness enveloped the scene.

It is a solemn reflection that in contrast to the large numbers in attendance at many burials there were but four persons present at that of the Lord Jesus, namely Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus [Comment 10].

The Lord's teaching recorded in 16: 16 shows that whilst baptism is not necessary for salvation it is closely linked with belief. Unbelief results in condemnation. The signs of verses 17 and 18 accompanied the Lord's working at the commencement of the new dispensation and were subsequently phased out.

K. Reilly

From Kilmarnock: We have a cross to bear in our lives. Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross is a picture of the disciple's privilege. Our cross will sometimes be heavy as the cross was that day, and people will throw insults and taunts as they did that day, but Jesus "opened not His mouth" (Is. 53: 7). "Save thyself", they cried. But how could He save Himself when He was dying for sinners?

"Truly this man was the Son of God!" (v. 39). The centurion's words echo down the years from the cross to us today - God Himself offered as the sacrifice of the New Covenant!

Whether we are open or secret followers of the Lord Jesus, how boldly we should stand up for Him! Joseph of Arimathaea was a secret follower (Jn. 19: 38), but he went boldly in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then, with cloth specially bought, he buried the Lord in the tomb he had had hewn out for himself. Joseph's meticulous care in the interment of Jesus shows his love for his Lord. The disciples could not have undertaken **this** work — they lacked the courage, the standing and the resources. God has His men for the fulfilment of each of His purposes. Pilate was surprised that Jesus was "dead already". Did he expect the Lord to save Himself? [Comment 8].

The young man at the tomb told the women to tell the disciples "and Peter". That Peter had not forfeited his title to be a disciple after his denial of Jesus is indicated in this special mention of him which would doubtless be a great consolation to Peter.

The gospel is a universal message for all mankind. Rejection of Jesus by Jew or Gentile will mean punishment in Hell. The disciples were empowered to perform miracles — confirmation that the message was divine.

Drew Ramage, David Cranson

From Liverpool: *To Golgotha.* The wine mingled with myrrh which Jesus refused was some kind of anaesthetic and it was not His intention to go to the cross stupefied in any way. This is not to be confused with the drink given to Him in answer to His cry of thirst later.

The Crucifixion. We noted the irony in the words of the chief priests and teachers of the law (vv. 31-32) — more true than they could possibly have realised! The jeers from the passers-by threw contempt on (1) His sayings (2) the relationship He claimed with the Father (3) the salvation He offered and (4) His rightful relationship to Israel. Edersheim points out how unusual it was for Sanhedrists to attend such an event and supposes their motivation to be to try and limit the damage done by the inscription placed on the cross by Pilate, after his refusal to amend it. In quoting from Psalm 22: 1 the Lord was doing two things (1) expressing His dismay at the breaking of the eternal communion on account of sin [Comment 9] and (2) identifying Himself with the experience described prophetically by the Psalmist.

Death. The darkness implies that even the creation was ashamed of what was taking place, and that God was drawing a curtain over the sufferings of His Son when He made Him to be sin for us. But more than that is indicated. It expresses the utter loneliness of the Christ, undergoing rejection by God and experiencing the dreadful darkness that lost sinners will know. In such darkness there is neither time nor distance, only awfulness. The darkness contrasted sharply with the heavenly lights and bright star at His birth.

Alive! After the hate and cruelty of the crucifixion we rejoice that God has His people for every occasion and Joseph and the women had an important role to play. We rejoiced too at the empty tomb: the stone rolled away, not to let the Lord out, but to let them see He had gone. The resurrection of our Lord is fundamental to our faith.

Postscript. Peter may have felt that what he had done was unforgivable but the words of the heavenly messenger — "... and Peter" indicate the depth of the Lord's forgiveness when we are truly sorry.

