



~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

"come just as you are"

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing

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Worship Music

[Pray-Santcus Real](#)

[Lead Me-Santcus Real](#)

[Forgiven-Santcus Real](#)

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being my Good Shepherd. I am so thankful You speak to me and lead me through life. I'm sorry I haven't listened to You so many times when You have tried to warn me, help me, and guide me. I have lost so much because I didn't listen when You spoke. But rather than focus on my past losses, I determine to do everything within my ability to hear You now and to obediently follow what You tell me to do, in Jesus' name. Amen.....

Sparkling Gems from the Greek.

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Matthew 24:36 (AMP)

36 But of that [exact] day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

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Matthew 16:1-28 (AMP)

1 NOW THE Pharisees and Sadducees came up to Jesus, and they asked Him to show them a sign (spectacular miracle) from heaven [attesting His divine authority]. 2 He replied to them, When it is evening you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red, 3 And in the morning, It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and has a gloomy and threatening look. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 A wicked and morally unfaithful generation craves a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Then He left them and went away. 5 When the disciples reached the other side of the sea, they found that they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 Jesus said to them, Be careful and on your guard against the leaven (ferment) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 7 And they reasoned among themselves about it, saying, It is because we did not bring any bread. 8 But Jesus, aware of this, asked, Why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? O you [men, how little trust you have in Me, how] little faith! 9 Do you not yet discern (perceive and understand)? Do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many [small hand] baskets you gathered? 10 Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many [large provision] baskets you took up? 11 How is it that you fail to understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But beware of the leaven (ferment) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 12 Then they discerned that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. 13 Now when Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? 14 And they answered, Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. 15 He said to them, But who do you [yourselves] say that I am? 16 Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 Then Jesus answered him, Blessed (happy, fortunate, and to be envied) are you, Simon Bar-Jonah. For flesh and blood [men] have not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter [Greek, Petros—a large piece of rock], and on this rock [Greek, petra—a huge rock like Gibraltar] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades (the powers of the infernal region) shall not overpower it [or be strong to its detriment or hold out against it]. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven. 20 Then He sternly and strictly charged and warned the disciples to tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. 21 From that time forth Jesus began [clearly] to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders and the high priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised from death. 22 Then Peter took Him aside to speak to Him privately and began to reprove and charge Him sharply, saying, God forbid, Lord! This must never happen to You! 23 But Jesus turned away from Peter and said to him, Get behind Me, Satan! You are in My way [an offense and a hindrance and a snare to Me]; for you are minding what partakes not of the nature and quality of God, but of men. 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to be My disciple, let him deny himself [disregard, lose sight of, and forget himself and his own interests] and take up his cross and follow Me [cleave steadfastly to Me, conform wholly to My example in living and, if need be, in dying, also]. 25 For whoever is bent on saving his [temporal] life [his comfort and security here] shall lose it [eternal life]; and whoever loses his life [his comfort and security here] for My sake shall find it [life everlasting]. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life [his blessed life in the kingdom of God]? Or what would a man give as an exchange for his [blessed] life [in the kingdom of God]? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory (majesty, splendor) of His Father with His angels, and then He will render account and reward every man in accordance with what he has done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in (into) His kingdom.

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came [And now they are seeking to trap Him], and they desire that he would show them a sign from heaven. And he answered and said unto them: When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, you say, It's gonna be foul weather today: for the sky is red, and lowering. O you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky; but you can not discern the signs of the times? (Mat 16:1-3)

Now the Lord is rebuking them for their inability to discern the signs of the times. They said, "show us a sign from heaven". And He said you're able to look at the sky in the evening when it's all red. You say, oh it's gonna be a good day tomorrow. Where, when you get up in the morning and the sky is all red, you say, oh, oh, we're gonna have a windy one today. It's gonna be a bad day. He said you have enough sense to be able to tell the weather from looking at the sky, but you don't have enough sense to know the signs of the times.

They should have known, had they been up in their scriptures. They would have known that this was the time for the coming of their Messiah. For in the book of Daniel, he promised that 483 years after the commandment had gone forth, to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah, the prince would be coming. And they did not know the signs and the times because they weren't really up in the scriptures.

And I wonder how many times Jesus might say to people today who are so blind to the fact that He is returning soon. You fools. You know how to give weather reports by studying the atmosphere, the atmospheric pressures, the direction of the wind and so forth, but you don't know the time of the coming.

And then he said,

A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah (Mat 16:4).

And again He repeats this as He did before.

And he left them, and he departed (Mat 16:4).

You've asked for a sign before. I've told you, the sign of the Prophet Jonah, that's the only sign you're gonna get.

And when His disciples were come together on the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. And Jesus said unto them, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Mat 16:5-6).

Now we told you that whenever leaven was referred to, it was referred to in an evil sense. It was the starter that they would use to leaven their loaves of bread. It caused the rising by deterioration and decay, and so it's been a type of sin, or hypocrisy. In this case He said, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees", which is hypocrisy, according to another gospel.

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, Oh, he knows we forgot to bring the bread. And when Jesus perceived what they were thinking, he said unto them, O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves, because you forgot to bring the bread? Don't you yet understand? Don't you remember the five loaves and the five thousand, how many baskets did you take up? Don't you remember the seven loaves and the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? (Mat 16:7-10)

Do you think that I am worried because you don't have bread? Don't you realize that we're able to provide the bread? I am not talking about you forgetting to bring bread.

