

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS LUKE



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

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RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN LUKE

Herod's Temple (scale model), The Jerusalem Museum, Jerusalem



Photo courtesy of Daniel Webster

“NOW SO IT WAS THAT AFTER THREE DAYS THEY FOUND HIM IN THE TEMPLE, SITTING IN THE MIDST OF THE TEACHERS, BOTH LISTENING TO THEM AND ASKING THEM QUESTIONS.”

LUKE 2:46

That you may know the Truth!

LUKE 1

In today's lesson we begin a new study in the gospel of Luke, and I know the Lord will bring a blessing upon us as we look together at this most wonderful account of the Life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke gives us another accurate account of the truth concerning Jesus, and in this first chapter he introduces us to several miracles associated with the birth of John the Baptist, and Jesus the Christ.

Luke writes to a nobleman named Theophilus, and says he wanted to write to him an exact account of the truth about the things he had learned. Luke wants to tell this man all about Jesus. It is interesting that Luke starts his account immediately with several miraculous events. We might think that when we present the story of Jesus we would leave the miracles to last, until we have presented other things more easily received and accepted by the hearer. In fact the great difficulty we all have is with the acceptance of the miraculous, and if we cannot at first accept God's supernatural intervention, then whatever else we may learn or read will lose its appeal and credibility.

Zechariah sees the angel Gabriel in the temple, who tells him he and his wife Elizabeth shall be given a son, even though they are old and beyond childbearing years. Zechariah finds the words most difficult to believe. The angel causes Zechariah to become mute due to his unbelief. Only when the boy is born and he provides the family with the name "John" is his mouth miraculously opened by the Lord, and he is able to speak again. The angel informs Zechariah that his child John would prepare the hearts of Israel to turn to the Lord.

The angel, Gabriel, later appears to the young maiden named Mary and tells her she will have a son, and he will be called Jesus, and he shall reign on the throne of David with an everlasting kingdom. Mary is perplexed because she knows that she is a virgin, and virgins cannot give birth. The angel then explains that the Holy Spirit shall cause her to become pregnant, and that nothing shall be impossible with God. He also informed her of her cousin Elizabeth who was already 6 months along in her pregnancy. Mary then quickly went to visit her cousin, and saw that indeed she was with child. The child in Elizabeth's womb leaped when Mary spoke, and this brought forth a word of blessing from Elizabeth upon Mary. Then Mary also lifted her voice in a magnificent word of praise to God for the wonderful kindness God had shown to the poor and humble, and for his mercies and promises sent to Israel.

The remainder this first chapter of Luke's gospel gives us the account of the birth of John the Baptist, and how his father Zechariah named him. Not only were the friends and relatives amazed by Elizabeth having a son in her old age, but that Zechariah had written down that his name was to be "John". No one in their family was called by that name, and after Zechariah wrote down "John" is his name, his tongue was loosed, and he was able to speak. This also amazed all those present. Zechariah then filled with the Holy Spirit praised God, and prophecies concerning his son's future ministry of turning Israel back to God, and preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. He spoke of the salvation and redemption that was coming to Israel through the house of David. This prophecy pointed to Jesus, the Messiah, who would be the means of salvation to God's people. The spirit of this prophecy would be later delivered by his son John to the nation of Israel, and then fulfilled by the presentation of Jesus to Israel.

In looking in review upon this first chapter of Luke, we notice that there are 7 distinct miracles.

1. The appearing of the angel to Zechariah in the temple.
2. Zechariah struck mute because of his unbelief.
3. The pregnancy of Elizabeth in her old age.
4. The appearing of the angel to Mary to announce the birth of Jesus.
5. The conception of the child in Mary's womb.
6. The opening of Zechariah's mouth to speak after writing down the name of his child.
7. The Spirit of God causing Zechariah to speak words of revelation about Jesus, and John.

In the introduction to this gospel we are to learn that everything about Jesus shows that He is unique from all other men. Everything surrounding His entrance into this world was miraculous, even the birth of John the Baptist, the man God sent forth to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

We learn from the miracles associated with Jesus birth that only God's intervention into this world, and into the affairs of men, will bring about the salvation that we all so desperately need. When God intervenes miraculously it brings great astonishment, fear, and often doubt. That is why Gabriel had to say to both Zechariah and to Mary, "do not fear" when they were so fearful in his presence. Like Zechariah, many of us think that God's revelation is too difficult to believe. However, when we do believe then God opens our mouths in praise, for then we discern by the Spirit of God, the great work of salvation that God has planned for all people. Praise God today, if you have believed in the Redeemer sent by God into the world to wash away your sins.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people." Luke 1:68

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the miracles surrounding the birth of John the Baptist, and the birth of Jesus the Christ. We also saw that God's miraculous intervention was necessary to bring salvation to the world. Someone might ask the question, "Does God use miracles to convince us to believe?"

Many people seem to be under the impression that God wants to perform miracles to help our faith, or as the means of revealing Himself to us. This unfortunate view of miracles can be seen in churches, which have special miracle services, or miracle centers. It appears that many are being convinced that they need a special miracle from God, and many are hungry to see the supernatural power of God in their lives. We might think that this would cause our faith to be strengthened. What amazes me is to see how these churches, and miracle meetings fill up each week with people, whom may very well be the same people coming again and again to get their miracle. This should tell us that they are not getting their need met because they keep returning for more.

Miracles in the bible are always designed and given by God for unique purposes. God does not desire to convince us of the truth through miracles. If we do not believe the revelation in the bible, we will not believe even if He raised someone from the dead. Just read the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 to see how God refused to perform a miracle, when men already had the testimony of scripture to consult. We cannot please God when our lack of faith requires God to show us signs and miracles. We see how Zechariah in the temple, having seen the angel Gabriel, and given a divine revelation about the birth of his son, did not even believe. God was clearly displeased with Zechariah's lack of faith, and therefore took away his speech for 9 months. If anyone had reason to believe God, it was Zechariah, for the angel of God had spoken directly to him, and yet he still was lacking in faith. Mary on the other hand believed what the angel told her, and she was blessed in her faith.

The trouble with what we refer to miracles is our lack of ability to discern what is truly miraculous. There are some people supposedly healed, or excised of demons, or people supposedly speaking miraculously in tongues. However, when we see the strange and sometime ungodly behavior of those supposedly performing these miracles it will leave doubt in our minds about whether it is from God. This is because many things they do are contrary to God's word, such as pleading for money, or making a show in the flesh and drawing attention to man and not Christ. Now it is not that we should believe that God could not perform miracles, for He most certainly can. However, we ought not to trust men, who say they are doing miracles for God, and yet everything about them suggests they are not God's true servants. Besides this, much of what is claimed to be miraculous has no clear evidence of being miraculous. Those speaking in ecstatic tongues could be just making noise. It is not difficult to teach someone to make strange noises and yell into a microphone. Do those who are apparently healed show undisputable medical evidence to verify, or is it just the excited testimony of bewildered and disillusioned victims of a sensationalistic deceiver.

Miracles were wonderful interventions by God into the affairs of men, always having the purpose of God fulfilling His plan for His people. They are performed by the Sovereign working of God, and not at the disposal of carnal and unbelieving men, who disregard God's word. God did miracles at special times for special purposes, but He does not always choose to use miracles. It is interesting to note that, although John's birth was miraculous, there is no record of his performing any miracles. Even though he did not do any miracles, yet the people flocked to him and believed he was God's prophet and they repented and turned their lives over to God in faith. When Jesus performed miracles, it was an act of mercy to relieve suffering, but we hardly can ever see how the miracles of Jesus lead men to believe in Him, even if that was the intent. Surely, we would expect that those who witnessed His many miracles would believe him who could open the eyes of the blind, raise the dead, and feed 1000s from a small lunch. The strange fact is that most people rejected Him, and cried out for His blood. Miracles so often are used by God to rebuke his unbelieving and disobedient people. Those who know and love God are not so lacking in faith as to need a display of miraculous power to believe. If we know God's word is true, then we will cast our confidence in what God has said.

"But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' Luke 16:31

LESSON 46
The Savior is born!
LUKE 2

In today's lesson, we learn about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and the response of the Shepherds to the angelic announcement of our Savior's birth. We also meet Simeon and Anna, who by the Holy Spirit were immediately able to identify the greatness and mission of the baby Jesus. At 12 years of age, Jesus stunned the teachers in the temple, and caused some concern for His parents.

When Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to be registered in the Roman Census, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. They had to lodge in an animal shelter, because no one had room for them to stay. It is quite a remarkable that the king of glory entered into our world born in such deprived circumstances. Joseph and Mary were humble and obedient in nature. They willingly obeyed the Roman authority submitting to the census, though they might have been excused for the reason that Mary was so far along in her pregnancy.

Some shepherds were tending their sheep near Bethlehem and suddenly were visited by a vision of an angel who announced the Savior's birth in Bethlehem. As the announcement was made, a great number of angels also appeared praising God because of this most wonderful news for all of humanity. The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, and found the manger where the baby was, along with Mary and Joseph. They were filled with joy, and made it known all around the region about the angelic news concerning this child. The people marveled at them, and Mary pondered these matters in her heart. The Shepherds went away rejoicing and praising God. What a wonderful privilege they had to receive the greatest news that had ever come to mankind since time began. Since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, and man was condemned and estranged from God, there had never been such a hopeful and wonderful message of God's love and grace towards humanity. It is no wonder that the angels sang praises to God. This was a day of great joy for all people, and how thankful we are today for the arrival into the world of our Savior.

Joseph and Mary were faithful to the requirements of the Jewish Law, and therefore had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day from his birth. They also brought him to the temple to perform the sacrifice required for a firstborn son, but only after the days of Mary's purification were fulfilled. This shows that Joseph and Mary were careful to observe the Laws that God have given to the Jews through Moses. Their humble and obedient spirit is undoubtedly why God choose them to be parents for Jesus. When Christians also act obediently to God's word, then God is pleased to use them for His kingdom and glory.

When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to present their sacrifice to the priest, a man named Simeon met them. Simeon was a just and devout Jew who was waiting for God's redeemer to come. Simeon immediately recognized the child as God's Savior, and takes the child in His arms and praises God. Simeon was able to prophecy by the Holy Spirit about Jesus future, how he would affect the nation of Israel, and how he would be opposed. He also tells Mary that a sword will pierce her own soul, and this probably refers to when Mary would see her son crucified, and how this would be like a sword going through her own soul. It is hard for any parent to see a their child suffer and die, but imagine how Mary must have felt losing her son, for Jesus had never done any sin, and only came to serve and bless humanity. She would feel the pain and loss of her son so very deeply.

Also in the temple was an old prophetess named Anna. She also came and recognized the baby Jesus as God's redeemer, thanking the Lord, and speaking about him to those who were looking for the redeemer. When Joseph and Mary had completed all that the Law required of them, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth. Each year they would travel back to Jerusalem to observe the Passover, and when Jesus was 12 years old, they were leaving Jerusalem after the feast, and realized that Jesus was not among their relatives and friends. So, Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem looking all around the city for him for 3 days. They finally found him in the temple area talking with the teachers of the Law. The teachers were amazed by the questions he was asking them. Mary asked Jesus why he had done this to them, but Jesus replied, "Did you not know, that I must be about my Father's business". What Jesus was saying to his earthly parents, was that His first responsibility was to His Father in Heaven, and to carry out His work. Jesus then returns to his home with Mary and Joseph and submits to them. While Jesus was a Jewish child, under his parent's authority, He was also God incarnate, and had all authority. It is a remarkable step of humility to lower himself to be under the authority of Mary and Joseph, who themselves were sinners. We learn a good example in humility from the attitude of the young Jesus, and that is to accept our place, as others perceive us, without trying to exalt ourselves. This second chapter of Luke's gospel ends by saying that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, with God and men. Truly Jesus was unlike any other person ever born into this world, and only a handful of people recognized the greatness of who He was during His early years. He lived in humble obscurity, until the time of His public ministry would begin. Some still do not recognize Him as Lord and Savior? Do you recognize Jesus as your Savior?

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the birth of Jesus our Savior, and the events surrounding His birth. We learned about how the humble obedient spirit of Joseph and Mary made them ideal candidates for raising God's precious and unique Son. We also saw how the Shepherds were overjoyed at the news of a Savior come into the world, and how Simeon and Anna were able to recognize the baby Jesus as God's redeemer. Someone might ask the question, "Why do some people recognize Jesus as God's unique Son, while others do not?"

In our lesson today we saw how Simeon and Anna were immediately able to identify the baby Jesus as God's redeemer for Israel, and as a Savior for the world. The Shepherds also recognized Jesus as a Savior, because they believed the message delivered to them by the angel. Mary and Joseph also were believers who accepted God's plan for them. They may not have fully understood the greatness of their Son, yet they were obedient to fulfill all that God had told them in the Law, and pondered and wondered at the things spoken about their son sent from God. These few people had some glimpse of God's great plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, and even if they did not see everything clearly, yet they believed. Simeon and Anna in particular were directed by the Holy Spirit to recognize Jesus as the Savior, and to prophecy concerning His rejection, and Mary's sorrow.

The reason that some can recognize Jesus, while others do not, has to do with the revelation of God through the Holy Spirit. When a person seeks God with all their heart, as Anna did, then God will be pleased to make known His revelation to them. In addition, Simeon was a just and devout Jew, and this qualified Him to receive a revelation from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does try to communicate with all of us, but some people are much more disposed to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit because of their godly conduct, and their faith. We also learned that Simeon was a man eagerly waiting for the redemption of Israel. Because His heart was devoted to God, God rewarded him with the revelation of the redeemer by the Holy Spirit.

Many people today do not know Jesus, because they do not care to know Jesus. They do not find it important to learn about God's Messiah, or the salvation that comes through him. Some people like a religion that suits their lifestyle, which is all about serving self and enjoying their time here in this world. Such people are not prone to hearing God's voice through the word of God, because they live according to their flesh, and not according to the Spirit.

God is very glad to speak to us, and open our hearts, if that is what we truly want. Unfortunately, the sad fact is that many are just not prepared to humbly seek after God's revelation. Many also do not wish to make the effort to listen to the word of God, by taking their time to read the bible carefully and constantly. If we do not pay attention to the bible, and we are only interested in looking after our comfort and pleasure in this world, then we will find it quite difficult to learn about Jesus, or receive God's revelation about Him. We might gain a general human knowledge, but we shall not truly understand and believe who Jesus really is, unless the Holy Spirit convicts us, and we come to Jesus in faith and obedience.

As Jesus began his public ministry there were some who accepted Him as God's Messiah, believed and followed Him. These were few among the many others who rejected and despised Jesus. The religious people were especially hostile towards Jesus, because they could not believe that He was God's son. Their pride, their envy, and their love for the comfort and pleasure of this world, caused them to reject God's son.

God wants everyone to recognize, through the help of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus is, and to embrace Jesus by faith as their Savior and Lord. If you have never come to that point in your life, where you know you need Jesus in order to be saved from God's judgment against your sin, then why not make today the day when you place your trust in Jesus to save you. You could be like those shepherds who long ago went their way rejoicing because they had found the Savior.

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31

Preparing the way of the Lord!

LUKE 3

In today's lesson, we learn about the ministry of John the Baptist, and how he was called to prepare the way of the Lord. John was a poor man living in the wilderness, but a man prepared by God to do a great work for God. We shall see that God's greatest servants need not be rich or well dressed, but men of conviction, and willing to preach righteousness.

John was baptizing people in the Jordan River and many came to him to be baptized. The people recognized in John that he was a man sent from God, to prophesy and to preach the truth. Many asked him about what he they should do, for they were under conviction because of their sin. John was very clear in telling everyone how to walk in righteousness before God. He taught people to be honest, to love their neighbor as themselves, and to repent from all their evil ways. John was very bold in his preaching calling the religious hypocrites a brood of snakes, and challenging them about who warned them to flee from God's wrath. His preaching certainly was not designed to tickle the ears of his listeners, but to bring about conviction about sin. He was not at all popular with those religious elite who thought themselves to be more righteous than others.

As John preached so boldly against sin, and against religious hypocrisy, the people saw greatness in him, and marveled at his zeal to honor God. They wondered if John might be the Messiah, and so they asked him if he was the expected Messiah of Israel. When John was asked about this, he quickly responded that he was not, but there was coming after him who was much greater than he, and whose shoes he was not worthy to untie. John had a very high view of God's Messiah, and a very humble view of himself. This is what made John such a great prophet for God. John was a mighty servant for God, and honored by some, but was also hated by others. Herod was the king over the Jews, though still under the Roman authorities. Herod had some respect for John, for he knew he was favored among the people of Israel, but he also had something against him that was personal. Herod had taken for himself the wife of His brother Philip, which was not lawful. John had spoken publicly against Herod's sin, and Herod was not happy about this. His wife also hated John and wanted him dead. Herod however feared the people, for he knew they counted John as a prophet, so he contented himself with putting John in prison. Later we learn that Herod is forced, against his better judgment, to execute John.

John the Baptist did much to turn the heart of the people of Israel back to their God, and back to the ways of righteousness. This prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. The greatest work of John was to announce to the nation of Israel the arrival of their Messiah. God the Father had approved Jesus as His beloved Son, and His anointed. John had the privilege to baptize Jesus, and after He was baptized the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove, and a voice from heaven announced, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased". This marked the beginning of Jesus public ministry to the nation of Israel, and identified Him as God's chosen Messiah and Redeemer. Luke tells us that Jesus was about 30 years of age when He began His public ministry.

Luke provides a genealogy of Jesus the Christ, beginning with Jesus himself and working backwards all the way to Adam, the first man. There are 75 generations from Adam to Jesus listed by Luke, and this is to verify his legal and human ancestry, and as being a Jew under the Law. Luke differs from Matthew's genealogy in that Matthew focuses on Jesus right to the throne of David, and as heir of the promises made to Abraham. Luke is more concerned with the true humanity of Jesus, and thus follows his lineage all the way back to Adam, and using the lineage of Mary, not Joseph. Though Joseph's name is mentioned, he was the legal father and not the physical father of Jesus. Jesus was the physically descendant of Mary, and of her father was Heli. The genealogy traces his human lineage all the way back to Adam. Luke is affirming the true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Adam's descendant, he would crush Satan under his feet, according to a prophecy concerning the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15.

Luke has shown us how John the Baptist was used by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who was the son of Adam, and He who would deliver Israel, and destroy Satan. The rest of His gospel will show us that Jesus was indeed the son of Adam, truly human, God's means of redeeming His people, and overthrowing the power of Satan. God did not need to use a man like John to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, for Jesus himself could have done everything that John had done, and much more. However, God was pleased to use this man, to preach righteousness, and turn the hearts of people back to God. It cost him his life to speak against sin, but God was honored, and John rewarded in heaven. Be sure to take your stand against sin, no matter what it may cost you.

"Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Luke 3:7

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the ministry of John the Baptist and how he preached righteousness to the people of Israel, and told them how to live in order to please God. We also learned about the true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of Adam, through Luke's genealogy. Someone might ask the question: "What kind of preaching is acceptable to God?"

Every Sunday countless numbers of people gather in places of worship to hear a preacher preach. Have you ever given some thought to what is most important to God when it comes to preaching? Far too often Sunday sermons are messages to make the audience feel good, or entice them to give more to the church collection. Some messages are all about how to prosper in this world and become rich, happy, and healed. The message going around many churches seems to be that God wants you to live well and prosper, and you can if you only have faith, and give plenty to the churches. Historically this kind of hypocrisy was also seen during the dark ages when the church sold indulgences to the poor and common folk to buy their way out of God's judgment. All this was a sham, from corrupt men, who used religion as a cloak of covetousness. This is what we see happening today in so many churches. Supposed men of God, are preaching to gain wealth for themselves, while trying to convince their congregations that God wants to make them rich and prosperous.

What is the problem with this kind of preaching? The problem is that it avoids the subject of sin, and God's anger and displeasure with our sin. This is what John the Baptist preached about, and it hit a nerve with people. Many fortunately repented of their sin, and turned to God in faith, but many hated John and wanted to get rid of him. True preaching ought to hurt. It should challenge, rebuke, and correct. The word 'preach' comes from a word that means to stab. That is what we do with a sword or a knife. That is how the preacher is to use the word of God, which is called the sword of the Spirit. When we hear men preach, it should convict us about our sin, and cause us to flee from God's wrath. You should be hearing preaching that makes you feel the sting of sin, convicting you so that you are anxious to find God's salvation.

God has condemned all men as sinners. The bible is very plain when it says that all of have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It also says there is none good, no not one. Do not be deceived into thinking that you are good, or that some few good people get to go to heaven. Not at all! The bible tells us that we are all condemned, and except for the mercy and grace of God, we could never enter into heaven. That is why Jesus came to die. He came to be judged in our place, and to bear away our sins on the cross. Is there sin in your life? Do you know that God hates your sin? Are you willing to confess this to God, and look to Jesus to cleanse you and make you righteous before God? Come with a broken and contrite spirit before God, confessing your sin, and pleading for His forgiveness, and for His salvation.

John was not afraid to tell people about God's anger against sin, and about the fires of judgment and Hell. He knew that people might not like to hear it, but they needed to hear it just the same. Hell is real, and God does not want to send you there, but you might leave Him no choice, if you fail to repent from your sin, and live like a wicked sinner. Do not think that somehow going to church on Sunday, or putting some money into the collection, will wash away your sins committed during the week. God will not accept your shallow religious efforts to cleanse you from sin. He wants to give you an entirely new heart that loves righteousness and hates wickedness.

While God's anger against our sin is real, and the fires of Hell are just as real, the love and mercy of God are also very real. God does not want any of us to have to suffer forever in the torments of Hell, so He provided for us a wonderful salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus can provide you with forgiveness of sins, by paying that debt for you. As you look to Jesus dying on the cross for your sins, recognize how much he loves you, and wants to bring you to heaven. Call out to him today in faith and ask Him to cleanse you and make you God's child, and be assured that he will hear and answer your sincere prayer.