D. J. Webster

From Paisley: *The Carpenter and the Cross.* Mark, who reveals that the Lord was known as "the carpenter" (6: 3), now records how He had to be relieved of the rough beam. Matthew, Mark and Luke emphasize Simon's part, as though they describe something that would not have been expected. Further, there is no mention of such an arrangement being made for the thieves. There is also evidence from the period of the crucified being required to carry his own cross-beam. Surely this underlines the physical weakness of the Lord, and makes the power of

the final cry of triumph the more amazing. In addition, the mention of Alexander and Rufus reads as though these (though common names) were well known disciples at the time of Mark's writing, so that this detail would be strength to faith for many.

The Use of Present Tenses. Mark's use of the present interspersed with the past, as in 15: 21-25, has been called a sign of unrefined style. The scholar W. L. Lane, however, sees it as having a higher, deliberate function, along with simple sentence-construction and direct speech, as bringing the reader closer to the events described. This goes with the frequency with which Mark records people's feeling (e. g. 1: 27; 2: 12; 9: 5; 10: 24, 32) to make a vivid and colourful account.

The Hour of Darkness and Death. Unlike the sacrifice placed upon Israel's altars, the Lord had full consciousness through at least three hours. Where the Spirit wishes us to have precise knowledge, no doubt is left. We note the exactness of "the ninth hour" to which the darkness extended, Matthew, Mark and Luke being in exact agreement and consistent with John. It was then that the cry of desolation came. The pattern of narration in all four Gospels suggests that the Lord's receiving the vinegar, His final cry and death occurred directly after the ninth hour.

Perhaps we have given less attention to the time during which the body hung in death until "even was now come". What relief then to find that some came forward to lead (perhaps most unexpectedly) in asking for the body so that it should be buried with respect! "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God... will with the temptation make also the way of escape. "

Ai. Archibald

COMMENTS

1. (Birkenhead): At least, the rending of the veil marked the absence of the divine presence from the Temple. The Lord's statement in Mat. 23: 38 "your house is left unto you desolate" is often taken as declarative, dating the departure of the divine presence from the time of the statement, but the context appears to refer more to the people than the Temple. If this statement is not taken as fixing the time, we cannot be sure of it, but it does seem appropriate that it should coincide with the Lord's death....

The divine presence must have been in the Temple when the Lord kept the Passover, else He would have been wrong to do it. Had the departure taken place prior to the Trial, then the Chief Priests would have had no divinely ordained position to flout. Beyond that we have to face issues like, did God accept the morning and evening oblations, or perhaps just the morning one, of that day when their Antitype was simultaneously sacrificed? We should note, however, that the new dispensation, as with most new dispensational changes, did not begin immediately the earlier one ended.

I. E. P.

2. **(Derby):** Scriptural references other than Acts 2: 4, 6 do not make it clear what kind of language was used, but the writer shares the opinion of F. F. Bruce that "the tongues of 1 Cor. 14 were 'strange tongues' to the hearers (as the quotation of Is. 28: 11 in 1 Cor. 14: 21 implies), and so could not be understood unless they were interpreted; the tongues of Acts 2 were foreign to the speakers, but immediately recognized by the hearers as the languages wherein we were born". One would think that when Paul spoke of the tongues "of angels" (1 Cor. 13: 1) he was using a figure of speech such as we do when calling someone 'silver-tongued'.
 P. L. H

Due weight should be given to the view that has been taught in the Churches of God that 1 Cor. 14 shows that he who speaks in tongues (by the Spirit) understands what he is saying, though there may be no other present who does, unless one can interpret. Thus in 14: 2, "no man understandeth" means no-one other than the speaker. In v. 4 he "edifieth himself", which surely implies understanding himself, since edification is not merely emotional encouragement. If to be profited the church needs the ministries listed in v. 6, does not the tongue-speaker need these to be edified himself? "My understanding is unfruitful" (v. 14) then means that he understands himself, but this has no effect upon those who hear. *M.*
 3. **(Derby):** This goes rather beyond the scripture. It says "when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away". It may well be that "that which is perfect" refers to the written canon of Holy Scripture, thus doing away with the spectacular gifts of 1 Cor. 13: 8 on its completion, but this is not the only possible interpretation of v. 10, and it is therefore unwise to be dogmatic about the removal of the gifts.