How is it that you do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Then they understood how that he was bidding them not to beware of the leaven that is in bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Mat 16:11-12).

And now they leave the Sea of Galilee and they come to the upper part of what is known as upper Galilee. The area that is today called Banias. In those days it was Cesarea Philippi. There are the headwaters of the Jordan Rivers, springing out from the base of Mount Herman.

And when Jesus came into the area of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the son of men am? And they said unto him, Some say that you are John the Baptist: some, say that you're Elijah, others think you're Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. And he said unto them, Who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona [or Simon Bar is son, the son of Jonah]: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mat 16:13-18).

Now we have one of two choices. The church is built upon Peter, or the church is build upon Peter's confession, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God.

Now the Catholics assert that the church was built on Peter. There are problems with this. Number one, Jesus said unto him, "Thou art Petros", which in the Greek is a little stone. And then He declared, "upon this Petras", which is a giant stone, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The church was not build upon the little stone, but upon the giant rock; "Thou art Petros", a little stone, "upon this Petras".

Paul the apostle in 1 Corinthians 3:11, tells us: "For other foundation can no man lay, then that is laid, which is", not Simon Peter, but Jesus Christ. "No other foundation can man lay, but that which is".

I know men have tried to lay another foundation, Peter. But it seems quite obvious that Peter is not the foundation of the church. And it's not build upon him, but it is build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and Peter's declaration that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the son of the living God. And that is the true foundation of the church. The church is build upon Jesus Christ. He is the foundation upon which the church stands.

Now the interesting thing to me is that Peter had here, and I am sure he did not realize it, he had here a spiritual revelation. When he said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God!" Jesus said, "All right Peter, flesh and blood it not reveal this unto you, but my father which is in heaven." Peter you've had a spiritual revelation. This didn't come out of your own chemical juices that flash the little electronic impulse across your brain, this came from God. And I am certain that Peter didn't realize this that had come from God, because it just came to him, I am sure, as just a flash. Peter as we said was impulsive, and I am sure that when Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" He just said impulsively, "You're the Christ the Son of the living God." He said all right, blessed are you; you've had a revelation from God. "Flesh and blood didn't reveal this unto you, but my Father which is in heaven".

God speaks to us in such natural ways, that usually we are not aware that God is speaking to us. We expect God to speak in some supernatural way. We expect to go into a trance and hear the prelude of the angelic choir, and feel all of these tingling sensation, and our hair is standing out, and then we hear, "My child", God is talking to me. But God speaks to us in such natural ways, and God leads us in such natural ways, there is the beautiful supernatural within the natural. But because we are so dull in our spiritual sensibilities, we are usually not even attune or aware to the fact that it is God speaking to us or God leading us. And that's just put down to our spiritual dullness.

And there are a lot of times, when you say, "Well, God has never spoken to me, "or, "I never heard the voice of God, never had an experience. "And it's because you are looking for some kind of super kind of hocus-pocus, the vibrations to come and everything else. But God works in such beautiful, natural ways. And the real ability is discovering the supernatural in the natural. And more important than that, and more difficult than that is to be able to discern the supernatural from the natural.

Now that's the hardest part. Did this come from God, or did this come from me? God are you speaking to me or is this just something I am dreaming up? And that is difficult. There is no easy way. That is extremely difficult because the supernatural comes in such a

natural way. If the supernatural came in a supernatural way, I would have no problem with discernment. But because God, you see, is a superior Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, I am an inferior trinity, spirit, soul and body. I meet God in the realm of the spirit.

And so God's Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a son of God. Now my spirit has to bear witness to my consciousness, and when my spirit bears witness to my consciousness, it comes just like a thought from within, an awareness, an inspiration from within. Now I have my own inspirations too at times. Now how do I know if this inspiration is coming from God, or coming from me? Because they flash into my consciousness from the same level as the spirit comes from the area of the subconscious, so does my imagination come from the area of the subconscious. And because it comes to me consciously, the difficulty is to discern. Did this come from my own imagination or did this originate, did this thought actually come from God? Is He the one planning the thought in my mind?

And so here is Peter, he just expresses the thought that flashes in his head, and Jesus said, hey, all right, spiritual revelation Peter. My Father revealed that to you. So Peter has got a role going.

Jesus said,

And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven (Mat 16:19).

We have power as the children of God to bind the forces of darkness, and to loose the work of God. God has given us that authority over these spirit forces, these spiritual entities, that as children of God, we do have authority over them. We can bind these spirit forces and we can loose the work of God.

Then he charged his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Messiah (Mat 16:20).

The reason being He did not want a premature attempt to acclaim Him. There was a day in which the Messiah was to be revealed. That day came when Jesus made His triumphed entry. At this point He is saying now look, don't tell anybody. This is a revelation that came from you from God, but don't tell anybody. Now later on He set the stage, he said "go unto the city and you will find the donkey, bring him to me" (Mat 21:2). And He sat on the donkey, fulfilling the prophesy of Zechariah; "behold thy king cometh unto thee, but he is lowly, he is sitting upon a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). But now was not the time for the revelation. The perfect time of God had not yet come. So He is saying look, don't tell anybody yet. No premature kind of forcing of the people, or the people trying to set up the kingdom prematurely.