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19

LESSON 48
Preaching of Jesus!
LUKE 4

In today's lesson, we will learn about Jesus preaching in the regions of Galilee. As Jesus began His public ministry to Israel, he was first tempted by the devil, but resists Satan by the word of God. From today's lesson, we shall see that the preaching of God's word is not only very important, but also very powerful.

Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to be tempted by Satan. It may seem strange that the Spirit of God led Jesus to such a test, but this test was not designed to hurt Jesus, for no temptation could change his perfect sinless character. The temptation was only designed to prove to Satan and all others that Jesus could not yield to sin. This showed that he was perfectly suited to represent God, and to preach God's message to the world. It also qualified him to be our substitute and die in our place.

The temptation of Jesus is threefold, tempting the three areas of life where man is most vulnerable to Satan and to sin. These three are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The apostle John mentions these three areas of temptation in 1John 2:16. Jesus was tempted to change a stone into bread to satisfy his hunger, but he would not yield to the temptation, but quoted the scripture that says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Next, the devil showed him the kingdoms of the world and their glory and offered to give it to Jesus if he would bow and worship him. Again, Jesus resisted him by quoting "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve". The last temptation was Satan telling Jesus to throw himself off the top of the temple building, saying that angels will not suffer him to come to harm. The Devil was now using scripture to tempt Jesus, thinking he might be able to convince him this way. Jesus however knew the trap that Satan was trying to set for him, and again quoted to him the scripture that says, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Jesus proved that not only did he not want to surrender to temptation, but that He could not do so, because He was entirely sinless and devoted to doing God's will alone. It is worthwhile for us to notice the power of the God's word to resist the devil. If we train ourselves with the word of God, we will have good understanding of God's will, and shall be able to discern both good and evil. There is no greater defense against Satan and against sin in our lives, then to abide in the word and be faithful in practicing what we learn.

Jesus begins his ministry with a preaching campaign around the regions of Galilee, but begins in his hometown of Nazareth. It is always good for any preacher to begin his work at home, for that will prepare him for greater works father abroad. If a man cannot serve among his own people, then he likely will not do much when he travels further a field. While preaching in Nazareth, Jesus quoted some verses from Isaiah chapter 61 about the Messiah's ministry of healing, to the poor, blind, and captives, and then made the claim that this was fulfilled as he read it. This was a remarkable claim, for those in the synagogue would understand by this that Jesus was claiming to be the promised Messiah. Jesus realizing their shock and disbelief likened them to the Israelites of the past who would not believe and be healed, and how God could only bless and heal the gentiles during those times of Israel's rebellion and unbelief. Jesus words infuriated the crowd, and they wanted to kill him by throwing him off a cliff, but they could not do so. Jesus just walks through the midst of them. It is interesting here that the scriptures do not say why they could not attack and kill Jesus, but clearly the power of the Spirit of God somehow made it impossible for them to bring any harm to him. Jesus had said to this crowd in his hometown, that a prophet is not accepted in his own country. This is a universal principle, because most people do not expect anything great from those who are near of kin, or the neighbor next door. However God chooses whomever He wishes to do His work, and so we should not be surprised when people who seem common and unimportant to us, are actually used by God for great purposes. If you feel like you are too poor, or too unknown, or not intelligent enough for God to use, remember that God chooses not based on how popular, smart, good looking or rich you are, but on how much you fear and honor Him.

Jesus also preached in the synagogue at Capernaum, and casts out a demon from a man. The demon cried out recognizing Jesus as the Holy One of God, but Jesus silences the demon and commands him to come out of the man. Later in the evening, many people are brought to Jesus to be healed by him, and the people plead with him to stay in their city. Jesus has to tell them that his mission is greater than just their city, and how he must go to others cities and preach. The message that Jesus was bringing to the world, and his good work, were not just for the few, but also for as many as would receive Him, and hear His words. What we learn from this is that the word of God is important, for everyone needs to hear the message of God. We also learned today that the word of God is very powerful, for it can resist Satan. Jesus taught with authority, and the people marveled at Him and His gracious words. If we claim to be Christians we should also learn our bibles so well that others marvel at us and our words, as we preach to them life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Luke 4:18,19

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the preaching ministry of Jesus, as he began his public ministry in the regions around Galilee. We saw how Satan first tempted Jesus, but Jesus proved that he was perfectly sinless, and thus qualified to represent God, and preach His word. We saw how those of his hometown were upset with Him and wanted to kill Him, and yet others who loved him for His ability to bring healing, and wanted Him to stay in their town. Someone might ask the question: "Why is preaching so important?"

When Jesus began his ministry, he enters into the synagogues, where the Jews met on the Sabbath to listen to the word of God, and he reads from the word, and then preaches to the people. We also see how Jesus spent much of his time preaching to people all around his region, and later would travel to Judea and other areas preaching. He also sent his disciples all around preaching. Clearly, it was very important to Jesus, and so it should be very important to us. Why is preaching important? Preaching is important because it one of the most effective ways for people to hear the word of God. Today we are fortunate to have the bible so widely available in printed form, and most people are able to read, so they can have access to God's word. Some people might find it difficult to work their way through such a large book, and wonder what is important, and what they need to hear. It might take some more than one year to read the entire bible. However, God has sent forth his messengers to preach the word. This gives the bible more of a voice to every town and village, as His servants travel to these places and declare God's word. When a man is under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he shares the word of God in just the right way, for any particular occasion. We see this in the book of Acts when Philip is driven by the Holy Spirit to speak with an Ethiopian man who is reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Philip is able to explain the word of God, and preach to him about Jesus, and the man became the first African Christian, and went away rejoicing. God loves to use men to bring his word to needy souls. Often people are not aware of their own spiritual needs, and God sends a preacher to help them hear and respond to God's message.

Preaching is important because this is how many people hear God's word. It also helps us each Sunday to hear God's word being spoken clearly and with spiritual power, to help us grow as Christians, and stay close to the Lord. How easily we could forget God, and forget about what He wants from our lives, if we neglected to hear God's word. The nature of man is lazy and carnal, and if he were left to himself, in most cases would be like a sheep that wanders away from the fold, and gets into all kinds of spiritual danger. However, our good Shepherd uses men who are gifted by the Holy Spirit to speak the word of life into our hearts, and keep us close and abiding in our Lord.

Be thankful if you attend a church where you hear faithful and good quality preaching and teaching from God's word. This is the way God speaks to us, and helps us to live our Christian lives. Many people have been lead to Christ through faithful preaching, and many have been directed to godly Christian living through good solid bible teaching. If in the church you attend you see few people coming to faith in Christ, or Christians who are living carnally, then you might ask yourself if the preaching is being led by the Holy Spirit, and whether the preacher is being faithful to the word of God.

Sometimes preaching seems to be viewed as entertainment. Some love to glory in the personality and charisma of the preacher. How many come to church with a real ear to listen to what God is saying? If we are sincerely listening to God then we should respond in obedience to the preaching, and not just go away thinking to ourselves that 'he is a fine preacher', or 'my he dresses well'. Preaching is about changing lives, and if it never changes you, then you are missing the point entirely.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:14

Jesus, a fisher of Men!

LUKE 5

In today's lesson, we will learn about Jesus calling some fishermen to follow him, and become fishers of men. We shall see that spiritual work is greater than physical work, forgiveness of sins is more important than the physical healing, and that time need not be wasted on those who are not ready to obey God.

When Jesus is swarmed by great crowds of people on the shores of the sea, he gets into a boat and pushes out just a short ways from the shore so he to speak to the entire crowd. It was a makeshift pulpit, but effective for the purpose. It pays to be creative in our approach to our work for the Lord, and to try to be as effective in our work as we possibly can, so that we can do good for the greatest number of people. This means using some improvisation, and careful thought in how we serve God.

Jesus tells Peter to let down his nets for a catch of fish, but Peter complains that they had tried all night to catch fish and had caught nothing. Still Peter does as the Lord asks, and he and his partners catch so much fish, that both of their boats were ready to sink. This shows us how important it is to follow the Lord's instructions even when it does not appear to be what we think is best. So often, we excuse away the commands of our Lord, because they do not make sense to us. We might not want to pray for our enemies, and give to those who ask of us, and turn the other cheek, but when we do obey our Lord, we can see that it will bring to us the overflowing blessings of the Lord.

Jesus calls Peter and his partners John and James to follow him. These men were all willing to leave their work of fishing to pursue a greater work for God, which was catching men for Christ. We learn here that spiritual work is always much more important than physical work. We might wonder how these men managed to live and eat, when they had no source of income. The scriptures do not tell us much about this, but we know that those who seek God's kingdom first shall not lack any of their basic needs. God has promised to supply those who seek His kingdom first.

When Jesus heals a man of his leprosy, he warns the man not to tell others about his healing, but the man reported it widely. Those who heard the news crowded to meet Jesus, so that He decided to escape into the wilderness so He could spend some time in prayer. While there is much work to do for God, it is always important to take time to pray so that our service for God will be always be blessed by God.

Some people tried to bring their lame friend to Jesus for healing. The large crowd of people prevented them from being able to enter the house where Jesus was so they decided to take some of the roofing away, and let their friend down by ropes near to where Jesus was. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the lame man, that his sins were forgiven. This upset some who thought Jesus was blaspheming, because no one but God had authority to forgive sins. Jesus knowing their thoughts healed the lame man in front of them all, and proved that he had authority to forgive sins because God's power was working in him to heal. From this story, we learn that a man needs to have his sins forgiven more than he needs healing of his body. Jesus forgave the man first, because that was the greatest need in the man's life, and it is the greatest need in our lives as well.

When Jesus is invited to the home of a tax collector named Levi, Jesus is found to be eating with many tax collectors and sinners. These were the people who the religious elite hated, and would not associate with, so they were indignant with Jesus for eating with these sinners. Jesus said to them, that it was not the healthy who needed a doctor but the sick, and that He had not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. While the tax collectors and sinners were glad to hear Jesus, repent, and follow him, the righteous Pharisees did not think they were sinners, and that they had any need for repentance. They felt self-satisfied, justified before God, and so Jesus tries to show them He does not want to waste His time with them, while He can help others who were ready to receive help. He uses two illustrations to show this point. The first is the waste caused by using new cloth to repair old torn clothes, which only makes the tear worse. The second is the waste caused by putting new wine into old wineskins. If you do this the wineskin will burst and the wine will be wasted. The proud Pharisees wanted to maintain their own righteousness, and not accept the righteousness that comes from God. If Jesus spent his time with these old religious Pharisees, they would not repent, and Jesus teachings would be rejected. It would be a wasted effort, just as with the broken wineskin or the torn cloth. On the other hand, Jesus was glad to share with the tax collectors and sinners for they were like new wineskins ready to receive new wine. They would gladly hear and repent, and Jesus efforts would not be wasted. The new wine can be likened to Jesus teaching, which the old wineskins (the Pharisees) were not ready to accept.

Jesus Said: *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."* Luke 5:32

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about how Jesus called some fishermen to become fishers of men. We learned that God's work is always more important than man's work, and God supplies those who seek His kingdom first. We also saw forgiveness is more important than physical healing, and Jesus would rather spend time with sinners who were ready to listen to Him than waste his efforts with self-righteous religious people. Someone might ask the question, "If God's work is so important, should I give up my job to do God's work?"

When we see Jesus calling the fishermen Peter, James and John, and the tax collector Levi to leave their work and follow Him, He was certainly commissioning these men to a much greater work. God's work is always more important than any other work which men might do. We might be inclined to think that if God's work is so important, then we should also give up our work, and go out preaching and trying to win souls for God. While this attitude might be very noble and good, we must be careful not to make the mistake of presumption. We may presume that God has called us to do His work such that we decide to give up our day job. God does want His children to serve Him, but not everyone is called into fulltime service for the Lord. So often men make presumptions about this, and follow their own will and not the will of God. To be the Lord's servant requires a definite call from God. To know and discern this call takes spiritual maturity, and the recognition of other godly Christians. Usually a person is qualified to enter into fulltime work for God, because they have already proved themselves as useful servants in their work and ministries for the Lord. A man does not begin his spiritual career preaching to the masses, but learns by first sharing his faith, leading a few souls to Christ, until eventually he has been equipped by the Lord, and prepared through experience to take on further responsibility in the work of the Lord.

No one ought to appoint, or proclaim, themselves as God's servant, or claim to be called of God, without clear confirmation from mature believers, and a proven testimony in Christian service. Too many are trying to make claims of being God's servant, and yet live and act in ways that are dishonoring to the Lord. Some street corner preachers peddle the word of God to make money. They beg from anyone passing by, asking them to give money so that they can do God's work. These behave as though God were poor and needed to beg ungodly people to support His work. This brings shame to the gospel, and to the name of our Lord. Those who labor for God, and are truly called of God, do not need to beg, because God is not only able, but also very willing to supply the needs of those who serve Him.

Serving God is the highest of all callings and those who presume for themselves a role in representing God, when God did not call them, are in danger of judgment. James wrote to the Christian brethren saying "be not many Masters (Teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation". God will not look lightly upon those who promote themselves as His representatives, when they are neither called nor prepared by the Holy Spirit to serve.

Some people think of God's work as a job, a career, or a lucrative trade. This view of God's work is entirely contrary to what the bible teaches. When Peter was addressing elders in his 1st letter, he said that they should not do their work with a motive for gaining money. The motive for service must always be to please the Lord, and bring glory to Him through faithful obedience. The servant of the Lord does his work to fulfill the will of God, and trusts in the Lord to supply all of his needs. A famous missionary once said, "God's work done in God's way shall never lack God's supply".

God's call to service should never be presumed, even with the best of intentions. There must be clear qualifications to serve, an affirmation of godly elders, a proven record of fruitful service within the church, and a burning passion to see the gospel advanced and Christ magnified. Without this, a Christian should never think of leaving their job, which God has so graciously provided. Even if we are not called to fulltime service for the Lord, we can still serve the Lord faithfully in whatever task He might assign to us.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;" Ephesians 3:8

LESSON 50
Jesus the Master!
LUKE 6

In today's lesson, we will see Jesus as Master. Master means to be a leader and teacher, or someone worthy to follow and imitate. Certainly, Jesus is worthy of our devotion as dedicated disciples. We shall see that Jesus is Master over the Sabbath, over His apostles, and over our physical health. We shall also learn the teachings and Principles Jesus taught concerning His kingdom.

On the Sabbath day, Jesus and His disciples are eating some grain, and the Pharisees accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath Law of the OT. Jesus uses an example from the life of David eating the showbread to point out that under certain circumstances it was okay to be excused from following the ritual of the Law, when some greater good could be served. When Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath Day, some Pharisees are very angry about it. The man had a withered hand and could not work, and Jesus wants to heal him so he can work and look after himself. What Jesus was doing was for the glory of God, and for the benefit of the crippled man. Therefore, Jesus taught that it was okay to do good on the Sabbath.

Jesus is master over His disciples, leading them, teaching them, and sending them forth to serve. He chose 12 men, whom he called apostles (which means, "One sent forth"). They were not greater than other men; they were just selected to do the work that the Lord would assign to them. Jesus is also Lord over physical health, which is seen by His healing all those who had come to hear Him and be healed by Him.

Jesus provided His disciples many principles that are to govern His kingdom. We can only provide a quick overview of these principles, but we would do well to study these if we are to be His true disciples.

Jesus assures His followers who suffer for Him great joy and reward. This is the principle of future reward. Those who hunger, poor, or persecuted for following Jesus will have great joy and reward in heaven. The second principle of His Kingdom concerns future judgment. Those who use religion to get rich, seek pleasure, or the praise of men, will hunger, mourn and fall under God's judgment for their hypocrisy.

Jesus then gives us the principle of godly behavior. Those who follow Jesus, the true Christians, are to be marked by love, goodness, grace, humility, and generosity. These qualities should be displayed to those who are good and kind, but also to our enemies, who despise us. Jesus develops this teaching further in what we might call the principle of Adoption. When Christians learn to love their enemies, and not just their friends, and to give to those who take without expecting any return, then they are behaving with the same heart as God, and He is kind to the unthankful and evil. This makes them children of their heavenly Father. To be God's child means service with a smile, not for pay, but serving just to please the Lord. When the world sees such behavior in the Christian, they will know we are God's children, and they will find our Christianity very attractive.

We also have the principle of retribution. This means to get something in return for what has been given. Sometimes we are convinced that we can do bad things and not have the bad come back upon us, but God is watching over everyone, and he will repay all things in their proper time. If we judge, we can expect to be judged, if we condemn we also shall be condemned, and to the same measure, for God is perfectly just. However, if we forgive then we shall also be forgiven, and when we give we can expect to receive. In fact, Jesus adds that when we give we shall get back a good measure, pressed down, and flowing over. In the market, you may see someone buying beans, and when their container is filled, it is shaken to settle, and then more added until it overflows. God is so much more generous than we are, and we can be assured that when we give with the right motives, God will ensure that our portion is full and running over.

The last principle that we have in this sermon is the principle of discipleship. Jesus is the Master and we are his subjects, and we must not be like blind following the blind, or we shall fall into a ditch. Follow the true Master, who gives light and life, and who will not lead us astray. Our Master is Jesus and we shall never be greater than our Master, but we are encouraged to be like Him. To be like the Lord Jesus, our perfect Master, will take much time and effort but will yield spiritual joy and fruitfulness. Jesus also warns His disciples not to be quick to correct others, when there is still much to correct in us. Trying to remove a speck of dust from my brother's eye will be much easier once I remove the large plank that is blocking my own vision. If we are really Jesus true disciples then we shall be identified by our good conduct, for as Jesus said a good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree bad fruit.

Lastly, Jesus shows the need for His disciples to obey His words, for then they would have a sure foundation, and stand against all the storms that might come against them. The foolish do not listen, and their destruction is inevitable. I hope that you will choose to be a wise disciple by learning and obeying the teachings of Jesus.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus the Master. We saw how he was Master over the Sabbath, over His apostles, and over physical health. We also learned from our Master the important principles of His kingdom. Someone might ask the question, "How is it possible to love my enemies?"

Certainly loving your enemies would not be the natural thing to do. It takes a supernatural work in the heart of God's children to teach them and lead them by the Holy Spirit to act in the same manner that God acts towards us. After all, we were all enemies of God, because of our sin, but that did not stop God from sending His beloved Son into the world to pay the penalty for man's sin. God has been kind to us when we were His enemies, and He made us His friends, by saving our souls, and calling us to be His children. What a wonderful God we have, and how merciful He has treated us. We were so undeserving of His grace, and this should make us very humble and thankful to be His children, and to possess eternal life. Because God has treated us, His enemies, with love, compassion and grace, and we are so glad that He has done so, then it only seems right that we should offer the same attitude towards others who mistreat us.

When someone does us wrong, there is a part of us (our flesh) that wants to retaliate. We want justice, and we want our enemies to pay for their wrong deeds. However, the new nature, born of God, does not respond this way. The new nature wants to please God and imitate God, which means to show love, mercy, and patience, even with those who do wrong to us. This can only take place when a person has been born again by the Holy Spirit of God. When someone takes Jesus as their Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within them, and they are regenerated. They are given a new heart, and a new mind. A heart that loves God, and a mind that seeks after God and His righteousness. It is because of the Christian's new nature that he is able to love his enemies. Of course not all Christians behave this way, because they follow their carnal, or fleshly, desires, rather than obeying the Holy Spirit's directing. The bible teaches us about the new nature within the child of God. In 1Cor 5:17 it says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*". The apostle John also wrote these words, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God*".

In this world, we are going to run into many challenges and many who will want to cheat us, or harm us. We do not like to face these challenges, but in one way, they are good for the Christian, because then He can show the world his divine nature. He can show that his heart has been changed, and he is ready to forgive, ready to do good, ready to bless those who seek his harm. If you are a Christian, can you honestly say from your heart that you love your enemies? Think for a moment about whether you have every demonstrated the kindness and love of God that Jesus taught to His disciples. If you cannot see evidence in your life of the heart and mind of Christ, and if you know nothing about loving your enemies, then you should ask yourself if you have truly been born of God. God's children learn to think and act as God thinks and acts, and if that is not you, then be honest with yourself. The last thing anyone of us would want to do is think we are a Christian and on our way to heaven, when in fact we have never experienced the renewing of the Holy Spirit, having been born again.

Perhaps today is the day the Lord will speak into your hardened heart, and help you to see your need to be changed, to be forgiven, and to be born from above. Take Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Tell Him how wretched your heart is, and how you long to be forgiven and given a new heart that is like His heart. When you call upon the Lord in faith, He will hear you, and if you are sincere, He will most certainly answer your cries, and save your soul. If you have experienced the new birth, then be sure to allow the Spirit of God to direct your steps, and live a life that radiates the love and goodness of our Lord Jesus to a world sick with sin. May the Lord teach us all from His wisdom to build our lives upon the firm foundation of faith in Christ, and obedience to His words.

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." 1Peter 1:23

LESSON 51
Jesus the Coming One!
LUKE 7

In today's lesson, we find Jesus healing a man's servant, marveling at his great faith. He raises a young man back to life, and restores him to his widowed mother. He does many notable miracles, confirming to John the Baptist that He is the Coming One that Israel was expecting. Jesus speaks of John the Baptist's greatness and ministry, and teaches a Pharisee named Simon about love and forgiveness.

While Jesus was in Capernaum, a Centurion sent his servants to ask Jesus to heal one of his servants who was sick and ready to die. When Jesus came near to the Centurion's home, the Centurion sent messengers saying Jesus did not need to come to his home, because he did not feel worthy to have such a great man visit his home. He asked that Jesus would just speak a word, and heal his servant, for he believed that Jesus had authority to command the sickness to leave, just as he had authority over others. Jesus marveled at the man's faith, and said he had not found such great faith even in Israel. The greater our faith is, the more we can please God, and the scripture tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God.