We agree that we should not be dogmatic about the reasons for the removal of these gifts but insist that we should be dogmatic about the fact of their removal. Indeed, miracle-working has always been episodic in time and, therefore, we would be astonished if it did not cease after a brief period. See U. S. 1945, pp 4-6, 94-96, 101-102. Amongst many reasons showing the fact that such miracle-working does not happen today, the present writer has found the following to be convincing: *P. L. H.*

- (i) the signs are called signs of the Apostles (2 Cor. 12: 12) and, since there are no apostles today, there are no signs either;
- (ii) miracle-working is associated with new developments in God's dealings in association with His House, whereas today is a day of remnant times without miracle-working;
- (iii) miracle-working will be seen again, after the end of this dispensation (Joel 2: 28-32). If it did not cease and continue to be absent to the end of the dispensation, we would not recognize its starting-up again in the next. *I. E. P.*

4. **(Dulwich):** There is no inconsistency here. The Greek word is *exepneusen* which literally means 'breathed out' or 'expired'; the same word is used in Lk. 23: 46. In Mat. 27: 50 and Jn. 19: 30 it is made more explicit that the Lord did so voluntarily, but there is no conflict with the other two gospels.

5. **Dulwich:** The appearance of the Lord in Mark 16: 9 seems to be the same as that in Jn. 20: 14-17, and hence to precede that of Mat. 28: 9.

6. **(Innerleithen):** Since no-one knows for certain where the actual spot was, it is not possible to substantiate a statement like this. Two alternative places are suggested, the site of the Church of Holy Sepulchre and Gordon's Calvary, or the Garden Tomb.

7. **(Innerleithen):** We take it that friends mean that it would have made no difference to the scribes and Pharisees. If the Lord had come down from the cross, of course, it would have made all the difference in the world; it would have vitiated the entire divine plan for our redemption. This necessitated the Lord's death for us; belief in a work that had not been done and a person who failed to complete what he had begun would be futile.

8. **(Kilmarnock):** The answer is probably at a simpler level than this; Pilate expected the Lord to stay alive longer, as the thieves had done.

P. L. H.

9. **(Dulwich and Liverpool):** Without wishing to reopen the discussion of IIS 1981, pp 141, etc.; 1982, pp. 18-19, it may be that friends in Dulwich have taken the safest course here. In view of the impossibility of communion within the Godhead being broken, it is safest to say that the extent of the forsaking at Calvary lies within the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3: 16) and so cannot be understood by us. *LE. P.*

10. **(Innerleithen):** Need the special mention of the two Marys in Mt. and Mk. limit Luke's statement that "the women, which had come with Him out of Galilee,... beheld the tomb" (23: 55)? Lk. 23: 49 may suggest that more than two of these were prepared to follow to the tomb, though the Marys maybe named because they were well known.

M. A.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

From Aberdeen: The sabbath of Mark 15: 42 — was it the seventh day of the week, or was it a different sabbath from the normal weekly sabbath? (Compare John 19: 31).

This suggestion has attracted the writer, because it disposes of the difficulty of Mat. 12: 40, that the Son of Man was "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth", by placing the crucifixion on a Thursday. Unfortunately, one knows of no evidence that 'irregular', non-weekly sabbaths ever existed, so the explanation is not valid. Furthermore, it is clear from Luke 23: 54 - 24: 1 that three consecutive days are referred to. F. F. Bruce explains the reference to the 'high day' as follows: "That sabbath day was a high day" because it was not only the weekly sabbath but also the day of the passover, *by the temple reckoning*. *

P. L. H.

This sabbath was surely a high day (1) because it was the first day of unleavened bread, the 15th of the month (Lev. 23: 6). (The Lord was crucified the day before, the 14th = both the Passover and the Preparation = Thursday evening to Friday evening.) (2) because of association with the Passover, which was also a "day of unleavened bread" (Mk. 14: 12) and

was by that time included in the title "the feast of unleavened bread" (Lk. 22: 1). See also BS 1963 pp. 27, 28 and 187, 188.

M. A.

From Kilmarnock: How does Mark 16: 17-20 relate to the present day?