Now from that time on Jesus began to show to his disciples (Mat 16:21),

At this point, now He reveals Himself. "I am the Messiah." Peter you are right.

Now the Jewish people had been looking for the Messiah to come and establish the kingdom of God and overthrow the Roman yoke and bondage. And when Jesus acknowledged, "Yes, I am the Messiah, but don't tell anybody". He then began to tell them,

now look, I must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the Scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord [or, Lord, spare yourself] this shall not happen to you. [Peter the rock] And Jesus turned, and said unto Peter, Get thou behind me, Satan: you are an offence unto me: because you can not tell the difference between those things that are of God, and those things that are of men (Mat 16:21-23).

Move over Peter I want to sit down. A problem that I have, the inability to always be able to tell what is of God, and what is of my own heart.

Notice that Peter in one moment has a divine revelation, and in the next moment is expressing Satan's philosophy. The philosophy of Hell. Spare yourself. "Be that far from thee," literally, spare thyself, it shall not be to you. The philosophy of Hell, take the easy way. Take the easy path. Escape the cross. The philosophy of Hell is to encourage you to escape the cross, but the cross was important for our Salvation. Without the cross we could not be redeemed and the cross is also important for us, for our spiritual development.

And Satan is saying to us escape the cross, live the easy path, indulge yourself, escape the cross, you don't want the cross. But it is important that I recognize that I was crucified with Christ, and that old man, the old nature, was there crucified with Him, that I should no longer live unto the flesh, but now live unto the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. But Satan is still saying spare yourself. You don't want to come to the cross in your own life. Live after your flesh, go ahead, indulge yourself. And Jesus is just pointing to the cross and saying there is no answer except the cross. You must reckon your old nature to be dead, crucified with Christ. You can't live after the flesh anymore. Paul the apostle said, "how can we, who are dead to the flesh, how can we then be living any longer therein?" (Romans 8:12)

So Peter having a divine revelation, then the inspiration of his own heart inspired by Satan, as he expresses the philosophy of Hell, shows what is a common problem with us, the ability to know the difference between when God is speaking and my own heart is speaking to me. And God help me, I don't have any easy answers for you. This is a question that I am faced with so many times. People say, "How can I tell if it's God or me?" And God help me, I don't know. In my own life I seek to measure it by the scripture. Does it keep with the word of God? If it doesn't keep with the word of God, then I know it's not of God, because God is consistent, always consistent, in whatever He says will be in perfect harmony and in keeping with what He has said.

Then said Jesus (Mat 16:24),

You see, Peter had just said, "spare thyself," and Jesus is saying, Peter that's a philosophy of Hell.

If any man is gonna come after me [he can't spare himself], he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mat 16:24).

The path of discipleship is the path of self-denial. The path of discipleship is the path of the cross. I must come to the cross in my own life. I must come to the end of my own ambitions, my own goals, my own desires, my own self way, and I must just reckon that old life of the flesh to be dead, crucified with Christ, that I might live a new life after the Spirit in Christ Jesus.

I cannot live the life that Christ would have me to live apart from the power of His Holy Spirit. And I cannot be living after the flesh, and living after the Spirit at the same time. I've got to reckon that old man to be dead, and that is a process that I have to do day after day, because the old man is still trying to get on the throne.

Paul said that there is a war that is going on within us. The flesh is lusting against the spirit, and the spirit is against the flesh, and these two are contrary. And we don't always do even the things we want to do. And Paul expressing his own conflict in Romans seven, said, "and that which I do, I would not, and that which I would not, I do. O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death"(Romans 7:24).

And all of us having seen the divine ideal and consenting to it, and saying, yes Lord, that is the right life, and that's the life I want to live, and that's the life I am going to live, have experienced that weakness of our own flesh. And those things that we promise we would do, we are not doing. And those things we said, " I never do again," we are still doing them. Oh, wretched man that I am.

Notice at the end of chapter seven in Romans, Paul has thrown off now any self help formulas. "How can I change?" No longer is that his cry. And as long as you are crying, how can I change, how can I do better? I am looking for another formula. Doesn't anybody have any dietary aids to help me? Nothing has worked; I've tried them all.

He is not looking for another formula. He is not saying, how can I help myself? Doesn't anybody else have any more ideas? Self-help program, how to be a better me. But he is calling for outside help. He has come to the end. Who shall deliver me? I can't do it myself. I've tried. I've failed. Who shall deliver me? And therein is the answer, when we come to the end of ourselves, and we begin to cry out for that outside help. Paul responds to his own question. "Thanks be unto God, that through Jesus Christ we have the victory." I don't have to be a defeated Christian. I don't have to be in bondage to my flesh.

And in chapter seven, you find the I, I, I, all the way through, but in chapter eight, it disappears as he begins to talk about the Spirit, and the glorious, victorious life, that he is now living by the power of the Spirit. There is a cross. If any man is gonna come after me, he is gonna have to deny himself, the self-governed life. He's got to bring it to the cross, and reckon the old nature, and the old man to be dead, yes, crucified with Christ.

And then Jesus said, "follow me."