In the town of Nain Jesus met a funeral procession carrying the coffin of a young man who had died. Jesus felt compassion for the mother who was a widow and had just lost her only son. He put his hand on the coffin to stop the procession, and spoke to the young man saying to him "Arise". Then the young man that had died sat up and began to speak, and Jesus presented the young man back to his mother. This remarkable event caused a great stir among the people, and they all marveled saying that a great prophet had come to them, and that God had visited His people Israel. The news about Jesus' power to heal, and raise the dead, spread throughout all the surrounding regions. A truly remarkable miracle happened that day in Nain when Jesus raised a dead man back to life, however there is an even greater miracle that God can perform in our lives. That is the miracle of the New Birth, when we trust in Jesus as our Savior. The bible tells us that when a person believes in Jesus he crosses over from death into life. This does not mean just physical life, but spiritual life, which is eternal. The believer may die physically, but he will not die spiritually. He will live forever in the presence of God, and someday will be given a new resurrected body that is like the Lord Jesus body.

John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus was indeed the promised Coming One, and so he sent some of his friends to ask Jesus about this. Jesus was performing many miracles, healing all kind of people, and giving sight to the blind, and therefore told John's friends to let John know about these things. This would confirm by his works that He was indeed the expected Coming One. Israel had been waiting for their Messiah, for many centuries, and at last, He had come to them. The miracles were a validation that he was the one whom the prophets had foretold. Isaiah and others had certainly spoken of the miraculous nature of the Messiah's ministry, and how he would heal, many can carry their sicknesses.

After answering John's inquiry, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John, and how people went out to see John. They did not go to view the wilderness, or to see a king dressed in royal robes; they went to see a prophet of God. Jesus said that John was more than a prophet, for He had the great ministry of preparing the way for the arrival of the Son of God. Jesus says that of all men born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of God was greater than he. It is remarkable that John, a rather rough man living in the wilderness, and who had no great miracles attached to his ministry, was considered the greatest of all men born into the world. John's greatness was due to his being the forerunner of Jesus. He had the privilege to prepare the heart of the people by turning them away from their sins, and to receive the Coming Messiah. Not only great in the role and ministry he had, he also was a man more zealous in his lifestyle and preaching to honor God. He was greater than Abraham, David, Moses, and the prophet Daniel. This was a remarkable statement made about John the Baptist. We should learn from this that God is not looking for men who look well dressed, who live in places, who are rich in this world, or who can perform mighty signs and miracles. God looks for men who love righteousness and fear God more than they fear men, who stand for the truth no matter what it costs them. John was not greater than the least in heaven even though he was a great man in this world. In heaven, all have the privilege of being in the presence of God, and are free from the influence of sin. This makes their position far greater than anyone on earth, no matter how great or holy they may seem.

At Simon the Pharisee's home Jesus was invited to dine, but while they ate a sinful woman entered the room, and began to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, and wipe his feet dry with her hair. She also anointed his feet with fragrant oil. This made Simon and his friends say in their hearts that Jesus could not be a prophet, for otherwise he would know this woman was a sinner, and would never allow her to touch him. Jesus used a story to teach Simon about the relationship between love and forgiveness. The point he made was that the more a person was forgiven the more they would love. The fact that the woman demonstrated much greater love than Simon did, for he had not washed Jesus' feet or anointed him with oil, but the woman had done this with her own tears and her fragrant oil. Her actions showed that her sins were indeed forgiven, and this was clearly evidenced because of her greater love for Jesus.

"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Luke 7:47

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus as the Coming One, the promised Messiah of Israel. We also saw the validation of this through the many miracles he performed, including raising people from the dead, and preaching the gospel to the poor. The prophets had written about His ministry, and no mere man could have fulfilled these prophecies and demonstrated the mighty power of God, if He were not sent from God. We also learned that a person who is forgiven much loves much. Someone might ask the question: "How can I know for sure my sins have been forgiven by God?"

Some people have a hard time accepting the idea that God can wash away all of their sins, and completely forgive them. They still feel the guilt of their sins, and are not convinced that God is able to forgive them, because they do not feel righteous or holy.

The problem that people have is their lack of faith in what God has said in His word. God has revealed to us the way to have our sins forgiven. If we read carefully what God has said, we shall learn that not only is God able to forgive sins, but he is also very willing to do so. When God sent Jesus into the world, His main purpose was that Jesus would die on the cross and bear away the sin of the world. You might think that Jesus can forgive all your past sins, but when you sin again in the future, you will have to face God's judgment for your sins. What we need to understand from God's word, is that God is so satisfied with the work of Jesus on the cross to pay for our sins, that He can indeed pardon **ALL** of our sins, past, present and future. Let us see what the bible has to say about this.

*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Eph 1:7
Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Rom 8:1*

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 1John 2:2

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. John 5:24

These verses help us to understand that when God forgives our sins, it is a full and final judgment. All our sins are gone, forever buried and never to be brought up against us again. It is important that we understand this, or we can spend our entire lives worrying about whether our sins are truly gone, or if we will have to be judged for them. Remember that you cannot pay for your sins, and no matter how much you try to be a good person and do the right thing, it will never satisfy God, or pay for even one sin. The only payment that God accepts for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to pay for all of our sins completely and forever. These verses and others are meant to help us understand this, so we can enjoy the forgiveness and grace of God. The woman who anointed Jesus' feet while in Simon's house demonstrated her confidence that her sins were forgiven by how much she loved Jesus. If we really believe what God has said, and that He is willing to completely cleanse us from all sin then we, like this woman, will be filled with love and appreciation for Jesus. This will lead us to a life of service and worship that delights the heart of God. An Old Testament illustration helps us to understand how our sins are forgiven and gone forever. On the day of Atonement, there were two goats brought to the tabernacle and one was slaughtered as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, but the other one, had the sins of the people symbolically placed on its head, and then was taken into the wilderness and let go. This is a picture of how God dealt with our sins at the cross. When Jesus died, he was like the slaughtered sacrifice upon which our judgment fell. The other goat, called the scapegoat, was taken to the wilderness with the sins of Israel upon it and let go. It was removed far away from the camp never to return. The scapegoat illustrates that the sins that Jesus bore for us, have been taken away from us, and shall never be brought back against us again. God's forgiveness is true and everlasting forgiveness.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"? Psalm 103:12

LESSON 52
Jesus the Missionary!
LUKE 8

In today's lesson, we see Jesus as a missionary. As a missionary sent by God, Jesus had his workers and his supporters. He taught about God's word and man's response to God's word. Jesus does not permit any obstacle to hinder his mission, whether it was family, physical danger, demons, ignorance, distractions, or death. He came to heal, forgive, and grant life, and He always did His work successfully, to help those who looked to Him in faith.

Luke tells us that Jesus went about preaching everywhere about the kingdom of God, and that his disciples were with him, as well as some believing woman who helped to support the mission in practical ways. Jesus used the help of others to complete His work. Though his workers did not possess any spiritual power and wisdom of their own, He was glad to supply them, all they needed to carry out His work. How kind of the women folk, who honored Jesus with their substance, to give to His work. A wonderful way in which we can help the work of Jesus move forward is to supply substance to His workers. When you see someone doing God's true work of reaching souls and blessing others with the care and provision of God's love, then you should be willing to share with them, and supply to them whatever they may need. This is one way that we can show our love to God.

When the multitudes came to hear Jesus, he taught them about God's word and how men respond to God's word. He did this by using the "Parable of the Sower". He did not explain the parable to the crowds, but was glad to tell his own disciples the meaning. Some people are like rocky ground, a hard pathway, or ground with thorns and thistles. These all cannot respond properly to God's word. This is because their hearts are either hard, and Satan steals away their opportunities to hear God's word. On the other hand, they hear God's word and seem to accept it but not with sincerity. Or else they do not like the consequences of trying to follow God's word because it brings them many problems and opposition. Only those who are like good soil, take in the word of God gladly, and respond by letting it take root deeply in their heart and mind, producing faith and obedience.

Jesus would not allow any obstacle to hinder his missionary work. Not even his family members could interrupt his mission. His mother and brothers wanted to see him, and were waiting outside, but Jesus said that those who did the will of God were his brothers and his mother. Jesus would tend first to God's work; rather than give attention to His earthly family. Jesus would teach his followers, that God must be first in our priorities, even above the concerns of our immediate family. That does not mean we should neglect our families, or fail to provide for their needs. It just means that we will not allow family to become more important than doing God's work. Jesus did care about his mother, and gave her over to John's care when he spoke to him from the cross. By this, He showed that he did not neglect his earthly mother's needs.

When Jesus is crossing the lake with his disciples and a great storm threatens the boat, Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves, so that his disciples marvel at Him, and ask, "Who can this be"? There was no physical danger that could prove an obstacle for Jesus mission, for he commanded the entire physical realm, and could control the forces of nature to ensure God's purpose was accomplished. He is still in control of the wind and the waves, the clouds and rain, the earth, sun and moon, and so we can trust in Him to protect us from all danger when we are doing God's work.

On the shore, Jesus and His disciples meet a man who has a Legion of demons living within him. The man is what many today would call a madman, for he lived among the tombs and went about naked. The demons recognize Jesus immediately, calling Him the Son of the Most High God. They begged that Jesus would not torment them but send them into a herd of pigs nearby. Jesus sent the demons into the pigs, and the pigs rushed down a steep hill into the lake and drown. Jesus mission was to rescue people from the consequences of sin, by offering forgiveness and healing, and to rescue from the power and control of Satan, which is clearly seen in how he delivered this man from many demons. Satan and demons could not hinder Jesus in His mission to rescue and heal hurting and helpless sinners. The people of that area asked Jesus to depart out of fear and ignorance, but Jesus mission is not hindered by their ignorance and fear for He sends the man freed of demons to report to these people what great things God had done for Him. Though the man delivered from demons wanted to follow Jesus, he is glad to obey Jesus and go to His own people and proclaim the wonderful work of God, and so Jesus mission can reach more people.

Now Jairus, who was a synagogue ruler, called Jesus to his house to heal his dying daughter, Jesus gladly went with him, since it was his mission to help and heal people. On His way, a woman in the crowd reaches out to touch the border of Jesus clothes. She thought if she could only touch him she would be healed of her bleeding disease, and sure enough, she was healed. Jesus stopped to ask who touched him, and when she realized He knew, she confessed all to Him. He then assured her that her faith had made her well. At the home of Jairus, the girl had already died, but Jesus raised the girl back to life and gave her back to her parents. Though Jesus work of raising the dead was important, the distraction to heal the bleeding woman, did not hinder his mission, for he was able to accomplish all things for the healing and joy of all those who believed in Him. I hope you are trusting in Jesus, since He can also heal you from the disease of sin.

"And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace." Luke 8:48

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus the Missionary, and how he and his team of workers traveled about doing the work of God. We saw how He taught about man's response to God's word, and how he cast out demons, healed a woman, and raised a little girl back from the dead. Someone might ask the question, "What is God's mission in the world today?"

There are a whole lot of churches around, and many more preachers shouting out messages for all to hear. What is the point of all of this? What is God's mission for today? We might easily be confused by the mixed messages we are hearing on the radio, from pulpits, and on street corners. Everyone seems to have something to preach, they all preach with a voice, and volume, designed to convince their audience that their message is of the greatest importance. They seem to think that they are the only preacher left on the face of the earth. It certainly would be hard to make sense of all this confusion, but let us see what God has to say from His word.

1Tim 1:15 *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

1Tim 2:4 *Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

2Pet 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

It is quite clear from these scriptures and others like them, that God's mission is to save the souls of men. That is why He sent His Son into the world to die on the cross. The gospel message is the message of how sinners, that is everyone in this world, can be forgiven by God, and received into heaven when they die. This can only happen through our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus died to put away our sins, and the bible calls on us to believe in Him for our salvation. That means to receive Him by faith, and to acknowledge Him as Lord. Do you believe that Jesus died for you? Do you believe you are a sinner, and that you need to be saved? Do you know that God wants to save you, and has provided the full price for your salvation through Jesus? If you have never trusted in Jesus as your personal Savior, then I invite you to do that today. Simply call out to Jesus in faith, ask Him to be Lord in your life, and to cleanse you from sin. As you place your trust in Him the bible will assure you, that you have been born of God, and you have eternal life.

The great mission of God is to save souls, and bring them into His home in heaven, where we can enjoy God's presence and all of His rewards forever and ever. I hope you understand God's great mission on earth today, and I also hope you can discern God's love for sinners, and His call to trust in Jesus, as you listen to the preachers shouting their message. If this is not what you are hearing or understanding, then perhaps the preacher you are listening to is just shouting for himself and not for God. Now God does have plenty to teach his children about how live and follow Christ, but the basic and most important goal, or mission, is to see people come to the Lord in faith. Every church and every preacher that is not faithful to the simple gospel message, has missed the main mission of God, and could be leading souls astray. Many who attend church regularly do not know the simple plan of God to save sinners and bring them to heaven. What a shame that so many preachers are preaching, but the people listening are no closer to heaven after all the shouting, singing, and offerings are finished. If you are a preacher, then please preach the gospel. If you are a sinner, then trust in Jesus as your Savior. If you are a believer, then make sure to join God's mission and tell your friends how they too can be saved.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Rom 10:14

LESSON 53
Jesus the Trainer!
LUKE 9

In our last lesson, we saw Jesus as a Missionary, and today we shall see Jesus as a Trainer of his disciples. He sends them forth to preach and gives them power to heal. He uses them to feed 5000 people, telling them not to reveal His identity to others. He speaks of the cost of following Him, reveals His glory and their weak faith. He teaches them about greatness, gratitude, and commitment.

Jesus sends out his 12 disciples with instructions to preach the kingdom of God, giving them authority and power to cast out demons, and to heal diseases. He advises them to take no extra clothing, and no extra food or money, and to lodge with any that would receive them. He was training them to not trust in their own resources, but to rely upon the Lord to provide as they journeyed, through the kindness of those who benefited from their ministry. If they were not received in a village, they were to shake off the dust of their feet as they left, to testify against that town. The disciples needed to understand that it was not just themselves that were being rejected. Those who reject God's word, reject God himself. Severe judgment shall fall upon all who despise the mercy and grace of God. The symbolic gesture, was like saying we will not have anything to do with this place, which aligns itself as God's enemy, and will surely meet with God's judgment.

While Jesus is a curiosity to king Herod, and He wants to know who this Jesus is, His disciples are able to identify Jesus clearly as the Christ, the Son of God. They saw how he was able to feed thousands of people with just two fish and 5 loaves. They witnessed his power, and learned that He was the great provider, and through Him, they could accomplish, what they could never do in their own strength. When the disciples confess Jesus as the Christ, Jesus speaks to them about the cost of being His disciple. He says even the whole world was not worth as much as one soul, and those who follow Him must be willing to deny themselves and take up their cross. To sacrifice our lives entirely to Christ is to give the very best that we can offer to God, for nothing else in this world, even the whole world itself has as much value. Jesus also teaches that any that are ashamed of Christ, will also bring shame to Him. What we give to Christ, whether good or bad, will be returned to us when in heaven, and with the same measure which it deserves.

High on a mountain Jesus' glory is revealed to Peter, James, and John while Jesus is transfigured and appears with Moses and Elijah. While Peter thought it wise to offer to make tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, His words were not well thought out, and God speaks saying, "This is my Beloved Son, Hear Him". These three men needed to understand that Jesus was God's delight, and was to be always the focus of their heart and attention. He was the glory of heaven and worthy of their complete devotion and obedience.

Jesus delivers a man's son who was tormented by a demon, which had often tried to harm and destroy the boy. The disciples of Jesus attempted to cast out the demon but could not, and Jesus comments that they were a faithless and perverse generation. Perhaps Jesus said this to his disciples to chide them for their lack of faith and prayer, for He had given them power to cast out demons, but on this occasion they were unable. Often believers fail to do all that they could do for the Lord, because they lack the faith in Christ's power, or are trying to do the work in their own strength, and do not trust God or His power.

Jesus spoke to His disciples about his coming betrayal to prepare them for it, but they did not understand what He was talking about. They chose instead to talk among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus sets a little child before them, and says to them that the greatest among them shall be the least. They needed to understand that the way up was down, and the mount of glory must take them first through the valley of suffering and shame. Christ taught His disciples to not look for crowns, but for crosses, not fame and riches, but rejection and poverty. He also trained His disciples to have a proper attitude towards others working in God's service. He said they should not stop others who were not against them, for those who are not against us are for us. We should resist all those whose doctrine is false, denying Christ, or the gospel. Those who seek to serve God in a good conscience should make us rejoice and be thankful, even if they are not in the same church, or follow exactly the same practices as we do. We shall all share God's reward in heaven, so why would we want to make divisions where God seeks to unite us in the Lord.

As Jesus made his way towards Jerusalem to meet his rejection, suffering and death, we might expect some apprehension, but Jesus is determined to fulfill the Father's will, and to make his way to Jerusalem where He knew he would be shamefully crucified. When others say they will be Jesus disciples he has to warn them that they might be homeless and penniless. He also says that any who follow must not allow any thing to distract or hinder their commitment to Him, or they would not be worthy to be His disciples. If Jesus was willing to go to the cross for us, then He expects His followers to be willing to suffer along with Him to fulfill the will of God.

"Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me". Luke 9:23

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus as a Trainer. We saw how He trained his disciples to go out preaching, trusting the Lord for their provisions. He is the great provider, even when our provisions seem too small. We saw how Jesus displayed His glory, and taught his disciples to keep their eyes fixed upon Him, obey Him, and how the greatest among them must become the least. Someone might ask the question, "How can I be trained to serve Lord?"

Some Christians sense that God is calling them into His service, and would like to be trained so that they can enter fulltime into the Lord's work. Training is very important in serving the Lord, but even more important than training is to be certain that God has called you to serve Him. Perhaps many have mistakenly thought they would like to serve God, when in fact, God has not called them, and so they find themselves begging others to support them. Those who beg others to sponsor their education, to their Christian service and ministry bring shame to the name of Jesus Christ. As we have seen in today's lesson, the Lord wants His servants to trust in Himself for their support. God will most certainly look after the needs of those whom He calls into His service, when they faithfully fulfill their ministry, and do so in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord.

Many who feel called to serve the Lord believe they must first go to bible school, to receive a degree in theology, or be ordained in some official ceremony. Although many churches and bible schools support the idea of ordination, we certainly do not find this taught in the bible. Someone like Timothy had hands laid on him by the elders of the church, not to ordain him, but in recognition of his call to serve. Church leaders do not make someone a servant of God; that is God's doing. The elders of the church simply recognize and affirm the obvious, when they recognize a man that has been prepared by God to enter into service for God.

Bible schools can be helpful in equipping a man with skills to study God's word, but there are also some dangers associated with bible schools. Bible schools may not follow the same doctrine of the church, or might be quite liberal in their beliefs, to accommodate a wider spectrum of believers. This can cause the students of theology to weaken their convictions about biblical truth. In addition, we do not find bible schools mentioned in the New Testament. We see however how God raised up servants from within the local churches. It appears that God's ideal is to have each local church operate as a mini-bible school. We can see the wisdom in training people within the context of the church, for it provides a practical hands-on approach to learning to serve, teach, and shepherd. A student who learns from mature church leaders will be held accountable for their doctrine and Christian testimony. Bible schools often are lacking in the area of mentoring, or spiritual accountability to leadership. The bible says knowledge can puff a person up with pride. Bible schools may tend to lift a person up in pride, when graduates think they are qualified to serve, because they have increased their knowledge. However, God does not look to a man's intellect or knowledge, as much as He looks at a man's heart, attitude, and humble service to qualify him. David, the shepherd boy, who came to be king over Israel, demonstrates this biblical principle.

Bible schools perhaps can provide a profitable way to prepare a person to serve the Lord in the church, but do remember that this was not the pattern seen in the New Testament. Ideally, our local church should have mature men, who are capable and willing to disciple younger men for serving the Lord. Elders also will have the spiritual discernment to recognize qualifications and gifting of those under their care, and be the best to direct them in their particular sphere of service for the Lord. Every young man who is thinking about doing the Lord's work would be wise to consult with their elders in the church, submit to them, obey them, and follow their godly example. Also they will want to find places of service within the local church, for this is the best biblical training ground for any servant of the Lord.

"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." 2Tim 2:2

The Character of Christian Service!

LUKE 10

In today's lesson, we shall learn about the Character of Christian service. We shall see that though there are hardships and rejection, there is greater reward and joy. We shall see how the Lord provides for his servants, and mistreating them will bring judgment. While there is great honor for the Lord's servants who are privileged to know and serve Christ, proud religious people cannot find eternal life. We shall also learn that our service for the Lord should not hinder our worship of the Lord.

In this chapter, we again find Jesus sending out his workers to preach, but this time it is not just the 12 apostles, but also 70 of his disciples. He sends them out in pairs to visit the various towns and villages. He asks them to pray for more workers, because there is much work to be done, and not enough workers. In the great work of reaching souls, there is always plenty of work to be done. If more Christians are committed to sharing the gospel message, then the kingdom of God will expand even more. Jesus again tells his disciples to take no extra money, shoes, or bag with them, and to enjoy whatever food is set before them in the house that welcomes them. He was teaching them that the worker is worthy of his wages. As they faithfully served God, and preached about the kingdom of God, then they should be glad to receive whatever kindness people would provide for their care. These servants were to represent God himself, and thus if they were well received then God's blessing would be upon the house that accepted them and heard them. Those who rejected Christ's disciples were rejecting Christ and His Father. As they shook off the dust from their feet, they testified of God's displeasure and judgment. The reason the judgment would come so severely upon these towns and villages, was because they had seen the mighty miracles done by Jesus, or by the hand of His apostles, and this divine witness should have led to their repentance. Jesus said that if the same privileges had been given to cities of the past, such as Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon that they would have repented. God judged all these former cities for their wickedness, and those living in Jesus time were far guiltier for rejecting the Son of God, who came with a message of mercy, and miracles to validate His ministry. In serving Christ, his disciples would experience many struggles and rejection, but one day they would be greatly rewarded for their faithful service.