We presume that the miraculous signs are the point of the question. They undoubtedly did occur at the beginning of the Christian era, but whether they were intended to continue throughout the new covenant period must be considered in the light of New Testament scripture. Paul warned the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13: 8) that miraculous manifestations would cease at some time, and there are hardly any in the latter part of the book of Acts, except for Paul's shaking off the viper in Malta. It does appear that they were given for evidential reasons when the gospel was first preached, but seldom subsequently. Some groups in the southern United States have sought to handle snakes and drink poison deliberately, on the basis of this scripture, but it does not seem consonant with God's ways deliberately to court danger in this way. It would be rash to say that these abilities could not be given today, since we cannot limit the power of God, but we might say that they normally are not.

P. L. H.

A question from Bolton and Leigh on Mark 16: 19-20 as Scripture has been transferred to 9001 through lack of space. Eds.

COULD THE LORD JESUS SUCCUMB TO TEMPTATION?

The issue. Before discussing a topic of this sort one must make absolutely sure what the issue in question is. The mind instinctively recoils from anything which implies that the Lord Jesus was anything other than completely pure and holy, and this feeling is founded on scripture, e. g. 1 Pet. 2: 22. However the question is not whether the Lord *did* or *would* commit sin, for it is common ground that He did not, but whether He *could*. Was it within His ability to commit sin, or was it something which He was without the power to do?

Temptation. In Greek, as in English, "to tempt" could mean either "to put to the test" or "to try to entice (a person) to do evil", and the shade of meaning in a particular case can only be deduced from the context. When the Lord was tempted, and He replied to Satan "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God", it is obvious that only the former sense could be meant (since the Lord is saying that He should not tempt God by putting Him to the test). Satan's temptations to the Lord were of both sorts (Mat. 4: 1-11); there was both testing of His resolution and enticement to gain His kingdom by a less painful, but illegitimate, method. It should be noted here that the fact that the Lord Jesus was both God and man did not prevent His being tempted, although Scripture says that "God cannot be tempted with evil" (Jas. 1: 13).

To what did temptation appeal? Unlike ourselves, the Lord Jesus had no sin in Him (1 John 3: 5), so there was nothing of that sort for Satan to appeal to (John 14: 30), but there are many normal human desires which are not sinful in themselves, but can be so if indulged in in excess, or in illegitimate circumstances. To take an unemotive example, the desire for food is not sin, but gluttony is. Hence it is suggested that the Lord Jesus could be tempted to satisfy legitimate desires in illegitimate circumstances. The temptation to make bread from stones was an example of this.

Could He succumb to temptation? Again, it must be acknowledged that the eternal purpose of God would have been frustrated had the Lord sinned, and such an action would have been totally inconsistent with His character. However, unless the Lord had the power to take wrong actions, there was no suffering trial involved, for He would have had no alternative but to do what He did. One cannot see how He can have felt the pressure of temptation if there was no possibility of His yielding to it. Scripture specifically says that "He Himself hath suffered being tempted" (Heb. 2: 18), and that He is "one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4: 15). It is contended that in this latter passage *choris hamartias* means 'without the result of sin', rather than 'except for those of sin'. The Lord's High Priestly work is the more valuable because He understands the struggles of those He represents; and in His case temptation would have impinged upon Him with special sharpness because of His own purity.

This latter point is one of very great importance in the theology of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ was Jehovah the Saviour, God Himself undertaking a work which could be done by no other, and part of this was the great mystery that God the Son — the One with Life Himself should pass through death. We must be very careful not to detract from the true deity of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, He was the archetypal man — the second man, the last Adam, and by active devotion of His mind, will and personality He took His position as leader of a new race. In positive acts of will, assisted by the word of God (Ps. 119: 11), He rejected the wrong and chose the right. He thus understands all our difficulties, as a true man, for He had had the same problems, and has overcome them. That is what the Scripture says, and this is what we should believe, or we detract from the genuineness of the Lord's manhood.

P. L. H.

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Editors regret that the November contribution from Innerleithen was wrongly attributed to *K. Reilly* instead of *A. MacDonald*, and apologise for the confusion.

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