And then He gives a rational, first of all an explanation, then the rational. The explanation is, amplifying,

For whosoever will save his life will lose it (Mat 16:25):

If you're trying to find life apart from Jesus Christ, you're gonna end up losing your life eternally.

But whosoever will lose his life for my sake he'll find it (Mat 16:25).

He'll find what real life is. Then the rationale. For what should it profit a man, if he would gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mat 16:26) Now if you can have anything. Here we are now; the genie has popped out of the bottle, and you have three wishes. If you could have anything that you wanted. If there were the magic genie, and you could have anything you desired, anything you wanted, what would it be? What would it be? Now if you were able to achieve or to attain that wish, that desire, but it cost you your soul, what would it then really profit you? What would it profit you if you gained the whole world, but you lost your own soul? So you see, Jesus is saying, "look, you've got to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. For what profit is it, if you would gain the whole world, and yet lose your soul?"

Secondly, what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mat 16:26) Now as far as God is concerned, your soul is worth more than the whole world. As far as God is concerned, if you were offered the whole world in trade for your soul, and you took the whole world in exchange for your soul, you'd be making a bad deal, a stupid deal. For your soul is eternal. The world is gonna pass away. The world and the lust thereof, he said, is gonna pass away. Your soul is eternal. You're trading your eternal soul for something that's just gonna pass away. And as far as the Lord is concerned, you've made a bad deal. Then the question, "what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" What would you take for your soul?

Now every once in a while these plots are developed by the movies of Satan coming and offering a guy to sell out. And the guy names his price. What would you exchange your soul for? You know I am always shocked at what men often give for their souls. I am shocked at how cheap man often values himself, or his eternal life. I see people exchanging their soul for such foolish things, such as pride or pleasure for a moment, or fame, or glory. They sell out so cheap. And it always amazes me that people value their soul so lightly when God places such a tremendous value upon it.

For Jesus said,

The son of man shall come in the glory of his Father [Jesus is going to come again, in the glory of His Father,] with his angels (Mat 16:27);

Now He says this time I am gonna be crucified, I am gonna be turned over unto the elders, they're gonna crucify me, they are gonna kill me. On the third day I am gonna rise, but I am gonna come in the glory of my father, which His angels,

and then he shall reward every man according to their works. Verily I say unto you, There are some who are standing here, which will not taste of death, until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Mat 16:27-28).

What does He mean by that? Well it's unfortunate that there is a chapter break there, because what He meant by that is explained as we go right into chapter seventeen. But with the chapter break there, really they should have made the chapter break at the end of verse 27. So we start our lesson next Sunday night with verse 28. Really it belongs to chapter seventeen of the book of Matthew.

May the Spirit of God take the word of God tonight and continue to minister it to your heart, and to your life, as you deal with those issues of your own soul, and of your own relationship with God, and of your own life, the flesh life verses the spiritual life.

And I pray that God might work in your heart. And if you have not been brought by the Spirit of God to the cross, our place of victory in Jesus Christ, I pray that the Spirit will lead you to the cross this week, that you might come to the end of self, and the self-governed life, and put it there on the cross. Recognize that the old man was crucified, that the body of sin might not rule over you anymore, but that you might be ruled now by the Spirit of God, that new life, that life of victory in Christ.

And some of you, who have been wandering in the wilderness in your Christian experience, has been a wilderness, barren experience, that you might pass over Jordan, and come into the promised land, the life of the Spirit and begin to know the victory and the power of the Spirit in your life, in those areas where your flesh has kept you in defeat before. And so may this be a week of spiritual development in growth, as you continue your walk with Jesus Christ.



Matthew 17:1-27 (AMP)

1 AND SIX days after this, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And His appearance underwent a change in their presence; and His face shone clear and bright like the sun, and His clothing became as white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, who kept talking with Him. 4 Then Peter began to speak and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good and delightful that we are here; if You approve, I will put up three booths here—one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah. 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a shining cloud [composed of light] overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is My Son, My Beloved, with Whom I am [and have always been] delighted. Listen to Him! 6 When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were seized with alarm and struck with fear. 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, Get up, and do not be afraid. 8 And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 9 And as they were going down the mountain, Jesus cautioned and commanded them, Do not mention to anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. 10 The disciples asked Him, Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? 11 He replied, Elijah does come and will get everything restored and ready. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know or recognize him, but did to him as they liked. So also the Son of Man is going to be treated and suffer at their hands. 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them about John the Baptist. 14 And when they approached the multitude, a man came up to Him, kneeling before Him and saying, 15 Lord, do pity and have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy (is moonstruck) and he suffers terribly; for frequently he falls into the fire and many times into the water. 16 And I brought him to Your disciples, and they were not able to cure him. 17 And Jesus answered, O you unbelieving (warped, wayward, rebellious) and thoroughly perverse generation! How long am I to remain with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to Me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus and asked privately, Why could we not drive it out? 20 He said to them, Because of the littleness of your faith [that is, your lack of firmly relying trust]. For truly I say to you, if you have faith [that is living] like a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to yonder place, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. 22 When they were going about here and there in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is going to be turned over into the hands of men. 23 And they will kill Him, and He will be raised [to life] again on the third day. And they were deeply and exceedingly grieved and distressed. 24 When they arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel [the temple tax] went up to Peter and said, Does not your Teacher pay the half shekel? 25 He answered, Yes. And when he came home, Jesus spoke to him [about it] first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly rulers collect duties or tribute—from their own sons or from others not of their own family? 26 And when Peter said, From other people not of their own family, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are exempt. 27 However, in order not to give offense and cause them to stumble [that is, to cause them to judge unfavorably and unjustly] go down to the sea and throw in a hook. Take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find there a shekel. Take it and give it to them to pay the temple tax for Me and for yourself.