There was great honor in serving the Lord, for those privileged to see Jesus and His miracles. Even the great prophets of the Old Testament had longed to know and see the Messiah and His ministry, but were not privileged to live during the time Jesus would come into the world. Not only was a great honor for these to serve Christ, but it is also a great honor for us today to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. To those who represent Him to the world, He promises great reward and joy. While the 70 disciples were rejoicing about the spirits being subject to them, and the power they were able to use in Christ's name, Jesus said they should rather rejoice that their names were written in heaven. It is far greater to be a child bound for heaven, than to have miraculous power, or be someone great in this world. God is pleased to reveal himself to the simple and sincere, while the proud and wise are not able with their knowledge and religious effort to know God.

There is such a wonderful privilege in serving the Lord, while many other religious people are trying to earn their way to heaven, and yet cannot attain to eternal life. When a lawyer comes to Jesus asking how he might gain eternal life, Jesus points him to the scriptures. This man understood that the scriptures taught it was man's responsibility to love God and to love his neighbor. Jesus said this is what the man should do, and he would live. Jesus said this not because the man was capable, but to test the man's sincerity. In fact, none of us is capable to fulfill the requirements of the God's Law, and love God and man perfectly. This is illustrated in the story of the Good Samaritan, where some religious men pass by a man in desperate need of help, but a Samaritan man is willing to offer as much help as the man needed. The story should have cut into the lawyer's heart, helping him to see that all his religious effort will never make him fit for heaven. Those who are truly God's children are not so because of their religious efforts, but through faith in Jesus. They have been born again, and now have the nature of God living within them, so that they act as God would act. When someone possesses God's free gift of eternal life, they are so grateful to be saved, and the Spirit of God living within them fills their heart full of God's love and goodness. This will manifest itself by loving God, and loving our neighbors. All the religion in the world cannot change a heart, or make someone a child of God. Only those who humbly, sincerely accept Jesus by faith have eternal life.

Serving the Lord is a very good thing, and every Christian should find a place where they can serve God. While serving is good, it is not better than worship, and should not take away from the importance of devotion or worship. Martha was concerned and upset that her sister Mary was not busy serving as she was doing, and Jesus had to tell Martha that her service would not be permitted to take away the good part that Mary had chosen, which was sitting by the Lord to learn from Him.

"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:20

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the Character of Christian Service. We have learned that there is a need to pray for more workers, that the Lord's servants should be honored, and the Lord provides wages for his workers. We also learned that personal power and prestige are not as important as having our names written in heaven; and that though Christian service is good, it should not hinder worship. Someone might ask the question, "Why does Jesus say it will be more tolerable for some on the Day of Judgment?"

When Jesus said that it would be more tolerable 'in that Day' for Sodom, then for those cities that rejected Jesus messengers, what did He mean? What we learn from this passage in Luke and other similar passages in the gospels is that in the coming day of God's judgment on the wicked, some will receive a more severe punishment than others. The reason for a greater judgment on some of the cities around Galilee was because Jesus had performed mighty miracles among them, and so they had even greater reason to believe, repent, and follow Christ. Other cities of the past had not been as fortunate to have as much spiritual light as had been given to the people of Galilee during the earthy ministry of Christ. Those who had less spiritual light to respond to are less accountable for their rejection of that light.

It is important for all of us to understand this point, because it applies to us also. If we have heard the gospel, and know the message of the bible, then God will hold us accountable for the light that He has given to us. Today we are privileged to each hold our own copy of the complete bible. This was not something the first Christians had. We also have many preachers, who have been well trained to teach the bible, and a wealth of books written by godly men over the past centuries. We have the bible available not only in a variety of languages, but also in several translations to help us better understand it. We also have audio bibles that we can listen to, and so many ways for us to hear and know God's word today. This means that we are without excuse, and we shall be held more accountable than previous generations. If we reject God's message and salvation, when it has been so clearly presented, and made so easily available to us, then God will bring upon us the most severe judgment of all.

We might tend to think that all in the fires of Hell shall suffer the same, but this passage would teach us differently, pointing out that even in the Lake of fire, there will be different degrees of judgment. It is hard to imagine how it will be more tolerable for some, when we read how Hades is a place of eternal fire, torment, and darkness. Just as the scriptures teach us that in heaven there are different degrees of reward to believers, it also teaches there are different degrees of judgment to those who have rejected God's love and mercy. The basis of God's judgment is the works that a person does while living on the earth, and the amount of spiritual light they were privileged to receive. The bible teaches us that God has given light to every man that comes into the world, and so no one can excuse themselves or say that God has not treated them fairly. Some have been giving so many opportunities, and still reject God's salvation, because they prefer their sin.

How often has God been pleading with you to repent, turn from your sins, and trust in Jesus as your Savior? Have you been rejecting Jesus, and putting off the decision to become a Christian, because you did not think you could live the Christian life? Have you been pretending to be a Christian to make your relatives or family happy? How long will God plead with you? How long will He try to open your eyes and your heart? He has given His light to you in abundance, He has sent you preacher after preacher, but still you are outside, and not convinced to trust in Jesus. Today is the day you must hear and respond to the message that God is giving to you. Do not reject Jesus for another day, but turn to Him this day and make Him your only hope and trust for entering heaven. He loves you, and wants to save you, if you will only take Him now.

"For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you". Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 2Cor 6:2

LESSON 55
Seeking Spiritual Light
LUKE 11

In today's lesson, we shall learn about the blessing and rewards of seeking spiritual light, and the folly and condemnation of those who refuse to receive spiritual light. We shall learn that God delights to respond to our earnest prayers. Also we will see how seeking signs will bring God's displeasure and condemnation, because God has already given spiritual light to those who are willing to see.

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus teaches them a model prayer, which is commonly known to us as the 'Lord's Prayer'. These men were seeking spiritual light, and the Lord was glad to respond to their request. We could learn much from a careful study of this prayer, but for the sake of time, let us just simply observe that our prayers should always put God first, and His kingdom before our own needs. We also should be thankful and praise our God, because He is our provider of daily bread, He is merciful to forgive us our debts, and He is our great protector from temptation and from evil. We need His grace and help everyday, and so we ought to pray each day, and praise Him each day. Jesus also taught that God will reward those who are persistent in prayer, and that when we ask, seek, and knock, God is pleased to give, reveal, and open a way. God loves to hear us prayer, and as a good Father, He knows how to bless His children with good things.

When some accuse Jesus of casting demons out by the power of Beelzebub, Jesus rebukes their folly. Jesus points out that it would not make sense for Satan to cast himself out, for why would he fight against himself. Jesus points out that only someone stronger than Satan could cast out Satan, and this gave evidence to who Jesus really was. Jesus had cast out a demon from a mute man, and was also doing many good works. This should have been enough spiritual light to convince everyone that He was God's Messiah. Yet, with this spiritual light available they still could not see clearly, because they had diseased eyes.

Jesus said that the eyes were the light of the body. That is the eye allowed the light to enter into the man, so he could understand the truth. The fact that Jesus was doing mighty miracles, and overthrowing Satan and His demons, should have made it obvious that Jesus had God's power working in Him. If their eyes were clear and healthy, then the spiritual light would enter in, but because they could not see clearly, the spiritual light was not able to enter in. Their eyes were sick; they were blind to the obvious. When they ask Jesus to perform a sign, they are admitting their state of blindness, for Jesus had been doing many miracles, but they refused to acknowledge or see the signs He had already given. Jesus has to tell them that it is an evil generation that seeks for a sign. He also pointed out that only the sign of Jonah would be given to them. While they could not see clearly any other sign through His miracles, the resurrection, which is the same as the sign of Jonah, would be more than enough proof of His identity as their Messiah. If they would not believe in Him after He was raised from the dead, then nothing He could do would ever be able to convince them to surrender to His authority.

Jesus condemns the generation that was seeking for a sign, saying that all the guilt of the former generations would come upon them, for they of all people had the greatest evidence of God's power working among them, and yet they stubbornly refused to see and accept Jesus as God's chosen one.

Jesus said that the Queen of the South and Nineveh would be used to condemn them, for they had been given evidence and believed. When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon and saw the glory of His kingdom, and all his wisdom, she was very impressed, and knew that God had blessed Solomon above all other kingdoms. When Jonah preached to Nineveh, the people believed his words and repented. These all responded to what revealed to them. They responded to the spiritual light God provided to them, even though it was such a smaller light than the light provided by Jesus to those who witnessed His many miracles. That is why the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will be just in condemning that generation, which was so much more privileged to have a greater light but refused to accept the light.

When a Pharisee invites Jesus to dine in his house he marvels that Jesus did not wash his hands to eat. Jesus knew his heart, and shows him the fault in his thinking, for cleaning the outside is meaningless, when the inside is not clean. What Jesus was trying to get across was that while the Pharisees were trying to look good on the outside, they were unclean on the inside, for they were full of greed, pride, and evil thoughts. Jesus then pronounces woes against the Pharisees and lawyers for all their religious hypocrisy. Jesus does not withhold the ugly truth of the corruption and evil within these men, but exposes their sin, speaking plainly about their hypocrisy. Jesus speaks about their hidden corruptions, their attention to details of the Law, while missing the main point of God's Law to love and do justice. He said they honor the dead prophets, but they were no different from their fathers who murdered the prophets because they were seeking to destroy the greatest prophet of all. They wanted to extinguish the spiritual light by getting rid of Jesus. Jesus words made these men very angry, and they were trying desperately to find some way to accuse Him. If only they could have accepted the spiritual light that God had sent to them, then God could forgive and cleanse them. I do hope that you have accepted the spiritual light that God has provided to you through His word, by accepting Jesus as Lord of your Life.

"Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness." Luke 11:35

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about receiving spiritual light. We saw how the disciples wanted to learn how to pray and to conform their lives to the light that was given to them. We also learned how the Pharisees refused the light God had provided, and asked to see a sign. Jesus rebuked their folly, and warns of their condemnation. Someone might ask the question, "What did Jesus mean by the light in us being darkness?"

In Luke 11:35 we read, *"Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness"*. This statement seems rather confusing, for how can light be called darkness. We need to understand that Jesus is talking about spiritual light. Spiritual light is a revelation given to us by God. This comes to us through the word of God and the Holy Spirit helping us to understand, and "see" the truth. The seeing is what should happen if we have good spiritual eyes. We can have good spiritual eyes, when we are ready to hear God speak, and are willing to accept and obey what we learn from God. If a person does not understand that God forbids using the Lord's name in vain, and they read their bible and learn, "You shall not use the Lord's name in vain". They may become convicted about their sin and decide not to commit this sin again. Their obedient response to God's word shows that they have received spiritual light.

While Jesus performed so many miracles for others to see, it was as though a great light was shining for everyone to see. If anyone had good spiritual eyes, they would see and understand that Jesus was sent from God, and they would gladly follow Him, learn from Him, and obey Him. However, if their eyes were damaged, so that the light could not enter into them, then they would be full of darkness. If we think of spiritual light as God's revelation, and understanding of the mind of God, then we can appreciate that those who refused to accept Jesus as God's Messiah, were refusing a clear revelation from God. They did have some revelation from scriptures, but had misunderstood it, and added to it their own ideas, which were not from God at all, but from their own evil desires. Thus, the spiritual light inside of them was not God's light, but their own folly, which they believed was God's truth, but was just their own darkness. Here darkness needs to be understood as man's false understandings and his false religious ideas. So when Jesus says the light in them is darkness, what he meant was that the false religious ideas that were guiding some people were not God's light, as they might have thought, but was man's light, which was not light at all, but darkness. It might seem a bit confusing for us to understand, but perhaps another illustration can help us to get the point. Imagine if I thought it was okay to take some herbal medicine to cure me of a sickness, but when I went to the doctor, he told me that the herbal medicine was not good for me, and that I should take the medicine that he prescribed. Now, I could choose to follow the doctors advice, because he is a trained professional, or I could decide to go with the herbal medicine in hopes that it will help me. If I refuse to listen to the doctor, who best knows what medicine I need, then I am refusing to accept the doctor as a qualified professional. I treat all of his learning and training with less importance than as my own understanding and beliefs about herbal remedies. Pride has blinded me to the truth, and darkness is ruling inside of me. If I accept that the doctor is much wiser, and more knowledgeable about my condition, and I trust his advice and follow it, then I am allowing his knowledge to enter in and be my guide. I have accepted the light of his knowledge, and I am made well through his help. Therefore, Jesus is trying to teach us that we need to acknowledge that He is much wiser and more knowledgeable than we are, and we can trust in His guidance. We have plenty of evidence to assure us that He is qualified to govern our lives and make us God's children, because of all of His good works and miracles. If we accept the light that God had given to us through Jesus, then we shall be made well, and God's light will be in us. I do hope that you are allowing the light of the gospel to penetrate into your heart, and you have received Jesus by faith. Do not allow darkness to rule in your life, but commit your life to Jesus, and receive God's light.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2Cor 4:6

LESSON 56
Seeking God's Kingdom
LUKE 12

In our last lesson, we considered the subject of seeking spiritual light, and today we shall consider seeking God's kingdom. We shall learn how to relate to God, and how to set our heart on God's kingdom and not on the riches of this world. We also will consider how the faithful who wait for their Lord's return shall be rewarded, but those who act wickedly shall be judged.

In the first part of this chapter, as Jesus addresses a large crowd of people, he teaches them how they should relate to God. He says they should fear God, and that is in the sense of fearing him as the one who has power to judge and cast into Hell. He says also that His followers should not be ashamed to confess Christ before men, and that they should trust in the help of the Holy Spirit to provide words and guidance as needed. From this we learn that God the Father is our judge, the Son of God is our Master, and the Holy Spirit is our guide and helper. We can see that each member of the trinity relates to us in a unique way.

When a man asked Jesus to intercede for him to get his inheritance, Jesus refuses to judge his case, and then uses a parable to warn about covetousness. In the parable a man stores up great wealth, and is only concerned about his possessions, but was foolish, for God took his life earlier than he expected. Jesus teaches us that the important thing in life is not how much money or possessions we can collect for ourselves, but our relationship to God. Jesus says that His followers should sell their interests in this world, and store up treasure in heaven, for where you have your treasure your heart will also be. Earthly riches will pass away, but heaven is forever; where would you rather store your riches? Jesus tells the crowd that they should not worry about food and clothing. God looks after all of his creation, and through the eyes of faith we see how God provides for all living things. We also understand that man is of greater importance to God than the birds and flowers, and therefore realize that God who cares for the birds and flowers will most certainly care for the needs of man. Our responsibility is to seek God's kingdom. The trouble is most people are seeking their own personal kingdom of wealth in this world. They lack faith, and cannot give up this world's riches to seek God's riches in heaven.

In the latter part of this chapter, Jesus speaks about how we should be looking for His return. Those who faithfully follow Jesus as their Lord, choose to live righteously in this world, as they wait eagerly for His return. They do this because their faith assures them that Jesus is coming soon to judge the world. Jesus said those who are waiting anxiously for Him to come, will be rewarded with honor from the coming king, who will even serve them and dine with them. However, those who forget about the Lord's return, and use their time to treat others wickedly, and who indulge all their appetites, enjoying the pleasures of this world, demonstrate that their treasures are in this world. When the Lord comes, these fake hypocrites will be cut off and sent to a place of torment with unbelievers. It is not enough to call yourself a Christian, and think that the Lord will accept you into heaven. To be a Christian means that Jesus is Lord of your life and you are eagerly seeking for His coming kingdom. Many are pretending to seek God's kingdom, but are only living for earthly pleasures. When Jesus speaks of His coming to judge, he says that some will receive a greater judgment, because they knowingly rebelled against His will, while others disobeyed His will from their own ignorance. We are all responsible to obey the will of God, whether we know His will or not. Judgment will fall on all people for their disobedience to God, but some will suffer less, if they did not have the privilege of knowing His will more fully.

While Jesus speaks about his coming judgment on the world, He points out that His mission in the world, although intended to bring peace and reconciliation with God, would in fact bring about division. Families would be divided because of Christ's words, and their different responses. Those who obey Christ would become enemies to those who refused to follow Him. Some are ready to accept Jesus as King, and welcome His kingdom, while others are not ready to submit to Him. Jesus said he was distressed as he thought about going to the cross, which he called His baptism. What He meant was He would be fully immersed in God's judgment when upon the cross. He was anxious to accomplish His Father's will, but also knew that the cross would bring not only peace to men, but also division and strife as men took their stand with Him or against Him.

Jesus said that some could discern the weather by the signs they observed. If a south wind was blowing, they knew that meant hot weather was coming, and if they saw clouds forming, they knew rain was soon to follow. They could interpret signs about the coming weather, but they were not able to interpret signs about the coming judgment of God. Therefore, Jesus warns all that they should seek to settle matters with their enemy, before facing the judge, or they will be required to make full payment. To seek God's kingdom means to first repent and accept Jesus as your rightful king, surrender to Him and obey Him. If you cannot make reconciliation with God through Jesus, then you will have to face the judgment of God. The payment required is something that you will never be able to pay for all eternity. Christ suffered to make full payment for your sins, so why not surrender to Him, and have all your sins washed away, then God will not have to judge you and send you to Hell to pay for your sins.

"But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." Luke 12:31

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about seeking God's kingdom, and this means that we are willing to give up the pleasures and riches of this world to gain riches in heaven. We also saw how our faith leads us to anxiously wait for our coming King. We were warned that the Lord would judge those who behave wickedly when He returns. Someone might ask the question, "What treasure can I store up in heaven?"

Jesus tells us to store up our treasures in heaven, where they will not fade or corrupt, but will last forever. What are the treasures that Jesus is speaking about? Men love to seek after the riches of this world. The man, whom Jesus had rebuked for covetousness, was seeking after an inheritance. Money is the great pursuit of men's hearts in this world, but we shall not need money in heaven.

The riches we store in heaven come to us by the way we live in this world. When Jesus spoke about storing up treasures in heaven, he began speaking about how we should live godly in this world, and do good to our neighbors. The reward of godliness, and showing God's love and goodness will mean that we can enjoy our relationship with God all the more. The bible speaks of crowns, but we do not necessarily have to think of our treasure as literal crowns, but rather is something like the honor, joy, and victory that a person feels when they are crowned. That is similar to how the Christian will feel when we meet Christ, and receive our reward from Him. However, our crown will be so much greater than any earthly crown. Imagine the feeling of honor that someone feels when they are crowned king or queen. Imagine how an athlete feels when they receive their victory medal. They feel the power, honor, and greatness, which men have given to them, but it only lasts for a moment. What we shall receive in heaven will give us joy, honor, and victory forever and ever.

The greatest treasure in heaven is to be with Jesus. He is our Savior, the one who loved us unto death, and when we meet Him at last, we shall know the fullness of true love, and it shall sustain us forever. Some things that Jesus has promised to His followers are peace and joy. These are two very precious rewards for the child of God, and they are rewards, which shall never fade away through the ages of eternity. Christ will always bring us peace, and fill us with joy. This might not seem to be such a great reward when we compare it with all the riches and luxury of this world, but remember that all that the world offers never satisfies, because it does not last. In heaven, our joy will be forever, and our peace will endure forever.

When a young man and woman are ready to marry, and they gaze lovingly into each other's eyes, they think to themselves that they want to spend the rest of their lives together, and enjoy and explore the depths of their love for each other. We know from experience that even the love within marriages will face so many challenges and obstacles because of sin. However, imagine being with one whose love is unchanging and is perfect in all His ways, knowing that your relationship will continue joyfully forever. This is what our hearts long for, and it is what Christ died for. The greatest reward of heaven is Christ Himself and being with Him forever. If we have learned to truly love Him and live for Him, then we shall seek long to be with Him. Through His riches, we shall find our every need met. Our greatest imaginations could not begin to comprehend all the joy and blessing He has in store for those who love Him.

So, we should not think of treasure in heaven as something to compare with the temporary riches of this world. Money and things, are just smoke clouding our eyes. When the smoke clears, and we fix our eyes upon the true riches, then all that smoke will be despised. Why should we spend our time collecting things which we cannot bring to heaven, and steal our heart's affection from Jesus? Our treasure in heaven will be more joyful when we bring along more friends to meet our glorious king. The treasure of heaven will include the souls we helped bring to Jesus.

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" 2Thess 2:19

LESSON 57
The Unfruitful Fig Tree
LUKE 13

In today's lesson, we are going to look at the unfruitful fig tree, which pictures the nation of Israel, who continually rejected God's message and messengers, and thus proved themselves to be unfruitful. We can see the sad condition of Israel in the story of the healing of a woman on the Sabbath and the synagogue ruler being upset about this good work. We also hear Jesus speak of those who call Him Lord, Lord, but who are not known to Jesus because of their wickedness.

When Jesus refers to some people who were killed by a falling tower, or by Herod, he explains that their untimely death was not because they were greater sinners than any other. Death is not a respecter of persons, and will take the young as well as the old. We all must face death sooner or later. We hope and expect to meet death much later, but we cannot tell whether the Lord will make today our last day in this world. That is why we must repent while we have opportunity, or we shall all perish.

When Jesus speaks a parable about the unfruitful fig tree, He is teaching the patience that God has had with the nation of Israel. How often the Lord had sent prophets to Israel to call her back to God, and yet how often they departed in rebellion. Eventually the fig tree would be uprooted and God's blessing given to another, for Israel did not deserve all the grace and goodness of God, when she constantly rebelled against God. That is why God has set aside the nation of Israel, while He calls all the nations to repentance and faith in Christ.