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Matthew chapter seventeen. The seventeenth chapter of Matthew actually begins with the twenty-eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter. It's unfortunate that the men who divided the Bible into chapters and verses made the chapter distinction where they did. They should have taken and included the twenty-eighth verse of chapter sixteen into chapter seventeen, and it would have eliminated a lot of questions. Because Jesus is talking to His disciples there at Cesarea Philippi and is talking to them about His death, and about the glory of His Father that He is going to bestow, and His coming in the glory of His Father, with His angels, rewarding every man according to his works.

Then Jesus said, "verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, until they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom"(Mat 16:28). Now from that, there are people who have assumed that Jesus no doubt failed, because all of the disciples who were standing there did die, and the Lord has not yet come in His kingdom. So it's a very confusing thing. It would seem that Jesus made a false prediction of His return.

However, if you don't have the chapter distinction, and you don't stop at the end of chapter sixteen, but you go immediately into chapter seventeen, you'll find out what Jesus was referring to. "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom",

And after six days Jesus takes Peter, James and John His brother, and brought them up into high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him (Mat 17:1-3).

So Jesus was referring to the fact that some of His disciples, and those that He was referring to were Peter, James and John, that they were actually going to see Him in the glory of His kingdom, and so He took them up into the high mountain. Now they were at Caesarea Philippi, which is at the base of Mount Hermon. And so it is quite obvious that the high mountain that He took them into was Mount Hermon.

Now in years to come when they sought to establish the Holy Land as a tourist attraction for Christians from throughout the world, in establishing where the holy sights were, that is where the events actually happened, most of the holy sights were established by the mother of Constantine some three hundred years, plus or minus, after Jesus was crucified. And she established the holy sights by her feelings when she stood in a spot, "oh, this feels like the spot where He must have been born. I feel an interesting sensation. Surely this must be the cave where He was born. Or this must be the place where the angel announced to Mary that she was going to conceive and have a child. This must be the place where He lived." And she went around the country establishing these holy sights, and they begin to build then these churches on these holy sights to commemorate these places where Jesus supposedly did these various things.

In her establishing of the holy sights it's obvious that she wasn't too familiar with the scriptures. And it's also obvious that they wanted to make it convenient for tourists. So they established the sight of the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, which is sort of in the middle of the land near the Sea of Galilee, and in the area of the Valley of Megiddo. They said that's where Jesus was transfigured, so they would have an excuse to build a huge church on the top of Mount Tabor. And after all, how many tourists are going to journey all the way up to Mount Hermon to see the place where He was transfigured.

The multiplying of the loaves and fishes; though it was around the upper end of the lake near Bethsaida, yet, at that time there weren't any roads going around into that area, and so they established a church down near Magdala, which is closer to where all of the tourists can go. And so that's where they established the loaves and fishes.

And then the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, they established that in the place the Church of the Crucifixion, within the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. Though the scripture tells us plainly that they took Him outside the walls, in the place where He was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a cave. So they have established that inside the gate of Damascus, and they have, of course, recently excavated the ancient gate of Damascus. And you can actually see the very gate that Jesus no doubt went through when He went over to Golgotha and was crucified. But it was convenient for tourists to get things close together, and so they established the holy sights that way.

Tabor is not an especially high mountain; in fact, it isn't even as high as Mount Gaber, right in that same area. Hermon is the highest mountain, 9800 feet high. And is the fact that Jesus was all the way up in Caesarea Philippi, it doesn't seem reasonable that He would hurry down to Mount Tabor, which would be a good six-day journey, I mean really hustling, in order that He might go up to the top of, to be transfigured for His disciples. But traditions such as the -- would have you and -- and when you go there, if you go with someone other than me, they probably take you to Tabor and let you get the same sensation that Constantine's mother got, as you stand in the place.

There are three Churches of the Ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives, and all of them swear that theirs is on the exact spot. One will even show you a footprint that He left in the rock when He ascended. Even though the scripture said, He went as far as Bethany and there He ascended into heaven. But they didn't read that gospel, and so they established all the Churches of Ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives. So I guess distorting news isn't anything new.

So Jesus was referring to the fact that these disciples were going to see Him in His glory. And as He was transfigured before them, they actually saw God's glory upon Him. He was transfigured. His face did shine as the sun and His raiment was as white as the light. And there appeared unto Him, Moses, and Elijah talking with Him. Matthew does not tell us what they were talking about, but Luke's gospel tells us that they were talking to Him about His death that He was soon to accomplish in Jerusalem. They were there talking to Him.