Jesus heals a woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath, which brings about the complaint of the synagogue ruler, who thought that healings should not be done on the Sabbath day. For 18 long years this poor woman suffered, and the religious ruler was more concerned about what day of the week she should be healed on, than about the woman's condition. This man portrays the proud religious Jewish people who lived at the time Jesus came to them. They should have rejoiced to see their Messiah, but instead were complaining about Him, though He was doing so many good works. For so many generations they had a dead religion, caring more about strict observances, than about pleasing the Lord with a heart of compassion, justice, and mercy. When religion cares more about its' own regulations, then about the people it is supposed to serve, it has departed from the whole point of religion, and that is to make us godly. This means we will be like God, full of compassion, and not cruel and unkind, to those we should love.

When Jesus shares two short parables about a mustard seed and about leaven, He does not explain their meaning, but both show something very small that grew and spread. He may be referring to the pride of religion that spreads in the heart, and takes over completely, so that the person cannot respond to God's truth and righteousness.

Jesus said that we should strive to enter the narrow gate that leads to life. He said this because the broad road is very wide, and most people follow that path which leads to destruction. You have to try hard to enter God's kingdom. Not that we enter by our own efforts, but it is so easy to be deceived by false religion and follow the broad way. We need to make sure we are on the right path, for many will say "Lord, Lord, did we not eat and drink with you, and did not teach in our streets?" Association with religion, or general knowledge about Jesus, will not bring you into God's kingdom. We need to have a personal relationship with Jesus through faith. That is why Jesus will say to the professing religious people, "Depart from me, I never *knew* you". Notice our entrance is based on a personal relationship. In the kingdom, many from other nations will sit down with the prophets; with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the nation of Israel will be thrust out, because they refused to accept and receive their king. This does not mean that all of Israel will be cast out, but many of them that could have been saved, will find themselves outside the door shouting let us in, when other gentiles have been welcomed to dine with the Lord in heaven. Jesus points out that those who are cast out from God's kingdom will be sent to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This tells us that the suffering in Hell will involve much grief and much anger. Grief will be due to the hopelessness of having no escape; and anger at their foolishness in not repenting when they had the chance. Perhaps they are also angry with God, but this anger will not be justified, for God has been more than fair to give everyone a chance to be forgiven and enter into heaven. When Jesus is warned that Herod is seeking to kill him, he sends a message back to Herod to say that He would be dying in Jerusalem, as all prophets are killed in that city. Jesus mourns over Jerusalem, a city that God called to repent many times. They refused to come to Lord, and take shelter in His love and protection. Israel could have been saved; and should have borne much fruit for the Lord. He had nurtured Israel with the word, and sent prophets repeatedly, just like the farmer in the parable, who spent more time nurturing the fig tree, hoping that it would at last produce some fruit. Israel had failed to produce repentance and to receive her Messiah, and so Jerusalem would be left desolate. Let all be warned! Repent while you still have hope. Without repentance, you certainly perish because of your rebellion against God.

"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:5

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Israel as an unfruitful fig tree. We saw how their religious pride made them unfruitful, so that God could not find any pleasure in them, and turned to the gentiles to offer them salvation. We learned about the need to repent, or else perish, and that death may come to anyone at any time. Someone might ask the question, what does the bible mean by the words "repent", and "perish".

We frequently here preachers shouting from street corners that we all need to repent, but what exactly is biblical repentance? The word repentance means to change our minds about something. In the bible when we are called upon to repent, it means that we need to change our mind about several things.

1. We need to change our mind about sin, recognizing that we are guilty before God because of sin. Without this sense of shame, guilt, and sorrow over sin, we cannot claim to be repentant.
2. We should also change our mind about God, realizing that God hates our sin and is ready to judge us. We also come to understand that God loves sinners, though hating our sin, and has provided a means for us to be forgiven for our sins.
3. We should also change our minds about the person and work of Jesus Christ, as we come to realize that Jesus bore our sins upon the cross, and is calling us to trust in His sacrifice to wash away our sins. We also come to acknowledge Jesus as God's beloved Son, and receive Him as our Lord.
4. We also change our minds about ourselves, we no longer see ourselves as trying to be good enough to get to heaven, but we accept that we are guilty sinners before God.
5. We also change our minds about Christians, where once we did not love or care about God's people we now are ready to love them and desire joyful fellowship with them.

You should notice that this change of mind affects the way we think about many things. This repentance is brought about by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, who convinces us of our wrong ways, and shows us that we need to have an entire change of heart and mind. As we experience true repentance, it will always lead to a corresponding positive action. If we feel ashamed and guilty about our sin, then we freely confess our sins before God. If we know God hates our sin, then we shall do our best to avoid sin. If we know Jesus loved us and died for us, we will love and worship Him. We will love the Christians since God loves them, and paid a great price to redeem them.

Someone who has experienced repentance will have a complete transformation of their mind, as they look at things entirely different from their old way of thinking. We must be careful not to confuse the acts of repentance with our justification. God does not accept us, and forgive us, because we have given up all of our sins. Many have fallen into this false idea of repentance, and how it relates to our salvation. Please remember that you are not saved by your good works, or by cleaning up your life from sin. You are saved by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus alone. Repentance gives us a change of heart that leads us to come to Jesus in faith. Faith and repentance go hand in hand, and you cannot sincerely have one without the other. However, the bible makes it clear that we are saved by God's grace and our response of faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Repentance not only happens when we first trust in the Lord, but will also need to take place regularly in the Christian life. The reason for this is that sin has a way of clinging onto the Christian, even though he is trying to get rid of sins. As a Christian becomes aware of sin, he must confess to God and do his best to repent of it. That means taking firm action to stay away from sin. If I tell God I am sorry about my sin, but then go right back to the sin again, then I am not showing true and sincere repentance.

Jesus also said, 'that unless you repent, you will perish'. What did he mean by the word perish? The word literally means to kill or to destroy, but when Jesus used this word he was speaking of those who reject God's salvation, and will end up in Hell suffering forever. Biblically speaking, 'to perish' means to suffer forever under God's wrath and judgment in the Lake of Fire.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

LESSON 58
Taking the Low Place
LUKE 14

In today's lesson, we find Jesus dining with some Pharisees, and challenging them to take the humble place. He also shows the importance of serving for future rewards in heaven, and not just here on earth. Jesus will also point out the importance of accepting God's invitation while it is available.

Jesus is dining in the home of one of the ruling Pharisees, and takes notice of a man who with dropsy. It appears the Pharisees were looking for an occasion to accuse Jesus for doing wrong. As it was the Sabbath day, and Jesus could see the man that needed to be healed, He first asked the Pharisees, if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, but their kept quiet. Jesus then healed the man, and asked the Pharisees another question about the Sabbath. He said to them, 'if your donkey or ox falls into a pit on the Sabbath, which one of you would not rescue the animal on the Sabbath?' A donkey or an ox was an important investment, and not helping the animal immediately could cost its' life, and a large money loss to the owner. No one was prepared to make such a loss on, even if it meant pulling the animal out of the pit on the Sabbath day. While these men were trying to lay a trap for Jesus, He in fact trapped them, for if they said they would be willing to rescue an animal on the Sabbath day, and then they would have to further admit that it was okay to release a man from the bondage of disease on the Sabbath as well.

Jesus said to those at the dinner table, that it was important when attending a feast to seek the low place, and not the high place of honor. That way the host will have a chance to exalt you, rather than having to humble you, and move you from the better seat to a lower seat. Jesus was telling this story to teach the need for humility, while he sat at a dinner with a group of proud men, who loved honor and praise. How true it is that we see men seeking a place of honor, but when men exalt themselves Jesus said they would be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. It is wise then to always seek the low place, and let others do the exalting.

Jesus also pointed out to the Pharisees, that when having a dinner, they should not just invite their friends, family, or rich neighbors who were able to repay the kindness, but they should invite the poor, maimed, lame, and blind, since these could not repay. The principle taught to us here, is not to do go, only so we can have some immediate advantage, but rather to do go that will last into eternity. Jesus points out that when we serve the interests of God and others by faith that is not looking for our reward now, but later in heaven, that we shall be rewarded at the time of the resurrection of the just. Our religious good deeds are not so we shall look good in the sight of men, but in genuine love for God, and with a view to our eternal rewards in heaven.

Now Jesus also tells the Pharisees a story also about a dinner. It is interesting to notice how Jesus uses illustrations to teach that relate to the immediate circumstances that others could understand and relate to. While Jesus was a dinner guest in another's home, he speaks of another dinner and invited guests. In the story, those who are invited to dinner all decline the invitation, because of other business they had to attend to. They clearly thought their own business was more important than honoring the man who invited them for dinner. It was a show of pride, which said your dinner invitation, is not as important as my own affairs. The host sent servants to collect as many guests as could be found in the highways and byways to come and enjoy his feast, but he said he would never allow those wicked men who refused his invitation to ever taste his dinner. Though the Pharisees likely did not understand the implications of this story, it was in fact directed at them and others like them, who are invited by God to feast with God's son, and to bid honor to the one God delights in. When pride of religious position causes men to refuse God's invitation to come and dine, which is a picture of salvation, then God will cast them out. It takes humility to recognize our need of salvation, and to come to Jesus in faith, and those who refuse the invitation provoke God's wrath, and will be punished for their obstinate pride and rebellion.

The scene then changes, and we find Jesus being followed by a large crowd of followers. Jesus turns to the crowd to speak to them about the high cost of discipleship. He explains to them that to follow him, means they must make Him more important than even their families. He said they too must be willing to carry a cross, meaning they must be ready to die. They must be willing to die to their own ambitions, to their own families influence, to their comfort and ease in the world, and to be ready to even given up their lives if necessary to represent Christ, and make the gospel known. Jesus said in both building and war prior plans need to be made to ensure the effort and commitment were enough to complete the task. When following Jesus, we must understand that it will cost us everything, and so we must be willing to give up all for Him. He then says that salt that loses its' flavor is not good for anything, but to be cast out. This means those who can only go part way for Christ, and then turn back, are useless to the kingdom of God. I hope you have counted the cost of following Jesus, and are prepared to forsake all to be His disciple.

"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:33

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about taking the low place, so that we will not be put to shame, exalted by others and not ourselves. We also learned that in doing good we should keep an eternal perspective, not seeking applause and reward in this world. We also saw that many do not heed God's invitation to salvation because they are filled with pride. Someone might ask the question, "Shouldn't I seek to get ahead and do well for myself, rather than take the low place in life?"

In today's lesson, we learned the importance of not honoring ourselves, but rather to humble ourselves by preferring the low place. The truth is that none of us likes to take the low place. No one wants to be last in the queue, or to let everyone go before them. It is in our selfish nature to assert ourselves and push ahead of others. Unfortunately, our tendency to think only of ourselves makes an unhappy environment to live in. No one seems willing to give, to serve, to let others go first, so the result is pushing, shoving, corruption, stealing, lying, and a host of other sins. Exalting self might be the way the world works, but it is not the way of Christ. If we are to be His followers, then we must learn to be different from the world, and take the low place. Jesus went from the highest place in heaven, to the lowest place possible upon a cross of shame and suffering. He did all of this for our sakes. He did it so you and I could be exalted to heaven. It is hard to humble ourselves, and let others take first place, but when we do so, we act as Christ would act, and thus glorify Him. When we humbly take the low place of servitude as a Christian, then we have the hope of one day being rewarded in heaven. The man, who takes the low seat at the wedding feast, will be asked to move to a better seat of honor by the host. The Christian who is willing to humble himself and go low, shall also one day be exalted with honor when in the presence of Christ.

It is a strange paradox that those who humble themselves shall be exalted, but that is what Jesus teaches. When we act that way, the world will think we are quite strange. By faith, we know that one day our sacrifices will be rewarded in heaven. If you worry about what your friends think of you, or what your family expects of you, then you will not be able to obey Christ in being a faithful disciple. The world and your family will call you to exalt yourself; to make the best of this world, and take everything you can to be rich and live in luxury. It has a great appeal to most people, because they prefer the immediate satisfaction that comes from catering to their own pride and desires. It is only by the eyes of faith, and looking onward beyond this world, that we can give up the treasures of this world, in view of the treasures of heaven.

Jesus does not call his followers to an easy and exalted life in this world. It is a life of taking the low place. It is life of bearing a cross, denying self; of choosing Christ over family, friends, and riches. Why would anyone want to follow Christ if it is so costly? It might even cost us our lives, if we are bold in preaching the gospel? So why do it? Why pay this price? We could ask the same question about why Jesus went to the cross. Why pay this price? Why do it? The bible gives us the answer to this question, when it says, "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). Jesus looked beyond the cross, to the joy of having us in heaven with him and enjoying His presence for the eternal ages to come. Based on the joy that was to come, He was willing to go low, to take the low place and suffer pain, loss, rejection, sorrow, humiliation, and an agonizing death. He did it all in love for our souls, to bring us to heaven. When we ask why should we take second place, why should we humble ourselves, be willing to suffer and allows others to take the place of honor? The answer is found in our Lord's example, who had his eyes set on the joy that was before him. If we could only get a glimpse of all that He has in store for us in heaven, all the honors and exaltation, we would be so glad to suffer with him for a short season, so we can enjoy an eternal place in heaven with Jesus. Moses made this choice in his life, when he could have enjoyed the riches and privileges of Egypt, but chose rather to suffer with the Hebrew slaves. The scripture says this about Moses:

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Heb. 11:25

LESSON 59
The Joy of Repentance
LUKE 15

In today's lesson, we see how the scribes and Pharisees are upset with Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them. Jesus uses three parables to teach them about the joy of true repentance. These proud religious men needed to understand that God delights to save sinners, and that means searching for them, as one would search for something they have lost, and that is very important to them.

The Pharisees and scribes complained to Jesus when they saw him eating with sinners. They thought that they were so much better than these sinners, and could not understand how Jesus, a teacher of God's word would bother spending His time with these, who they thought were not worthy of His time. However, Jesus will point out how very wrong they were in their attitude towards these sinners. Jesus uses three parables about lost things that were found, and the joy that results. We all know that if we lose something that is important to us, like our money or property, we will be anxious to find it, and when we do, we are very happy about regaining that which we have lost. Jesus wants His listeners to understand that God has lost something, and that is these sinners, and he wants to reclaim them for Himself, and find joy in them.

The first parable is about 100 sheep, but one of them is lost. We are told that the shepherd will leave the 99 sheep, and go to find the one sheep that is lost. He is not content if even one is missing, even if he still has so many. The lesson of this parable is that even though the flock is large, the shepherd is not willing that even one should perish. That is how the Lord thinks about you. He does not want you to be lost, and will not be content if all are found and saved, but you are lost. He will search for you as a lost sheep, and desires to bring you safely home into his sheepfold. When the shepherd found his lost sheep, we are told that he invited his friends to rejoice with him. His joy was something so great that he could not keep it to himself but wanted others to hear the good news. This is often what happens when someone becomes a Christian, they cannot contain their joy, and they are compelled to tell others the good news of salvation.

Jesus said that in heaven that is also joy when one sinner repents.

The second parable is similar to emphasize the same point. This time a woman who had 10 coins lost one, and searched diligently, sweeping all around until she found it. Just like the shepherd, she too calls her neighbors to come and rejoice with her over the coin she lost and has found. The shepherd was not content to accept a 1% loss in his flock, and the woman was not content to lose 10% of her money either. Jesus again says that in heaven there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents. If a shepherd can rejoice over one sheep that is found, and a woman can rejoice over one coin found, because of what they value, then surely God can rejoice over one sinner who repents, because every person is of great value to God.

The final parable is the most famous story of the prodigal son. This time the illustration is more personal and vivid about how God thinks about wayward sinners. The son as we know took his Father's inheritance and wasted it on riotous living. He was selfish, sinful, and did not honor his father. He certainly deserved God's judgment, and his father's wrath. However, we are astonished as Jesus relates to us how the repentant son returns home to his father, perhaps expecting the father's anger and disgust, and yet he is met with love and celebration. What an amazing story of grace and forgiveness. How wonderful that the Father should so love his wayward son that he was willing to accept him back as his beloved son, and to celebrate his return with much joy and honor. This story helps us to see the heart of God towards sinners. God loves us so very much, and he wants all of us to come home to heaven and enjoy his good house of rich blessings forever and ever. We like the prodigal have wandered away and pursued a life of sin, and God in love calls us back home to himself. In this lovely story in the bible, we notice that the father saw his son coming when he was still a great distance away. This tells us that he was looking and longing for his son to return home, and looking daily upon the horizon with the greatest hope that his son would return to him. Such is the heart of God towards you. God is looking for you, and longing for you to return to Him. Oh, how he loves you and wants to bless you in heaven forever. We also notice in the story that the son had to make his own choice to return. No one forced him to repent and return home, he first had to come to his senses, and realize how wicked he had been. He had to acknowledge what a terrible sinner he had been. As soon as he set his heart towards his father's home, his acceptance was awaiting him.

Before we leave this wonderful lesson of the prodigal, we must think about the older son. He was upset that the father had received this wicked son with honor and celebration. The Father had to plead with this older son, to understand the great work that had been done in the heart of the prodigal son. He once was dead but now is alive, he was lost and now is found, and so it was right to be happy and rejoice. God's wonderful grace is extended to everyone, because He loves us all so much. I hope if you are like that prodigal son, you will admit your sin to God, and return to him today, so the angels can rejoice over you.

"It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." Luke 15:32

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about God's joy over sinners that repent. We saw how Jesus was glad to spend his time with lost sinners, so that they could be found, and received as God's own children. We learned that joy comes from finding something of value that was lost. Someone might ask the question, "Why does the bible speak about sinners being lost, and needing to be found?"

In today's lesson we learned about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Jesus was using all of these to illustrate the condition of sinners before God, as being lost. This helps us to better understand our need for God's salvation.

If we think of a person who is lost, we might picture someone who has wandered into a bush or forest and they cannot find their way. They do not know the direction they are going, and how to reach safety. Being lost is associated with a lost of direction, and this can result from being in a place we are not familiar with, or because of darkness. When we get lost it can be a frightening experience. As a parent, if you have ever lost sight of your young child in a crowded and unfamiliar place then you will know how frightening it can be to lose someone so very important and dear to you. When we realize that we are lost, then we realize the danger we are in. I recall once being invited to preach in a certain place where I had not been before. I got lost trying to find the church building, and drove around for quite sometime before I finally found the place. The people were very patient with me, and I was still permitted to preach to them, but clearly being lost can create great problems for us. When we discover that before God we are guilty sinners, and that if we keep going along our path without changing our course, we will most certainly fall into a pit of darkness where we will meet with God's judgment. Being lost means to be aware, and admit, that we are on the wrong path, the path that leads to destruction. There are many people walking around on this earth, who have no idea they are lost. They cannot see the coming danger, and they walk in darkness hardly aware of the fact that they are one step away from the flames of eternal fire in Hell.

Please know that the bible tells us that we are like lost sheep. The bible says, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"*. If you know you are a sinner, and that God must judge your sin, then you can admit you are lost like a sheep that has gone astray. You need to be found. That means you must know that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins. When you accept God's answer for you to be forgiven, and you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then you will be saved. You will be found, and are given eternal life, and joys bells will be ringing in heaven over one more sinner who has repented.

Perhaps there has been some sin in your life, and you know that God is not happy with your sin. You fear God's judgment, and you have been walking around with what seems to be a dark cloud over your head. Today you can be free from the dread of God's judgment; you can leave all of your sin at the cross of Jesus. By looking to Him in faith, and calling upon Him to forgive and cleanse you, you can find mercy and acceptance with God. Remember how the Father gladly welcomed his son home after he had lived such a sinful life. He probably still smelled like the pigs when his father embraced him, but such was the love of the father that all he saw was his beloved son, who had turned his heart towards home and was seeking forgiveness. Believe me when I say that God is so ready to forgive you, and bless you with all the joys of his house. Oh, how he loves you and me, and how wonderful that He should be so willing to forgive. Call upon Him today to cleanse you and make you his child. He is waiting and longing to hear your voice say to Lord, "Oh God, be merciful to me a sinner and please forgive me and make me your child". Then all the angels in heaven will rejoice over a sinner was lost and has been found, was dead is now alive.

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

LESSON 60
The Rich and Poor Man
LUKE 16

In today's lesson, we see Jesus continuing to teach the proud Pharisees, who loved money, and needed to learn that loving money, means loving self and not loving God, and this would lead them to a disastrous future of suffering God's eternal judgment. Jesus wants us all to understand that the true riches are not the possessions we gain in this world, but are the comforts and blessing found in heaven.

Jesus tells another parable about an unjust steward. This man was supposed to look after his master's property and money, but had not been faithful. When accused of his unfaithfulness, and told that his job as steward was taken from him, he became very concerned about his future. Therefore, he thought to himself about how he was not strong enough to dig ditches, or do manual labor, and he certainly did not want to have to beg. With all this in mind, he decided to secretly call the debtors of his master and reduce their debt by 50 or 20%. This he hoped would win him favor with these debtors and they would be glad to take him in and look after him, when he was no longer employed. When the master discovers the actions of his unfaithful steward, he commends his shrewdness or wisdom. He probably did not like losing his money, but he still admired the man's foresight to prepare for the future. The Lord has told this story not to call our attention and approval of the man's crimes and wicked behavior, but rather to notice how he wisely he prepared himself for his future. Jesus now teaches us the spiritual lesson from this story, and says that we must also be wise about preparing for our future, for we also have a stewardship. The money, which the Lord entrusts to our care, is not just for our selfish use, to live as we please, but He intends that we use it wisely not for our comforts now, but for our comforts in heaven. He said we should make friends by the unrighteous mammon, that is use money to win souls for Christ. Then when we fail, that is when we leave this world and go to heaven, we shall have many friends to welcome us there. This is wise planning. Jesus says that if we cannot be faithful with the money he entrusts to us, then God cannot entrust to us the true riches, that is the care of souls. If I am unwilling to use my money to help bring people to Jesus, then God will not put precious souls into my care to help them in their Christian walk. These are important words for everyone to hear, especially those who call themselves "pastors". First invest, and show that you are serious about God's work, then God will add to you further responsibilities. If we prove faithful in little, namely money, then we will also be faithful with much, namely the spiritual care of others. Jesus plainly states that we cannot serve God and money. Money is a tool to use for God's glory, not something; I use to indulge all my wants and desires.