Now, what tremendous persons to talk to Jesus. Moses, who of course stood for the law, and Elijah who was the head of the prophets. And inasmuch as in the law, all of the sacrifices and the feast and so forth where spelled out. Now He who was the fulfillment of all of this, which was just a shadow. Now the substance, Christ is here and the sacrifices which were all just a shadow of that which was to come, is now to be fulfilled. And so Moses is no doubt talking to Him and has himself a better understanding than even when he wrote the Pentateuch. Elijah talking with Him also concerning this death that He was to experience.

Then answered impulsive Peter, [our good friend] and said unto Jesus, It's good for us to be here: if you will, let us make here three tabernacles; one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Mat 17:4). Isn't it interesting what stupid things we say when we should keep our mouths shut? But sometimes we think, well, we ought to say something, and when we talk for just the sake of being, many times people just talk for the sake of talking and that's always dangerous. You put your brain in neutral and start talking; it's amazing what will come out.

And you think, "I got to say something". And so impulsive Peter, got to say something, "Lord, it's good for us to be here, let's build three tabernacles, for Moses, Elijah and you".

But while he spoke, he was interrupted by a bright cloud that over shadowed them (Mat 17:5):

You remember in the Old Testament there was a bright cloud that lead the children of Israel when they came out of the bondage of Egypt, and that cloud followed them or led them through the wilderness. And it was the cloud that represented the Shekinah, the glory of God. Later when the tabernacle was completed, and they were ready to begin the sacrifices, this bright cloud descended there on the tabernacle, the glorious presence of God. It was that which filled the Holy of Holies. And then later on when Solomon had completed the temple, and when they dedicated the temple, again this bright cloud came upon it.

And now once more, the bright cloud.

And the voice out of the cloud, which said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Mat 17:5).

They had heard the law. They had heard the prophets, but now God is saying, "hear Him."

In Hebrews chapter one, we read those momentous words. "God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spoke unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His own dear Son"(Hebrews 1:1-2).

And so the Father is affirming, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him." The law is represented, the prophets are represented, but now God is saying, "listen to Him," the full revelation of God, the pure revelation of God, the true revelation of God in Jesus Christ. "Hear ye Him."

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and they were frightened. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, don't be afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man is risen again from the dead (Mat 17:6-9).

Now just keep this quiet, don't go spreading it until I am risen from the dead.

And His disciples [a little confused,] said, Why is it that the scribes tell us that Elijah must first come? (Mat 17:10)

Now again the question of Elijah and this question is a legitimate question, because in the last of the books of the prophets in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, and in the last chapter, in fact one of very last promises of the old testament, the fifth verse of chapter four of Malachi, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

So here is a prophesy that before the Lord comes, Elijah will first come to turn the hearts of the people to their fathers, that is to the religion of their fathers, and to the God of their fathers. And thus believing that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Peter had just confessed this six days earlier. "We know you're the Messiah, then where is Elijah? If Elijah has to first come, and here you are, where is Elijah?"

Now it needs to be noted, that Jesus declared, and notice carefully, verse eleven,

Elijah shall truly first come, and restore all things (Mat 17:11).

Jesus is reiterating the fact that that will happen; Elijah will indeed come and restore all things. Now the confusion in the minds of the disciples arose over the fact that they were anticipating that Jesus would immediately establish God's kingdom upon the earth. They were expecting it in their lifetime. They were waiting for Him to establish God's kingdom upon the earth. What they didn't know is that from the time of the Ascension of Jesus Christ until His coming to establish the kingdom, would be a long period of time. They did not foresee this two thousand-year interval that would exist, and thus, anticipating the immediate establishing of the kingdom. How do you fit together the fact that Elijah is going to first come? And Jesus repeats the prophecy of Malachi. "Elijah shall indeed first come, and restore all things."

Now when we get into the book of Revelation and John is dealing with the third section of the book, as he is talking about the things which will be after the church things, John declares in chapter eleven that he saw these two witnesses, and God gave to them power to witness for a period of time, three and a half years. And during the time of their witness, they will be able to exercise supernatural-type power. They will be able to stop the heavens, that it rain not during the time of their prophecy. They'll be able to call down fire from heaven to consume their enemies. The very things that Elijah did while he was here upon earth; praying, and it rained not, calling down fire upon the captains who were commissioned by the king to bring him back as captive.

And it is obvious that one of the two witnesses in Revelation chapter eleven will indeed be Elijah, and that is the complete fulfillment of what the Lord has declared here. Elijah shall first come and restore all things. However, inasmuch as there was a double coming of the Messiah, first in humiliation to bear the sins of many, to die in the place of us for our sins, and His second coming to come in power and glory to establish the kingdom of God.

So there were two forerunners, the one John the Baptist, and Jesus then said,

But I say unto you, that Elijah has come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatever they pleased. Likewise also will the Son of man suffer of them. And the disciples understood that He was speaking to them of John the Baptist (Mat 17:12-13).

Now when Zacharias the priest was in the temple offering the incense, because when they cast lots that was his chore that he received in that particular course of his priesthood. As he was standing before the altar of God, offering the incense, suddenly there appeared unto him the angel Gabriel. And he was frightened, and he said, "Fear not, Zacharias, for you have found favor with God, and your wife Elisabeth in her old years is going to conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name John, and he will go forth in the Spirit and in the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers"(Luke 1:13-17).

Now that was the prediction made by Gabriel to Zacharias the father of John the Baptist. And of course Zacharias said, "How can this be? My wife is an old woman, she is stricken with years, that is, she is bent over in years." And the angel said. "Because you've doubted the word of God, you'll not be able to speak until the day that the child is born"(Luke 1:18-20).

And the people all wondered why Zacharias was in the temple so long because they were waiting outside. The people would wait outside, and the priest would come out and give them God's blessings and so they were waiting for that blessing. And man, he was in there, and they watched the sundial going down, and what's taking him so long? And finally when he came out, they were amazed that he wasn't able to give them the blessing. He wasn't able to speak. He went back to the hill country. His wife Elisabeth conceived, and of course John the Baptist was born.

Now when John began his ministry he attracted many people. And they came out of the villages and out of the cities to be baptized, and to hear his words. And because the people were gathering to him, there was a stir among the Pharisees and Scribes and all, and they sent out certain men to him, to find out where he got his authority to do these things. Who gave you the authority? Who are you anyhow? Are you the Messiah? No. Are you Elijah? He said, no. Yet Jesus is declaring, "if you're able to receive it, this is Elijah, of whom the scripture spake".

Now not the complete fulfillment, not the restoring of all things, that the children to their fathers, and the restoring of the religious order, that will come when Elijah comes again preceding the coming of Jesus Christ during the time, just after the church is removed. So I have no anticipation of seeing Elijah, even as I have no anticipation of seeing the anti-christ. And I am not looking for Elijah. I am not looking for the anti-christ. I am looking for Jesus Christ to come and take me to be with Him, and then is when these other events will be triggered.

So Elijah will come again, Jesus said that. Elijah shall indeed come first to restore all things. "But Elijah has already come", Jesus said, "And they did not know him, but have done to him whatever they wished, and they are going to do the same, so am I going to be suffering at their hands."

Now,

When they came to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is a lunatic (Mat 17:14-15),

The word in the Greek, literally is, "he's been struck by the moon". Now in those days, they felt that insanity was related to sleeping under a full moon, and thus the word, "lunatic". The word "Luna" in Latin, of course, is "moon".

And this is a feeling that has existed for many centuries, even before Christ's time. They felt that there was some relationship to mental illness and the moon. There does seem to be some kind of a relationship between mental illness and the moon because I know at full moon, it seems that all the loonies come out. In fact so much so, that during full moon the first couple days before and after, we always take the phone off the hook at night, because all times during the night we get phone calls from loonies during full moon. And it seems to be that it does something to them, and activates some kind of weird trigger inside their brains that cause them at full moon to begin to react and all.

So he is saying, "have mercy on my son, he's been struck by the moon." There was insanity there,

he is sore vexed: for oftentimes he falls in the fire, and many times in the water. And I brought them to your disciples, and they could not cure him (Mat 17:15-16).

Now it is interesting that this, of course, is after the time that Jesus had given to His disciples power over unclean spirits. And they went out and ministered in His power, and they came back rejoicing that even unclean spirits were subject unto them. And Jesus said, "don't rejoice that unclean spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in the Lamb's book of life." But they had exercised this power over unclean spirits, but here they seemed to be unable to do so.

I would like to point out one thing here that I think is quite significant, and I think that it is almost a rule. It seems to me that Satan is waiting at the bottom of the hill of every spiritual high experience that you may have. I know that after having a very beautiful spiritual experience, it seems that I am always tested and tried by the enemy. He tries to immediately come and rob you of that which God has given. You know God just blesses you and you're so excited and thrilled. "Oh Lord, it's good to be here, wow this is glorious, I don't want to leave Lord, I want to stay right here."

But you've got to keep going, and so when you get to the bottom of the hill, it seems like Satan is just waiting there to smack you, and to take away all of the glory and all of the blessing that you've just received. And so it is well to be armed, and to realize that no

matter how great my spiritual blessing, I do not have an immunity from the attacks of the enemy. And many times after our greatest blessings, he is there to try to distract, to destroy, that which God has done.

And so here is this father, kneeling before Jesus, pleading for his son, and the disciples were unable to help him.

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour (Mat 17:17-18).

So that which the disciples were unable to do, Jesus did immediately without a lot of hallow-balloo. He just rebuked the devil, and it departed out of him.

Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? (Mat 17:19)

It's a good question because they had been given authority and power, and here is one where they sought to do it, but were unable to do so.

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Remove hence in the yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind [that is this kind of faith] only goes out by prayer and fasting (Mat 17:20-21).

Now the disciples are wondering why they were powerless in this situation, and Jesus said, because of your unbelief. Now in another gospel it tells us, that while they were bringing this boy to Jesus, the devil threw him on the ground. The devil that was possessing him threw him on the ground, and he began to wallow on the ground, and everybody began to run to see what was happening. And it was very possible that when they brought the young man to the disciples that this demon manifested himself probably in some dramatic way, before the disciples, and they became so amazed at the power of the demons, and the demons ability to so distort and destroy a life, that they lost sight of the power of God.

And many times when we are observing the power of Satan and the work of the enemy by just our observation, unbelief begins to fill our hearts. We are so amazed at the power of Satan to destroy a life, that we forget the tremendous power of God, which is greater.