When the Pharisees heard Jesus talking about this, they scoffed at him, for they loved money. Jesus said to them that what man highly esteems, God thinks is an abomination. Men love to make money, live in luxury, and to be applauded by others. That is why people love professional sports so much, for it is all about the glory, honor, and wealth of man. However, God hates it when men live selfishly in this world, and use their gains to honor self; for in pushing oneself ahead a person must oppress others. While dealing with the self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus also points out that many were pressing into the kingdom of God since the time of John the Baptist, and that God's law was unchangeable. He also mentions that men who divorce their wives, and marry another are committing adultery. All these things he said to cut to the heart of these wicked men, who paraded themselves as God's men, but were in fact selfish, wicked men who twisted God's word, gave license to adultery, and sought after money and honor from men.

Now Jesus tells another very famous story in our bibles about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man ate the best of foods, and wore the best of clothes. Yet, there was just outside of his house a poor man who was very sick with sores, and hungry hoping to eat just a few crumbs from the rich man's table. Clearly, the rich man thought it okay to eat well, but not to share with the poor man at his gate. He reasoned in his heart, that he deserved his wealth because he had worked for it, and so this poor beggar could go and get a job if he needs money. This is how rich people have to think in order to justify their greed and lack of compassion for the poor. The poor man was in such a bad state, that dogs came and licked his sores. When these two men died, we find that the rich man ends up in a horrible place of suffering, and angels take Lazarus, the poor man, to a place of comfort in Abraham's bosom. What a contrast between these two men. The man who was rich in this world, was very poor after death, and still is suffering in the flames of Hell today. However, the poor man, who had suffered so much in this world, is now in heaven rejoicing with the angels and enjoying the blessings of God. It is not that poor people get to go to heaven, but those who believe in Jesus as their Savior, and clearly, this poor man was a believer, and thus was taken into heaven. The Rich man wanted a drop of water to relieve his torment, but was not permitted even a drop of water. He also wanted a miraculous resurrection so that his brothers could be warned about Hell, but that too was denied, because the scriptures were available to them. Remember, this if you will not listen to God's word, then God is not obliged to give you any further witness and you could perish forever in Hell like the rich man. Be wise then, take Jesus as your Savior, and seek the riches that are in heaven, and not riches on earth.

"But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" Luke 16:31

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the need to plan well for heaven, by making good use of the money God has provided to us. We learned that we cannot serve both God and money, and that seeking after riches in this world makes us selfish, sinful, and will likely take us into the torments of Hell forever. Someone might ask the question, "Why does God permit people to suffer in Hell forever?"

In today's lesson we learned about a man who went to Hell. There he was suffering in agony and could find no relief. Jesus opens up our view of the afterlife. He wants us to know what is awaiting those who reject God's salvation. He does this to frighten us, to warn us, and to advise us, so that we will not go to such a place. God does not want to send anyone to Hell. Hell was created for the devil and his followers. God has provided an escape for us if only we will receive the salvation that he offers.

These passages in Luke and others in the gospels tell us something of what Hell is like. We learn that it is a place of darkness. It is described as the blackness of darkness. God is light, and the source of light, which brings beauty and life to all, but when we reject God we reject light, and thus we are left with darkness. Nevertheless, even in the darkness there is still some perception, for the rich man was able to see Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. It must have cut into his heart to see the man he once despised, now enjoying the comfort of heaven, while he suffered so greatly. Please remember this point, that God is just, and he will not let you get away with your sin. If you are stealing money, cheating your friends, workers, or customers, mistreating your family, all so you can look out for yourself, then God will remember this in the Day of Judgment. No one will get away with anything, but all sins will be punished. Hell is not only a place of darkness, but also a place of torment and flame. We cannot imagine anything quite as horrible and painful as being burned by fire, and that is the image our Lord gave to us of what Hell is like, so that we will flee from God's wrath.

Many people wonder why a loving God would send people to such a horrible place, but we must remember that God never intends to send anyone into Hell. He wants all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth, but men love darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil. Men choose Hell; it is never God's choice for us. It may seem to us to be very harsh, but God's justice is perfect. We all deserve God's righteous judgment because of our sin, but in mercy, He sent His son to rescue us. Jesus suffered greatly so we could be forgiven. Therefore, we do not have any right to question God's goodness or justice. He will do what is right, and that means many souls who reject His Son will be cast away forever in a place of utter torment and darkness. This should put the fear of God in your soul, so you dread the thought of going into Hell someday. Do not let the lust for selfish gains in this world draw you away from God's salvation. Most people choose this world for their pleasure and sin, without much thought to life after death. What a foolish choice people make, when they let the Devil convince them that money, riches, and fame will make them happy. The human heart can never be fully satisfied in this world, it does not matter how much money a person has, or how many possessions they own. Imagine how that rich man must have felt as he suffered in the flames, and thought back to the foolish way he lived his life, thinking only of himself and his money. He was probably a Jew, a child of Abraham, and visited the synagogue regularly, perhaps even a Pharisee, but it is clear that he loved his money more than he loved God. This proved he was not God's child at all, but was only masquerading as a devout religious man, when all the while he was a pathetic selfish sinner, lost and on his way to the flames of Hell. Even today, his cries ascend from that dark pit of torment. What do you love the most, your money, or God? Would you rather attend church on Sunday morning to worship God, or go to your work and make money? Where is your heart? For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also? What you love leads you either to Heaven or to Hell. Are you going to heaven to be with the Jesus, or into the flames of Hell with all your money?

"Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth". 1Timothy 2:4

LESSON 61
Characteristics of the Kingdom
LUKE 17

In today's lesson, we learn Characteristics of God's kingdom. In our last lesson, we learned about the judgment that awaits those who love the riches of this world, more than the riches of heaven. Today we shall learn that following Jesus means setting a good example, showing forgiveness, faith, servitude, and gratitude. We shall also learn about what will happen when Jesus returns to the earth in judgment.

In the chapter Jesus is teaching his disciples, the way they are to behave as the servants of God. He points out the need to be a good example for younger ones that are looking up to us. If we fail to live properly before our God, then we can offend one of the little ones, and lead them closer to Hell than to heaven. Jesus said if our lives cause others to stumble in their faith, then it would be better to have a heavy millstone hung around our neck and to be cast into the sea.

Jesus also spoke of the need to forgive our brother, not just once but 7 times in the same day, if he should come and say he repents of his sin. The disciples must have thought that it was too difficult to be so willing to forgive repeatedly, so they asked the Lord to increase their faith. Jesus then tells them if their faith were only tiny like a mustard seed, then they could tell the mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey. When the fruit of pride is firmly rooted in our hearts, and we are unwilling to humble ourselves to offer forgiveness, it will take great power to uproot the sin. The power can be found in faith, for by faith we have God's power available to us, and he can change our heart to be like Jesus, willing to forgive.

Then Jesus spoke to his disciples about how a servant is to behave for his master. The servant should not expect to be treated any better than his master. Even after working hard in the fields or with the flocks all day, he is expected to prepare food for his master before he can take his own food. He should not expect to receive thanks, for he is only doing what is expected of him. In fact, Jesus said he should think of himself as an unprofitable servant. This attitude of service is what should mark every follower of Jesus. None of us are greater than our master, and he came in humility to die on the cross to pay for our sins. We can never repay all that He has done for us, but we can serve Him gladly, without expecting any thanks, for we are obliged to give him our love and service, because of what He has done for us.

Jesus also taught the need for his followers to be grateful for God's kindness in his life, for many receive from God's hand, but do not return to thank or praise God for his goodness and mercy.

The Pharisees asked Jesus a question about the coming kingdom, and Jesus said that God's kingdom is not seen by observation, but was something that was present with them. They did not recognize God's king, and his reign over the hearts of his followers as God's kingdom, but it was right in their midst in the person and authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells his disciples about what the coming kingdom will be like. He said that when he appears again it will be like the lightning that flashes suddenly across the heavens. Certainly lightning has the element of surprise and brilliance, and such will be the return of Jesus in judgment upon the earth. There will be no time to collect possessions and run to hide from His judgment.

Jesus helps us to understand the nature of what the world will be like just before He returns. He said it would just like the days of Noah, and like the days of Lot. Both of these men lived in a time where the majority of men were living wickedly in rebellion against God, and the destruction that came upon them was sudden and very catastrophic. Before these judgments, people were just living life as though they were certain of a future. They were going about their work and activities without any concern for God's anger and coming judgment, but then in an instant in time they were destroyed. Jesus reminds us about Lot's wife who perished when the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. She along with Lot and their two daughters were escaping with the angels sent to deliver them, but she turned to look back toward Sodom. She had been warned not to look back, but her heart was still attached to that wicked city, and when she turned back to look, she turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus is warning us to not be attracted to this world, because the world we are living in will soon be under the judgment of God, and the wicked will be destroyed. If we try to save our life in this world, like Lot's wife did, we will be destroyed by God's judgment as she was. However, if we forsake our life in this world by living according to the behavior of God's kingdom, then we shall be spared from judgment.

While describing what it will be like during God's coming judgment, Jesus said there would be two lying in one bed, or two working in the fields or in the grinding mill, but one would be taken while the other one was left behind. This tells us that the judgment will be very selective, preserving the godly ones, but judging the wicked, even when these two are side by side. We cannot be sure how the Lord is going to do it, but we see how he used water to flood the earth and kill the wicked, and how he used fire to destroy Sodom. He used a boat to rescue Noah and his family, and angels to rescue Lot and his family. The only safe place for us is in Jesus Christ. Just as vultures are attracted to a dead carcass, so wherever the sinners will be when Jesus comes, that is the place where the judgment will fall.

"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it." Luke 17:33

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about characteristics of the Kingdom. We learned that the followers of Jesus should not offend little ones, should be willing to forgive, serve, and show gratitude. We also learned about the coming king and His judgment on this sinful world. Someone might ask the question, "What will happen to those people who are left behind when Jesus comes for His church?"

There is some confusion among Christians about what exactly will take place when Jesus returns to judge the world. The reason for the confusion is that the details in the bible are not complete. We only have some information. A careful bible student will collect all the information he can about the future judgments, and the Lord's return, and try his best to understand what will take place. Though many details are not clear, a careful study will show us that Jesus first return at the rapture to take away His church. This could happen at any moment from now. Following Christ's return for His church, He will bring about severe judgments upon all nations. This time of judgment is called the tribulation period, which lasts for seven years, and is spoken of in Matthew 24, and Rev 6 to 18. Many people will die during the tribulation due to God's judgments, and Israel will be attacked and almost destroyed by her enemies in a great battle at Armageddon. At the end of the seven years, the Lord will appear like lightning flashing across the sky, and all people will see His coming. There will be no mistake about who it is, or about his right and authority to reign. He will judge all the nations at His coming, and many will be cast into eternal judgment because of their refusal to honor Jesus as the rightful king. This judgment of the nations will commence a new era of peace and prosperity where Jesus will reign as king of kings and Lord of Lords from Jerusalem. His reign will continue for 1000 years, but at the end of that period, the bible tells us there will be a final rebellion when Satan is released from bondage. Jesus will destroy all of his opponents and cast all unrepentant sinners of all ages into the Lake of Fire along with the Devil and his demons. This is the final and eternal judgment. After this, the righteous will live with Christ in the new heaven and new earth forever and ever.

The things we need to be most concerned about are the impending judgments that are about to fall upon the earth when the Lord snatches away His church into heaven. Some people are talking about the end of the world coming, but we know the world will not be destroyed for at least another 1007 years, even in the Lord should call His church home today. If you are not a Christian, and the Lord comes for His church, then you will be left behind to face the terrible time of judgment known as the tribulation. With the Christians gone, the world will become a very wicked place of sin and rebellion. Some might think that after the Lord comes for His church there may still be a chance to repent and come to the Lord in faith. We cannot be certain about this, for it appears that those who have been rejecting God's salvation before He comes for His church will believe a lie after the church is gone. This is what the bible tells us in 2Thess 2:11. This passage tells us that God will send a strong delusion upon those who have rejected His salvation. Moreover, this appears to be God's judgment against them. We might expect that when the church is suddenly taken out of the world that everyone in fear would repent and turn to the Lord. However the bible indicates that even with the miraculous rapture of the church, and many catastrophic signs of judgment the people will prefer to believe a lie, and thus in the hardness of their hearts will not repent and be saved.

The bible indicates that some people will be saved during the tribulation period. Perhaps it will be those who have never before heard the gospel message, but these tribulation believers will be fiercely persecuted by the Antichrist, who will be in power during that time. Many will be martyred because of their faith in Jesus. Today is the day of grace, and your opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, before it is too late. When the call comes from heaven for the Christians to meet the Lord, will you be ready; or will you be left behind to face God's wrath? If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior, do not waste another day, before you repent and give your life over to Him.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:" 2 Thess. 2:11

LESSON 62
Rewards of the Faithful
LUKE 18

In our last lesson, we were learning about characteristics of God's kingdom, and today we shall learn about the rewards of the faithful. The Lord shall answer those who demonstrate their persistence and humility in prayer. The Lord shall, abundantly reward those who are willing to forsake all in this world. In addition, those who recognize Jesus as God's answer to their need shall be rewarded.

Jesus was teaching through parables, and spoke of a widow who pestered a judge to deal with her case. The judge did not care about justice, but about his peace of mind, and so granted the woman her request, because he did not want her constant appeals to weary him. Jesus is teaching us that when we appeal to God, who does care very much about justice, He will answer us speedily. The righteous judge will reward constant petitions, because He does care, and will execute justice. Therefore, we should not grow weary in praying for what we know is right.

Jesus also taught about a proud Pharisee that justified himself in his prayers before God. This Pharisee spoke of all his good deeds, and how he was better than others. He mentions also a tax collector, who was convicted by his own sin, beat his breast, and cried to God for mercy. Jesus said the humble tax-collector was rewarded with God's approval, but the Pharisee was not justified. Religious rituals tend to make us think we have done what is pleasing to God, but God cares about our humble confession of sin much more than our observances of religious rites. Our prayers will be rewarded when we come to God with honesty about our sin, and conviction and sorrow over the offense our sins have caused.

When some people brought small children to Jesus for him to touch them, the disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said to his disciples that they should not forbid the children from coming to Him, for God's kingdom belonged to such as these. God's kingdom is for the humble ones. When a ruler asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life, Jesus tested him regarding his obedience to God's commands. The man proudly said he had kept God's commands, but Jesus showed him that he failed in the area of covetousness, for he had great wealth, and would not give it to the poor and follow Jesus. What holds your heart, and keeps you from following Jesus. Is it your money? Is it your career? Is it your family? Is it possessions? We all have things, which we think will bring us security and happiness in this world, but until we can let go of our securities, we can never find the eternal life that Jesus offers. Are you willing to forsake all?

Jesus said to his disciples that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom. This made the disciples wonder who could then be saved. Jesus tells them what is not possible with man is possible with God. Peter perhaps was a bit worried about whether he and his fellow disciples' sacrifices would be sufficient to merit reward, and asked the Lord what they would receive. Jesus told his disciples that whoever makes sacrifices to follow Jesus would be most richly rewarded. When our faith leads us to leave our home or family for the sake of the gospel, it means we have left all that is precious in this world behind, in order to obey our Lord, and prepare for entering God's eternal kingdom. Jesus says the rewards will exceed the sacrifice made, and eternal life will be their reward. We do not earn eternal life by going to the mission field, or forsaking our worldly ambitions for Christ's kingdom, but our possession of eternal life is made clear to others and us by these sacrifices. Do you know if you possess eternal life? It might be difficult for you to discern, or for others to be sure of this, if your wealth and security are clearly set in this world. How can you be certain? What will you sacrifice, what are you willing to give up for the kingdom of God? Are you willing to give your money, your talents, your career opportunities, all hope for success in this world? Until you can honestly show your willingness to give up everything for Christ, you may struggle with the assurance of possessing eternal life.

Jesus' prophecy is concerning his soon coming death and resurrection, but His disciples do not understand his words about this. It was not until after the resurrection, they were to recall His words, compare with the scriptures, and understand through the Holy Spirit God's great plan of redemption through Christ.

When Jesus is traveling near Jericho, there is a blind man along the roadside who calls out to Him for mercy. He calls Jesus the son of David, which means He identified Jesus as God's Messiah. His faith is rewarded when Jesus calls for him, and asks the man what he would like Jesus to do for him. The man replies that he would like to have his sight back. Jesus heals the man, so that he can see again, and all the people marvel and praise God because of the great miracle performed. Jesus told the man his faith had made him well. When we recognize Jesus for who he truly is, (that is God's Son, sent into the world to save us) then we also, by faith, can be made well. Have you acknowledged Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life? If you would like to inherit eternal life, then do not let any thing in this world keep you from surrendering your life entirely to Jesus. May God touch your heart today, and call you to place your faith in Jesus.

"But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Luke 18:27

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about rewards of the faithful. Those who pray with humility and persistence can expect that God will reward their faith. Those who want to belong to God's kingdom must be willing to forsake all their treasures in this world, and faithfully follow the Lord. Our limitations make it difficult to understand God's great plan of redemption, but by faith God can open our eyes to see the truth." Someone might ask the question, "How can I know if my faith is enough to inherit eternal life?"

The ruler who came to Jesus asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, but after the conversation with Jesus he went away still rich in possessions, but sad in heart. His desire was good, to gain eternal life, but he thought perhaps it was something he could earn by good works, or buy with money. He never thought it might cost him everything he owned. The man wanted assurances of one day going to heaven, as all people do, but was not prepared to give up his comfort in this world, to gain his place in heaven.

We need to understand that eternal life is a free gift to those who believe in Jesus. While it does not cost anything to receive it, it will cost us everything to authenticate it. God requires that our faith not be just superficial, only involving our words. Faith must have an influence on our behavior and decisions. For faith to be real it must be tested, and shown that it means what it says. If I am selling something of value to a prospective buyer, and he says he is keen to buy what I am selling, he might ask me to hold onto the item until he can come with the full payment. To test his sincerity I might ask him to provide me with a deposit, to assure me of his intentions to buy. Many people say they want to have eternal life, but when that life costs them something, like their reputation, or their family, or their job, their words prove to have little worth. Can you demonstrate the reality of your faith, by the manner in which you live?

It is not so much a matter of the quantity of a person's faith that matters, but rather what the object of their faith is. The true Christian directs his faith toward Jesus, but not in himself. So many folks are so close to the kingdom of God, because they believe all the facts about Jesus dying on the cross, and resurrecting on the third day. They accept that they are sinners, and that only Jesus death on the cross is able to pay the penalty for their sins. Yet, they still hold onto the devil's lie that their salvation is somehow dependent upon their own efforts. Be careful that your faith is centered entirely in Jesus, and not in yourself. If you believe in Jesus as your Savior, but also depend on your good deeds to earn your way to heaven, then you are not truly saved, and will miss God's salvation.

Many people struggle with an assurance of having eternal life. This is because the evidence has not been clearly seen in their life, or they have not taken time to carefully read their bibles to know from God's word those things that show true faith. I recall as a young believer wondering about whether I was truly saved and on my way to heaven. After reading the bible carefully, God provided me with assurance from His word, and not from my feelings. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that if you try hard to be a good Christian, then God will surly accept you as His child, and bring you to heaven. The difference between the religious man and the true Christian is that the religious man is still trying, by his own efforts, to earn his place in heaven, but the true Christian labors for God, not to gain heaven, but out of love for Jesus, because he knows that he is saved and assured of heaven. One produces cold religious ritual, and the other a life and love that are unmistakably from God. If you do not know that new life that comes from the Holy Spirit then today is the day you need to turn to the Lord, and cry out like the tax-collector in our lesson today, who said "Oh, Lord be merciful to me a sinner".

You may be interested in having eternal life, and knowing for sure that you have it. Please make sure that you accept God's free gift of eternal life by placing your faith in Jesus alone. Also, make sure that the reality of your faith is seen by the choices you make, and the manner in which you live your life. Do not fool yourself into thinking you can have all the riches of this world, and still gain heaven.

"So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Luke 18:22

LESSON 63
The Day of Reckoning
LUKE 19

In today's lesson, we shall learn about the day of reckoning. We will meet Zacchaeus who has a reckoning with Jesus and his riches. One day in the future we shall all give an account of how we have lived our lives. Some will be rewarded for faithfully serving in God's kingdom, and others will be destroyed because they failed to submit to Jesus as their king. We also see the day approaching when Jesus will have a reckoning with religious rulers of Israel.

Today we meet Zacchaeus, an interesting character in the Bible. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, which was not an honest job, and that meant most people, who had to pay their taxes to him, despised him. We are told he was a rich man, but when Jesus was coming by, he did not let his pride and dignity keep him from wanting to get a look at Jesus. Because he was short, he had to climb up in a sycamore tree to get a view of Jesus. This is not something we would expect from a rich man, but Zacchaeus was more concerned about learning about Jesus, than about what others thought about him. When Jesus came to near the sycamore where Zacchaeus was, he said to Zacchaeus that he would come to his house. Zacchaeus was very happy to have Jesus visit his home, and it is also clear that through Jesus words and influence that Zacchaeus became a true believer and follower of Jesus as God's Messiah. We can see the evidence of his conversion as he proclaims that he will give half of his goods to the poor, and if he had cheated anyone, he would replace it with four times as much as he had taken. Jesus perceived the genuineness of Zacchaeus repentance and faith and said that salvation had come to his house. Jesus added the words that he had come to seek and to save that which was lost. Are you that lost one whom Jesus is seeking today? Are you as anxious to meet Jesus as Zacchaeus was?

Jesus tells us another parable about a nobleman who traveled waiting to receive his kingdom. Before he left on his journey, he supplied some money to some men, and asked them to do business until he returned. Some of the men used the money to earn more and were rewarded with great responsibility in the nobleman's kingdom. One man returned the money that had been given to him, stating he knew that the nobleman was strict. He did not make anything from the money given to him, and he was severely judged. Jesus tells us this parable to teach us that one day we shall have a reckoning with the Lord, and shall give an account of our stewardship. He has entrusted to us our lives, and so many, waste this life on selfish and sinful pursuits. He also entrusts to God's children the gospel message to share with the world. If a child of God can take the message of salvation to the world and see others come into God's kingdom, then he will be rewarded abundantly when the Lord returns as king. Those whose faith has produced nothing, or those whose lives were only lived selfishly will be destroyed before the king, because they failed to honor him and serve his interests.

As Jesus came from Bethany over the Mount of Olives, he was riding upon a borrowed donkey and the crowds laid down clothes and palm branches and praised Jesus as the Son of David. The Pharisees, who told Jesus to rebuke the people, heard their shouts of praise and honor. They thought Jesus should not be honored with the titles of the Messiah, for they did not believe he was the Messiah, but Jesus knew who he was, and that even if the people would not shout out praise, even the rocks would sing with praise. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he weeps over the city that stoned prophets, and would kill their own Messiah. He pronounces a judgment against the city, saying that no stone will remain on another when the city was destroyed. This prophecy was later fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

In Jerusalem, Jesus once again visits the temple, and becomes angry at the sight of people buying and selling and moneychangers. In his anger, he chases them from the temple area, and says to them, "My house is to be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves". Daily Jesus was teaching in the temple area, and the chief priests, scribes and rulers wanted to find a way to put Jesus to death, but they could not because the crowds were glad to hear him. We can see that the day of reckoning was coming for Jesus with these religious rulers. They were not going to tolerate his preaching against their covetousness and religious hypocrisy. Jesus certainly knew that the time of judgment was fast approaching, but was determined to face his judgment in order to bring salvation to us. We too are fast approaching our own day of reckoning. Soon we shall leave this world, and face God's judgment. Are you ready for your day of reckoning? Have you prepared yourself to meet your king and give an account of your stewardship? Will you be like Zacchaeus willing to give up greed and selfishness to become a true follower of Jesus? On the other hand, will you be like the religious rulers, who only wanted to appear religious, but still live for sin and selfishness? On the day of reckoning, all secrets will be revealed and your true heart will be exposed. May that coming day be a day of rejoicing for you, not a sad day when you meet God's wrath. Trust in Jesus as your Savior, and He will cleanse you, make you new, and ready for His return.

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the day of reckoning. We saw how Zacchaeus had a reckoning with Jesus, willingly giving up earthly wealth to be a faithful follower of Jesus. We also learned that we are responsible for the stewardship of our lives, and of the gospel, and one day we shall give an account, and be judged according to how we lived in this world. Someone might ask the question "What awards will Christians receive when they get to heaven?"

In today's lesson the Lord told a parable about some who were left with money until their master returned and asked them to give account of how they had used the money. Some did invest the money, and produced more. Because these were faithful, and made a profit, they were given greater responsibility in the kingdom to rule over cities. They went from managing some money, to ruling over a number of cities. This teaches us that when a Christian faithful serves his master and Lord, he will be rewarded with much greater responsibilities in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord. We cannot be sure if the Lord intends us to rule over cities, but a scripture says that we shall reign with Him (Rev 20:6). This might indicate the type of reward and responsibilities we shall have in the future kingdom.

The bible teaches us that there will be something called the judgment seat of Christ. At this judgment, all believers will appear before the Lord, and he will judge them according to their works. If their works were of no spiritual value, they will be burned up with fire. This could be things that looked to be in service to God, but were actually motivated by selfishness, pride, or money. Those works, which are done for the right motive for the Lord, will be rewarded greatly. A careful reading of the bible will show us that God is very generous to his children who love Him and serve Him faithfully. Think of Abraham, who pleased the Lord by his willingness to give his son Isaac upon as a sacrifice. Because Abraham loved God so much that he was willing to give up his son, God blessed him, and all his descendants from that time until the present. King David wanted to build a temple to honor the Lord, and the Lord said he was going to establish David's throne forever, and one of his children would be an everlasting king on his throne. When King Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom to govern over the nation, God was pleased with his request, gave him more wisdom than any other man, and gave him riches, and a peaceful reign. Yes, God is very generous in his dealing with his children, and when we do things that please God, He will abundantly bless us with eternal riches that will never fade away. We have a wonderful hope of gaining bountiful rewards from the Lord. However, we need to be aware that the rewards are granted to those who are faithful in their service for Christ, and behave in ways that please the Lord. Christians, who are still attached to the world, and their own wealth and comfort, cannot expect to look forward to the same rewards as those who love and serve God faithfully. No one should be disappointed when they reach heaven, even if their rewards are not as great as others. Heaven and eternal life are such great gifts that no one will have reason for complaining. The bible does tell us that some will suffer loss at the judgment seat when their works are burned up. There may be many surprises on that day, when the first shall be last, and last shall be first. Someone we did not think was making much impact for God's kingdom, will suddenly move to the front of the line in heaven and receive great rewards. We wonder how and where did they earn that great reward, while others we assumed would be rewarded greatly are at the back of the line. Much of true Christianity is done in secret, feeding the poor, nursing the sick, visiting the sorrowing. These activities do not receive much attention in our world, but in heaven, they are noticed and greatly valued. We look at some preachers in their fancy clothes, and big talk, and perhaps think they will be the ones who are going to receive the greatest rewards in heaven. We may be shocked to see what was valued among men was, was actually an abomination to God. They might make it to heaven all right, but they will be saved as by fire, because their works were all about the glory of man, and not for the glory of God. We do not know all that God has in store for his children, but we can be assured that our God is generous, and whatever he supplies to us will be much more than we ever deserved, and will bring us much joy in the ages to come.

"But they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Rev 19:20b

LESSON 64
A Time of Questioning
LUKE 20

In our last lesson, we consider the Day of Reckoning, and today we shall consider a Time of Questioning. The chief priests and scribes confront Jesus with several questions in an effort to trap Him in His words. We shall see how Jesus does not fall into their trap, but ensnares them in their own hypocrisy.

After Jesus had overturned tables in the temple and chased out the moneychangers the chief priests and scribes confront him about His authority, and where he got His authority. Jesus realized immediately their evil intentions to condemn Him. If he said His authority was from God, they would feel He was blaspheming and arrest Him, but if he denied that His authority was from God, they would have reason to arrest Him as a troublemaker. Jesus realizing their trap, turns the tables on them, and asks them to answer a question about the ministry of John the Baptist, whether it had God's from authority or not, for all the people counted John as a prophet. Jesus understood that these men did not live by honesty, but by popular opinion, so he trapped them in their own game of deceitful cunning. They could not answer him without condemning themselves, so they refused to answer, and so Jesus refused to answer their question.

Jesus then speaks another parable for everyone to hear. He spoke of vineyard owner that leased out his vineyard to others, and when the harvest time came, sent his servants to collect his share of the fruit. The vinedressers abused the servants and sent them away empty handed. The owner of the vineyard sent his beloved son, thinking that these men would respect him, but instead they said in their hearts, that he was the heir, so they decided to kill him, that they might keep the vineyard for themselves. The parable ends with the owner killing those wicked men, and giving the vineyard to others. This parable really aggravated the scribes and priests because they knew Jesus was referring to them as the evil men who murdered the son to greedily gain the inheritance. The picture is of these religious leaders of Israel holding onto their authority and position, no matter what the cost. In their pride, they were blind to the fact that what they so vehemently tried to protect was not God's authority, but their own selfish ambitions. This is a great danger for anyone holding religious titles and position. Jesus finishes this parable by saying the rejected stone has become the chief cornerstone, a quotation from Ps118:22. By this, he meant that he was the rejected stone for building God's habitation, but the rejected stone will become the chief cornerstone. In other words the one they were rejecting was God's chosen one upon which the whole foundation of God's redemptive plan would be built. To reject Jesus is therefore to reject God's great plan of salvation and to be condemned eternally.

The anger chief priests and scribes sent spies to catch Jesus in His words, and some ask Jesus a question about paying taxes to Caesar. Again, Jesus perceives their evil intent to trap Him, and asks them directly why they are trying to trap Him. Jesus then answers the question very wisely by telling everyone to render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and to God the things that are God's. Everyone was amazed at his answer and kept silent. The Sadducees must have thought of themselves as quite clever, because they also brought their tough question to Jesus. They gave a scenario about a man who dies without children, and his younger brother marries his wife to raise up children for his dead brother. However, the younger brother also dies without children. Five more brothers all had the same woman as wife, but none had any children by her. Then they ask whose wife will she be in the resurrection. They did not believe in the resurrection, and so the question seems self-defeating, but Jesus nonetheless entertains the question and provides an answer with lots of insight to help us understand some things that had not been revealed before. He says to them, that in heaven the righteous will be like the angels and will not marry. Heaven will not be the same as life in this world, but will be different. Jesus also explains that resurrection is a doctrine clearly seen in scripture for those who have eyes to see and faith to accept. He spoke about God's identifying himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and thus by inference the God of the living and not the dead, since these men had left the world long before God said these words to Moses. When we read our bibles carefully, to discern the meaning of what God is saying He will grant us a good understanding, when our hearts are seeking His truth.

After Jesus silenced the Sadducees with His answer, no one dared to ask Him any more questions. He clearly was no match for even the wisest scholars of Israel. Jesus wants to further teach these wicked men about the limits of their own understanding, so they will humble themselves, and accept God's Messiah. He asks them a question about King David calling his own son Lord, and why David might do this, but they had no answer for Him. If they had time to consider and think carefully about this question it might lead them to understand that the Messiah was not only the physical descent of David (his son), but was also God's son (The Lord God Almighty). At this Jesus warns his disciples about the hypocrisy of the scribes and priests who wear long robes, love greetings, good seats at feasts and religious gatherings, and making long prayers, but take advantage of poor widows. We should also be on our guard when we see this type of religious pride and hypocrisy, and recognize them as wolves in sheep's clothing.

"The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone." Luke 20:17b

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about a time of questioning. We saw how the religious leaders of Israel questioned Jesus to try to trap him in His words. Jesus answered all their questions wisely and then asked them a question about the Messiah being David's son & Lord, and none of them were able to answer Him. Someone might ask the question, "Why do some people try to argue with the bible or with Jesus?"

It seems rather amazing that Jesus was questioned by the religious leaders of his day, with the intent to find fault with him. It is so characteristic of man's sinful condition that he will try to find fault with others, and to justify himself. A humble man will listen and learn, and be corrected if need be. However a proud man will not listen, learn or be corrected. We see this especially of those people who have attained some status for themselves. These religious scribes and priests were puffed up in pride, and love to be thought of as Israel's spiritual elite. They loved to go around in their long robes, so men could think highly of them. They treated their religious position as an accomplishment that set them above all others. They saw themselves as carrying God's authority, and thus everyone had to pay them homage and respect, obeying all that they said. They were not accustomed to having anyone challenge their authority. They were indignant with Jesus, the young Jewish teacher, who contradicted them, exposed their hypocrisy, and undermined their authority. To save their position and honor among the Jews, they felt they had to oppose Jesus. Even if in their deepest thoughts they knew they were wrong, and they knew they should listen to the godly words and correction of this wise younger man. Pride filled their hearts, and they could not admit to all the people that they were only religious hypocrites, and they were just sinners like everyone else. Their religious status was more important to them than the truth, or God's salvation. Until a man is willing to humble himself before God, and admit he is a sinner, he cannot be saved from God's judgment. How sad and evil is the curse of man's pride and stubborn rebellion.

Among all the religious rulers, a few were humble enough to listen and learn from Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and teacher in Israel, but was willing to come to Jesus one night to ask him about himself and his teachings. Jesus helped Nicodemus to learn that he needed to be born again, through faith in the Son of God. It appears from other passages of scripture that Nicodemus became a believer in the Lord Jesus and was saved. Sadly, most of the religious leaders of Jesus day perished without God's salvation. Do not think that because a man is called a "Pastor" or a "Priest" that this assures him of being in heaven with Jesus. Today we can also see this same religious pride as was seen in those former religious leaders who were the enemies of God, and the strongest opponents to Jesus.

Why would anyone dare to argue against the bible, or quarrel with Jesus words? This can only come because of pride in the heart, and a life of sin. All men are sinners, but there are those who think they are more righteous, and do not see themselves as sinners. This spiritual pride is a wicked thing in the sight of God, for it corrupts the heart, and leads many into spiritual darkness. Men will fight to maintain their religious title, status, or false doctrine, even when it clearly contradicts the teachings of scripture. Many men who have been trained in bible schools and seminary are compelled to accept the dogmas of the denomination that they belong to, and would not contradict those dogmas, even in their conscience knew that it was wrong, because they want to hold onto their religious position before men. The pride of position, and the fear of losing their status cause them to compromise God's truth. How refreshing to meet a man who does not care about popular opinion of the cultural and traditional influences, as much as he cares about the word of the Lord, and will stand on that even if it costs him his religious reputation, his financial support, or his life. We have seen some men historically who stood against the false practices of the church, and stood for the word. These men like Jesus were persecuted, and some martyred, but they have help to lead the church out of darkness into light. Standing for truth is costly venture, when most are willing to succumb to the pressures of popular opinion. We should defend the truth without compromising to accommodate our pride or position in the church.

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Mt 18:3b

LESSON 65
The Coming Judgment
LUKE 21

In today's lesson, we shall have a prophetic look at the coming judgments upon Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. There is much information in Jesus prophetic words about what signs we should expect before and during the tribulation period and the return of Christ to judge the nations and reign upon the earth.

The chapter begins with Jesus observing to His disciples a poor widow putting her last coins into the temple treasury, while many other rich folks put in a small portion of their wealth. Jesus explained to his disciples, that the poor widow, put in more than all the others, for she kept back nothing for herself. When we give to the Lord, God will evaluate it not on the amount given, but on the degree of sacrifice, it cost us.

While some folks were admiring the temple to Jesus, He explained that in a coming day of judgment the beautiful temple would be destroyed so that no stone would be left upon another. When the disciples heard these words, they asked him when these things would take place. He provides them a lengthy answer about two future judgments. Jesus will speak about the destruction of Jerusalem which we know from history occurred in AD70 at the hands of the Romans, who destroyed the city and the temple just as Jesus had predicted. Jesus also elaborates on God's judgment not only on Israel during a future tribulation, but also a judgment upon all nations upon the earth. These prophetic words are very important then for all of us, because much of Jesus words have not yet been fulfilled, but we appear to be fast approaching the time when all these things shall come to pass. Let us look at the prophecy more closely. Jesus mentions at least 19 signs concerning the future judgments, some relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the times following, and most have to do with the final stages before the Lord comes again in glory.

1. Jesus mentions false Messiah's will arise, and their will be wars and rumors of wars. These signs appear before His coming, which would be during a future tribulation period.
2. He said that nations and kingdoms would be at war, along with great earthquakes, famine, disease, and fearful sights and signs from heaven. Although we are seeing great earthquakes in various places like Japan, New Zealand, and Haiti, these are only preliminary to the natural disasters of the tribulation period. We also have plenty of famine and disease in our day, but have not yet seen any great signs in the heavens concerning the moon, sun, and stars, so we are safe to conclude that these are all future signs.
3. Jesus mentions a persecution against his people before these signs, and this might refer to the Christians that have been persecuted down through the church age, but could also refer to the tribulation believers, many of whom will be martyred for their faith.
4. Jesus jumps back to the judgment on Jerusalem and speaks of the armies surrounding the city to destroy it. Jesus warns that in that day the people should make haste to get out of the city before it is destroyed. He predicts that the Jews would be scattered to all nations, until the time of the gentiles is fulfilled.
5. Jesus returns to the topic of the signs that appear just prior to his return, which include signs in the sky with the sun, moon, and stars. He says there will be distress and perplexity, and men's hearts will fail them for fear, as the power of the heavens is shaken.
6. Jesus, the Son of Man, shall come in Glory. He will overthrow the armies which are trying to destroy Israel. He will also establish His kingdom on earth.

After speaking about all of these signs of His coming, he says that those who see these signs should look up for their redemption is near. Jesus speaks to the believers of the tribulation period, who will be fiercely persecuted, but they can be assured that soon their redeemer will come and rescue them. Jesus then tells a parable about the fig tree. He says that when the blossoms appear, you know that summer is very near. The fig tree is often a picture of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, and Jesus is pointing out that when the signs of His coming are seen, then we can know that His coming in Glory is very near.

When Jesus said 'this generation' shall not pass away until all this is fulfilled, he could not have been referring to the generation living at the time he spoke these words, for although many of that generation witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, they certainly did not see the Lord return to earth in glory. We are still waiting after 2 millennia for Jesus to return, so what did he mean by this generation. Some feel that from the time Israel once again became a nation, which happened in 1948, that the generation living at that time should not pass away before they see the Lord's return. This seems to fit well with what Jesus has said, which means that since 1948 to the present 2011, there has been 63 years. There are plenty still living who saw the formation of Israel in 1948, and the generation in scripture often equates to the average lifespan of man with is 3 score and 10 or 70 years. We cannot be certain, for no man knows the day or the hour, but the faithful should recognize the signs of the times, and prepare themselves for the Lord's return at any moment from now. Are you ready? Prepare yourself by receiving Jesus as your Savior.

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Luke 21:27

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the signs of the Lord's return to judge the world. We learned that Jerusalem was judged in AD70, when God allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and scatter Israel over the face of the earth. We also learned that the time of Jesus second coming maybe very near because the generation that witnessed the formation of the nation of Israel is coming to its' close very soon. Someone might ask the question, "Why is Israel so important to God and to prophesy?"

It is striking to notice how much of our bible is centered on the history and prophecies concerning the nation of Israel. Why would this little country in the Middle East create so much biblical attention, and be the center of world conflict, and of future glory? Starting way back in Genesis 12 we meet a man named Abraham, who was called by God to go the land of promise, Canaan, and what today we know as Israel. God, in His sovereignty, choose Abraham and his descendants as a people whom God would bless. He did this not to show favoritism to this particular people, but that through them all the nations on the earth would be blessed. As God's chosen people, they were given the Law of God through Moses, they were brought miraculously out of slavery and into a land of blessing, and they were given the priesthood, the tabernacle, and the promise of God's presence among them in Jerusalem. All of this was to be a means by which all nations could know the true God and creator of all. The nations worshipped other Gods, but could and should have learned by God's dealings with Israel whom the true God was. Pharaoh should have known after all of the signs given through Moses, who the true God was, even his magicians had to admit that these plagues were nothing else but the finger of God.

God's plan was to use Israel as an object lesson of his love and redemption, available to all people. Unfortunately, Israel failed to keep God's law and represent him to the nations. However, God's plan was not overcome because of the sinful rebellion of Israel. God was prepared for the failure of the nation. He sent His Son, who came through the nation of Israel, and called Israel to repentance. Even when Israel refused to receive her Messiah, and honor him as their rightful king, God's purposes still would not be confounded. The message of salvation went forth from the Jewish apostles to the gentiles, and has since spread across the globe, so that all nations of the earth have been blessed through the descendants of Abraham. Jesus was the son of Abraham, and the one through whom God would fulfill all his promises. It appears that Israel was lost and far from God over the past 2000 years, but God has not finished with the nation of Israel, for as yet He intends to fulfill all of His promises to these people. God has miraculously preserved Israel for over 2500 years, since their dispersion to Babylon and to all nations. It is more then remarkable that the Jewish people have remained a unique people with a unique language after so many generations have passed, not even having their own country in which to live. Although they have had short times of restoration to the land, they have never had their own sovereign state, until 1948.

Today in Israel, the Jews gather at the Wailing Wall, and say their prayers, still waiting and hoping for God's Messiah to come and exalt their nation. They still feel the oppressive hand of their enemies trying to destroy them, but cry out to God for His mercy on their nation. The Christian stands in the light of God's revelation and understands that until this nation recognizes that Jesus is their Messiah, they will not find peace with God, or safety from their enemies. But soon and very soon, the days of judgment will commence and the attention of the world will focus on this tiny nation, and when it looks as though Israel is about to be utterly destroyed, then their great savior will appear in Glory and spare them, exalt them, and He shall reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years.

The Christian should learn the significance of Israel from the Old Testament and New Testament prophecies, and understand that this nation is the apple of God's eye, and He will ensure that they be rescued and exalted. The church is not a replacement of Israel in God's plans, but rather God's special called out people, during the time of Israel's blindness and unbelief. We do well to remember the promise made to Abraham, that those who bless Israel would be blessed.

"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Gen 12:3

LESSON 66
Travesty of Justice
LUKE 22

In today's lesson, we shall consider how Jesus was betrayed and arrested unjustly. We shall also consider the Lord's Supper, which our Lord has provided as a memorial meal until he returns for His people. While the chief priests arrested Jesus with the pretense of serving justice, they were in fact, paying bribes and working under the cloak of darkness, to hide their true and evil intentions to kill Jesus.

This chapter begins with Judas bargaining with the Jewish authorities to hand over Jesus when he is away from the crowds. It was important to the authorities to arrest Jesus secretly, so that people would not revolt against their evil plot to kill Jesus. Judas was just the answer they were looking for, and he was glad to lead them to the place they could find Jesus.

The Lord asks some of His disciples to arrange for the Passover feast in an upper room. After the Passover meal, Jesus instituted what we commonly call the Lord's Supper. This simple meal involved only two things bread and wine, which represents his body and his blood. The bread and wine are merely symbolic, and help us to remember that Jesus gave his body and life upon the cross for us, and how he put away our sins. It is Jesus command and wish, that wherever His disciples are found, they would regularly celebrate this simple memorial until He returns of His church. Every Christian should therefore be glad and honored to participate in this meal to honor the name and work of Jesus.

While they were meeting in the upper room Judas had it in his heart to betray Jesus. Jesus knew what was in Judas' heart and told his disciples that one of them would betray him. They were wondering who could do such a thing, and then began to dispute among themselves who of them was the greatest. Jesus then uses this occasion to teach them, that in His kingdom, the greatest is the servant, not the one being served. He also added that his disciples would rule in His kingdom over the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus then tells Peter that Satan would cause him to deny knowing Jesus, but after Peter had failed, and was later restored, Peter should strengthen his brothers. Peter claims his loyalty to Jesus, and that he would never deny Him, but Jesus tells him that he would deny him 3 times before the rooster crowed.

After the dinner was ended, Jesus and His disciples leave Jerusalem and climb the Mt. of Olives, where Jesus asked His disciples to watch and pray. Jesus then goes a bit farther and begins to pray earnestly and in agony. His prayer is so intense that his sweat was like great drops of blood. When he returns from praying he finds His disciples asleep, for they were tired. Then Judas arrived with the soldiers and servants of the high priest to arrest Jesus. Judas identified Jesus to the band of soldiers by greeting him with a kiss. One of Jesus disciples attacks with a sword and manages to cut off the ear of the high priest servant. Jesus stops the attack and then heals the man's ear. Then the soldiers bound Jesus and led him away, and the disciples all fled. Peter followed in the distance to see what would happen to Jesus, and enters into the courtyard of the high priest's house, where Jesus was being held. As Peter warmed himself by the fire, several of the people identified Peter as one of Jesus disciples but, in fear, Peter denied three times that he even knew the man. As soon as he denied knowing the Lord the third time, he heard the rooster crow, and remembered the words of Jesus. He then went outside and wept bitterly.

We have seen how Jesus knew about Judas betrayal, and about Peter's denial before they took place. He also knew of his coming arrest and crucifixion. It is remarkable that Jesus, who is surrounded by evil men who wanted to kill Him, and even when his closest companions can betray and deny Him, would still willingly go to the cross in love for our souls. We are so unworthy of His love and grace, and yet in spite of our sin and wickedness, Jesus came to die for us. If the Holy Spirit can teach us the true significance of Jesus sacrifice for us, it will make us eternally grateful, and those who are compelled to worship such a great Savior.

The final scenes of this chapter show Jesus being mocked by men who arrested Him, blindfolding Him and striking Him on the face, asked Him to prophesy who struck Him. It was cruel and unnecessary to treat an innocent man in such a despicable manner. When brought before the high priest early in the morning, he questioned Jesus about His identity, and whether he was the Son of God. Jesus confirmed that He was the Son of God, and this infuriated them, and gave them what they desired, a charge of blasphemy. They did not believe Jesus was God's Son, and so His claim to be, was in their view, blasphemy. It never seemed to occur to any of them, that perhaps Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and that He had clearly shown this through His miracles, teaching, and by fulfilling many prophecies. These men, however, were not interested in truth, only that they must get rid of Jesus, because he was a threat to their status and reputation. Ironically, their travesty of justice was the means God used to bring about salvation to the world. While men meant it for evil, God meant it for good. You can have peace with God today, if you will accept Jesus as your Savior.

"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Luke 22:43

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have seen how the Lord was betrayed by a close friend, denied by another, and mocked before wicked men. They sought his death, and felt just in their plans to execute the man who is the Lord of Glory. They bartered with a traitor, interrupted Jesus earnest prayers to arrest and accuse him falsely. Why they were not convicted by their own treachery is remarkable indeed. Someone might ask the question, "Why did Jesus say to His disciples, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation'?"

When Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, he asked his disciples to pray, and then left them and went a short distance and prayed himself. When he returned sometime later he found them asleep, and Luke tells us that they were tired from sorrow. They seemed to sense the impending collision between their master and the Jewish authorities, and Jesus had just spoken to them about his body be given for their sakes. Perhaps they were getting a better grasp of what was going to happen to their Lord, and sorrow filled their hearts. The hour was late, and they were very tired, so they dozed off to sleep while Jesus was praying. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus also added the words, 'the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'. Why did Jesus say, pray that you may not enter into temptation?

A great spiritual battle was underway, and Jesus found it necessary to pray for strength in that battle. Angels came and ministered to him to strengthen him in his prayers. Not only was Jesus about to enter the greatest spiritual battle of all, his disciples were also to face their own battles. As they would watch men take their Lord, bind him and lead him away, and later shout for his crucifixion, their faith would be severely tested, and the loyalty to him greatly challenged. Judas failed because he was never a man of true faith, Peter buckled under the pressure to save his own skin, and all the disciples fled in fear. Jesus call for them to pray, was what they needed to find the spiritual strength to face the coming circumstances with courage and godly submission. This is what we see in the Lord himself. As all the wicked intents of men and Satan gathered around him like an angry pack of dogs, he remained calm and steadfast in his purpose. The disciples had lost their courage, and fearing for their own lives forsook him and fled.

These men could have attained greater spiritual strength to face their fears, if they had been able to recognize their need to pray. Prayer is that secret weapon of the believer that will grant strength, peace, courage, and wisdom, to weather the greatest storms. Spiritual warfare is very real, and those who take it seriously will make a spiritual impact in the world, but those who are spiritually dull, can have little impact when spiritual forces attack. The trouble with us is that like the apostles we are weak in the flesh. We want to pamper our flesh, and so we give way to the wants and needs of the body, and compromise the spiritual activities. Just as muscles need to be worked to keep strong and fit, so a believer must labor at prayer, if he wants to make a difference in the lives of those he is praying for. To train muscles in hard work and discipline, and it is painful. Some would rather not bother with pain and hard work, but if someone desires to be strong, then they know it will cost them the pain and the labor. So often, when we go to our beds at night we spend a few moments in prayer. We say some quick prayer, to convince ourselves that we are spiritually healthy. However, we cannot dedicate serious time to pray, when we would much rather take our rest. The devil will do everything he can to keep you from praying. He will provide you with a thousand distractions, and make sure you are so tired that you just forget to pray, and go right to sleep. We satisfy ourselves with excuses as to why we cannot spend longer in prayer. It is not a matter of going to all-night prayer meetings hoping that our wishes will be granted. God wants us to be alone with him, and to get serious about prayer, and the spiritual concerns in our lives, and the lives of those around us. Perhaps you are going through some difficult spiritual battle right now. Have you gone to the Lord in for a serious time of confession, thanksgiving, and intercession? Learn how to pray earnestly and with agony of spirit, until you see the sunshine of God's countenance bursting upon your life and circumstances. Realize it will not be easy, for prayer is work, and it is costly, but those who labor at it will reap due reward if they faint not.

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Jam 5:3

LESSON 67
The Cross of Jesus
LUKE 23

Today we are once again turning to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that event in history which changes everything. It offers life and hope, or death and judgment. We will consider Jesus trial before Pilate, and Herod, and the hatred of the crowds, and then see how Jesus was crucified and buried. This lesson is a very sober time of reflection, so please listen with interest and concern. Your eternal soul's destiny, and condition, depends entirely on what transpired on the cross of Jesus.

Jesus was taken before Pilate the Roman governor and accused of perverting the nation, and claiming to be Christ a King. Pilate questioned Jesus and after considering Jesus words, he tells the crowds and rulers that he cannot find any fault in Jesus. Pilate heard the crowd mentions that Jesus was from Galilee, so he thought it might be best to hand the case over to Herod, a king for the Jews but under Roman authority, and overseeing the Galilean jurisdiction. Herod was very happy to see Jesus, and hoped he might perform some miracle, but when Jesus refused to talk, they mocked him, put a beautiful purple robe on him and then sent him back to Pilate. Once again Pilate wanted to release Jesus, having found no fault in him, but the crowds cried out for the release of Barabbas a murderer and wanted Jesus crucified. Though Pilate tried to release Jesus, he could see that the crowds were loud and insistent, and so he finally gave way to their cries, and ordered Jesus to be crucified. Large crowds followed the procession leading out of the city, women were weeping at the sight of Jesus bleeding and condemned, though he had done nothing wrong.

The scriptures reveal to us many things that took place when Jesus was crucified, including the people that were there, and many of their comments, Jesus words from the cross, and the signs that accompanied his crucifixion. It is well worth our time to consider every detail that scripture provides us concerning His execution, and those present, so that the Holy Spirit can teach us, humble us, and call us to faith in Christ.

Though the other gospel writers mention other details, Luke provides us with 15 important details that took place at the cross of Jesus:

1. Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do"
2. Crowds gather to watch.
3. Rulers sneer at him, and say, "He saved others; **let Him save Himself** if He is the Christ, the chosen of God".
4. The soldiers mock him, offering Him sour wine, saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, **save yourself.**"
5. An Inscription is written in Greek, Latin, Hebrew and nailed to the cross - "This is the King of the Jews"
6. One criminal blasphemes, and says, "If you are the Christ, **save yourself** and us"
7. The other criminal rebukes him saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under same condemnation?"
8. This other criminal asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into His kingdom.
9. Jesus assures the man he would be in Paradise with Him that day.
10. Darkness covers the earth from 12pm to 3pm, the sun is darkened, and the temple veil is torn in two.
11. Jesus cries with a loud voice, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" and breathes His last.
12. The centurion saw what happened, and said, "Certainly this was a righteous man!"
13. The crowds beat their breast and returned, but acquaintances and women look on from a distance.
14. Joseph of Arimathea requests the body of Jesus for burial, and is granted his request.
15. Joseph takes down Jesus body, wraps it in linen, and laid it in a tomb hewn out of rock.

We do not have time to consider all of these details, but do notice that three times Jesus is called upon to "save himself", by the Jews, by the Romans, and by one of the criminals. Most everyone around the cross thought it would be best for Jesus to save himself, if He had the power to do so. We would all avoid death if we had the power to escape it. The unbelieving crowds thought if Jesus could save himself then they would believe in Him. Jesus had power to save His own life, but knew that these unbelieving and cruel people would not believe even if he came down from the cross with miraculous power. He had performed countless miracles already, but they stubbornly refused to believe in Him. There was a sense in which Jesus had power to save himself, but another sense in which He did not, for He was compelled by the love of God, and obedience to accomplish this sacrifice so that God could forgive our sins. We also have power to choose for ourselves whether we shall give our lives and hearts to Jesus in faith. His sacrifice and love should compel us to do so. What will you choose to do after considering Jesus death on the cross for you? Will you turn away like the crowds did, or will you yield up yourself to Him in faith, and cry out like the thief, "Lord remember me, when you come into your kingdom". It was not only this criminal that found salvation, but also the centurion who witnessed Jesus death was also likely saved. He testified saying, "Truly, this was a righteous man". After Jesus died a kind man named Joseph provided a descent burial for Jesus, and his friends watched carefully where His body was laid, so they could anoint his body with spices and oils after the Sabbath day. Will you honor this man? Will you show kindness and love to Him? Will you call Him Lord?

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2:10,11

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been to the cross where Jesus was crucified, and considered the various people and details that surrounded that awful scene of suffering. We saw him rejected, despised, forsaken, cast-out, mocked, shamed, and tortured. All this done to a man who was said to have no fault. The Roman governor, who ordered his execution, the dying criminal beside him, and the Centurion in charge of the crucifixion, all claimed Jesus had done nothing wrong, and was a righteous man. Someone might ask the question, "Why do righteous people suffer?"

It would seem to us that righteous people should not have to suffer. We tend to think that when bad things happen to people, they must have done something wrong, and God is punishing them, or Satan is permitted to attack them, or make them sick. This philosophy of the righteous being exempt from pain and suffering certainly is not taught in the bible, but is a clever delusion of Satan to distort our thinking, and harm our faith and our trust in God.

Throughout the bible, we see how righteous people suffer. God often uses the pathway of suffering to accomplish His purposes in the lives of those whom He loves. There are so many examples of this in the bible but just consider these examples. Jacob lost his wife Rachel as she was giving birth to her second son Benjamin. Jacob was a righteous man, but God allowed him to suffer the loss of his beloved wife. Joseph was the son of Jacob, and was a God fearing young man, but was sold into slavery by his own brothers, was falsely accused and put in prison for a long time. These hardships certainly were not because Joseph was evil, but God used it in Joseph's life to bring about blessing to many people. Then there is the story of Job who lost all of his property and all of his children and became intensely sick with disease. Yet the bible says Job was a righteous man. God allows us to see behind the scenes, and we learn that God allowed Satan to attack Job in every way to test his faith. God was vindicated by Job's faith, and was greatly blessed by God because of his willingness to accept the pain and loss and still praise His God.

When you suffer, can you accept that it is God's will for you? Can you praise God that He is permitting your suffering for His own good purposes, even when you may not see or understand those purposes? Suffering results from the consequences of sin in the world, and can afflict righteous people, not necessarily for any sin in themselves, but simply because sin has taken its' toll on all of humanity, and because of our rebellion against God. God does not promise us a shelter from suffering even when we love Him with all of our hearts. In fact, it is often God's means to create a greater faith and obedience in His children. If our love for God were dependent on our being in comfort and prosperity, then our love would be shallow and insincere. However, if we can still trust in God, and give glory to His name when we are suffering, then we prove our love and faith to be sincere, and this brings glory to God.

When Jesus died on the cross, he did so not because of any wrong he had ever done, for he was perfectly sinless. He died out of love for you and I and to pay for our sins. He willingly entered into suffering for our benefit. The bible tells us that it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. Not that God enjoys inflicting pain and suffering, but it was the means of bringing many sons to glory. It was the means of our salvation, so that we could go to heaven. It was the means for God's love to manifest in the most powerful way, so that the whole world would know that our God is a God of great love and compassion. He wants us to respond to His love, by trusting in Jesus as our Savior. Yes, the righteous suffers, and God uses that for our good. If you or a loved one is going through a time of suffering, then just remember Jesus suffering on the cross was the way of spiritual blessing for many. Cling to God in faith, and try to accept that God often permits suffering for our good, even when we cannot understand it. Trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. Look to Him upon the cross with the eyes of faith, and with eyes of love and sorrow.

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger." Lam 1:12

The Resurrection of Jesus

LUKE 24

In today's lesson, we have the greatest moment in all of history, which brings hope to all of humanity. The resurrection of Jesus is the single most important event to confirm the truth of the Christian gospel, and provide us assurance of heaven. Luke is very careful to give us the details of that day, and how the disciples went from being skeptics to being joyful worshipping believers.

When some of the women came to anoint Jesus' body early on Sunday morning, they noticed the stone had been rolled away, and while at the tomb they were encountered by two angels. The angels startled the women and in fear, they bowed their heads. The angels said to them, "Why are you seeking the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen". With this news the women ran back into the city of Jerusalem to report to the apostles what they had seen and heard. When the disciples heard their report, they did not believe them. This news was too fantastic to believe. Perhaps they thought the women were just exaggerating things because of their sadness and sorrow. Peter however wanted to investigate for himself, and so he runs to the tomb, and when he enters into the tomb he discovers the linen cloths that Jesus had been wrapped in. The linen clothes were lying neatly folded by themselves. So Peter leaves the tomb marveling and wondering about what has happened.

The scene changes to two other disciples that had been with the apostles and knew about the report of the women. These two were walking to the town of Emmaus, which is about 7 miles west of Jerusalem. A man whom they did not recognize joined them as they walked along, asking them what they were talking about and why they were sad. The man who was talking with them was Jesus himself, but they were not able to recognize Him. They told their travel companion about Jesus of Nazareth, a great prophet, and how they had hoped he would redeem Israel, but was condemned, crucified, and then buried. They also said that some of their company had reported that the tomb was empty earlier in the morning, and they had seen a vision of angels who told them Jesus was alive. At this point Jesus began to rebuke them for how slow they were to believe the scriptures. Then he explained how the scriptures foretold about the Messiah being rejected, killed, buried, and resurrected. Jesus went through passages in the Old Testament to explain everything to them, and how what had happened to Jesus was the fulfillment of all these prophecies. These two disciples were getting the greatest Bible lesson ever, and learned that all of the scriptures speak about Jesus, and how He is the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, and also the coming King to reign over all. As the travelers approached their hometown of Emmaus, Jesus looked as though he would travel farther, so they invited him to stay with them for the night, because the time was getting late. Jesus went into their home, and when the food was served for dinner Jesus took the bread and blessed it, and as he did so the eyes of the two disciples were opened and they knew him. He then vanished from their sight. It is interesting how Luke relates this story to us, for we learn that it was when Jesus broke the bread that they were able to recognize him. We cannot be sure why at that moment they would have recognized him, but perhaps it was because it reminded them of when Jesus broke the bread in the upper room to institute the Lord's Supper, or maybe they saw his wounds in his hands. Whatever the case, suddenly they realized that their dinner guest was none other than the resurrected Jesus. Though the hour was getting late, they knew they could not keep this news to themselves, and so they quickly made their way back to Jerusalem, and found the 11 apostles and other disciples, and told them about what they had seen and heard. As they reported about their encounter with the resurrected Lord Jesus, Jesus came and stood in their midst. They were all amazed and afraid. Jesus showed them His hands and His feet to prove to them that it was He, and that He was raised up from the grave. He also ate some food to show them that he was not a spirit, as some of them were thinking, but was indeed flesh and bone, and that He had been raised up from the grave.

This remarkable scene was one of amazement and wonder for the disciples. They could hardly believe their eyes, but there was Jesus standing before them, whom they had seen tortured, crucified, and buried. Not only was this the greatest miracle they had ever seen but was also the greatest miracle in history. Jesus overcame death, and rose again. This is the basis and foundation for all Christian doctrine and hope. Every Christian must believe that Jesus died on the cross, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day. It is our faith in the resurrected Christ that assures us of our place in heaven one day. As He rose up from the grave, so we, who trust in Him, shall also be raised out of death to be with Him forever in heaven. The great difficulty we meet in this chapter is the disciples' struggle to believe. The events are so astonishing to them, and they need much to confirm to them the truth of the resurrection. The report of the women, angels, disciples going to Emmaus, all seemed just too much to believe, but when Jesus appeared in their midst they just could not deny what had taken place. He even ate to show them that he has been raised in his body from the grave. After Jesus leads them out of the city as far as Bethany, he blessed them and then ascended back into heaven. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, praising and worshipping God continually. This is the greatest news ever told to human ears. As the Holy Spirit opens your heart to the great wonder of Jesus' resurrection you too can believe all that the scriptures have revealed, and find salvation through Jesus.

"Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.'" Luke 24:44

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have considered the most important moment in history, when Jesus rose from the grave, and how his disciples at first found it hard to believe, but later could not deny what they saw. Their mutual testimony is confirmation to us that Jesus is indeed risen from the grave and that one day all those who have trusted in Him will also be raised up to live with him forever in heaven. Someone might ask the question, "Why were the disciples slow to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?"

When the women saw the evidence of Jesus resurrection, they were astonished and fearful. The angels told them Jesus had risen, and they went to tell the other disciples, but they thought these women were telling idle tales. Peter went to the tomb himself to investigate and went away marveling, but still finding it hard to accept. Then the two on the road to Emmaus also were slow to understand, and when Jesus appeared to them when breaking bread, they believed and ran to Jerusalem to tell the others. They were all filled with doubts, but when Jesus appeared among them, and showed them his hands and feet, and ate food, they finally were able to apprehend the truth of the resurrection. Of course it is difficult to believe that someone who you have seen die, is now raised up to life again. These disciples knew of stories from the Old Testament about Elijah raising a boy from the dead, and some had even seen Jesus raise a young man, a 12-year-old girl, and Lazarus from the dead. With all the evidence they had, we might expect them to believe. However resurrection from the dead is such an amazing miracle of God, it is not so easily accepted. Only when the evidence was irrefutable did the disciples then come to the full acceptance of this fact.

Believing the resurrection of Jesus is essential to the Christian faith, and that which will transform our lives from skeptics to believers, from condemned sinners to righteous Christians. It is not easy to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, but God has provided us ample evidence in the scriptures. When Jesus spoke to the two on the road to Emmaus, he challenged them about their understanding of scripture. He said they were slow to understand all that is written. If we study our bibles well then we shall also learn about Jesus and have all the evidence we need to believe in Him as the Son of God and the one whom God has raised up. Not only did God speak of the coming of the Messiah, but also about His sufferings, and His resurrection. If we know our bibles well, then we shall not find it difficult to believe all that the bible teaches concerning Jesus for we can compare history with the written record, and even compare with what we know about the nature of man, and what God teaches us about man. Jesus used the scriptures to teach these disciples the truth, and as he talked with them, their hearts were burning within them. This is probably because they were coming to a realization of what God had done and was doing through Jesus, and their hearts were being filled with the joy and wonder of God's love and grace shown to us through the death of Jesus.

Many people say they believe in Jesus, and even believe that God raised Him from the dead. Do you really believe that He has risen? If you really believe that Jesus is alive, and that God has raised Him up, then you will never be the same again. You will hear Jesus when He speaks to you through the word. You will obey His command to go into all the world to preach the gospel, and like the disciples who saw Him ascend into heaven you will continually praise and worship God. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead means that we also, who believe in Him, shall also be raised up from death. Without the hope of resurrection, our lives would be lived in fear of death, and the darkness and emptiness of death. Jesus has brought life and immortality to life through the gospel, and we can be assured of the wonderful hope of living forever with the Lord. You may have this hope by trusting in the risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."
1Th 4:14