There are some very interesting stories of demonic activity even in this twentieth century. One of the most outstanding of all of them was of Theresa, who was in protective custody in the Bilibibe prison in the Philippines, because of these demons that would attack her, and bite her all over her body. When the attack was over she would end up with bite marks on the back of her neck, and on her back, places where it was totally impossible for her to bite herself. She was in solitary confinement, in a padded cell, but yet these attacks would take place.

The finest psychiatrists in all of the Philippines were brought to treat her, and none of them could do her any good. They finally suggested that they call for an American missionary, and at this time Reverend Sommeral and Bob McAllister were brought in to deal with the girl, Theresa. As they came in, these demons began to attack her. They saw her in one of these fits, and these bloody bite marks began to break out all over her body. And you look at something like that, and I tell you, suddenly unbelief begins to arise. I mean you believe in Satan and Satan's power, and you think, "Wow, that's horrible. Look at that." And it begins to strike sort of fear and terror in your own heart.

But these men fasted and prayed, and they were able through the power of the name of Jesus to command these evil spirits to leave her. When Theresa was freed, she told then Lester Somerall and Bob McAllister how these demons had been molesting her sexually. And how that whenever any man would approach her, that's when they would attack her because they were insanely jealous of any man approaching her, and that's when they would begin their attack on her body. And they warned her that when demons are cast out, they will come back and try and re-inhabit the body. And when they come back, that she was just to claim the victory of Jesus, and call on the name of Jesus and all. Which in a couple of days, these demons did come back, and she began to go into this fit, calling upon the name of Jesus and all, and she was delivered completely.

A very interesting and fascinating story. It was written up actually in Life Magazine, not her deliverance, just her case, because it was in the psychiatric annals. And her deliverance, of course, is told by Lester Somerall in his book called, "Bitten by Demons." He was the minister that God used, he and Bob McAllister to set Theresa free.

But when you see this kind of demonic activity, you become sort of captured by the power of demon activity that has a tendency of just sort of diminishing your faith. But thank God, greater is He that is in us, then he that is in the world. And we do have authority over all of these forces and powers. And as children of God we don't need to fear, we don't need to be in a position of, "oh, my, did you see that," or, "oh, isn't that awful." But we have authority and power through Jesus Christ over every force and power of darkness.

So Jesus said, "it's because of your unbelief, that's why you couldn't do it. Because if you just had the faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to the mountain over there, be removed and cast into the sea." It makes you wonder just how much faith do we have. "Howbeit," Jesus said, "This kind only goes out by fasting and prayer". That is, this kind of faith, or it could refer to this kind of demon; it could have been a demon of greater authority and power, because demons are ranked in authorities and powers.

And while they were still there in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry (Mat 17:22-23).

Now He told them this over and over, He was telling them this. He is on His road now to the cross. These are His final days. He is in Galilee, but soon they'll be journeying towards Jerusalem, and He is on the road to the cross. And so He is warning them over and over. "I am going to be slain, they're going to kill me. I am going to be betrayed, they're going to kill me, but on the third day I rise again."

Well, by the time Jesus said, "they're going to kill me," there was this thing that went on in their minds, "oh, no", and they never heard, "and I am going to rise again the third day." Somehow they had blanked that out. It wasn't until after His resurrection that they began to remember, "oh, yeah, He said He was going to rise on the third day, all right." But they didn't remember that part until after His resurrection.

It's interesting how that so many times we hear some shocking news, and our minds just sort of blank out with shock, and we don't hear the rest of the story. We don't record it; it doesn't sink in. We're so shocked by what we've heard. And whenever Jesus would talk about His death it was so shocking to them, because if He dies then how am I going to be prime minister. And they were so upset by His talk of His death, that they just didn't pick up the fact that He was also saying, "but on the third day I am going to rise again". And it is interesting that on the third day none of them were looking for His resurrection.

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth your master pay tribute? And he said, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What do you think Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? And Peter said unto him, Well, strangers. Jesus said unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go down to the sea, and cast in your hook, and take up the fish that you first catch; and when you open his mouth, then you'll find a piece of money: take it and give it to them for both of our taxes (Mat 17:24-27).

I love this. Once a fisherman, always a fisherman. Necessary to pay your taxes. Now Jesus could have said to Peter, now go dig over under the tree and you'll find a coin in the dirt or something. But what fisherman wants to be digging holes, unless he is digging for worms. He tells him to do something he enjoys doing, something that Peter just really loved. He loved to fish. So the Lord said oh, let's combine a little pleasure with business. Go fishing Peter, cast your hook in and the first fish that you catch when you pull it up, open it's mouth, take out the coin, and go pay our taxes for us.

You know serving the Lord can be the most delightful thing in the world. Jesus said, "my yoke is easy, my burden is light"(Mat 11:30). God doesn't lay some heavy horrible burden upon us, and say, "all right, carry that." He delights to do good things for His children. God just delights doing good things for you.

Now you, who are fathers, if your son should come up to you and say, "Well Dad, I've just been thinking this morning how neat it is to live here at home. You pay all the bills; you give me money for my clothes. I don't have to worry about the light bills. I don't have to worry about food; it's always on the table. It's been so neat living here, Dad. I really appreciate all you've done for me. And I was just thinking Dad, and just to show my appreciation, today I want to do anything you want me to do. I just want to show you how thankful I am."

Now which of you fathers, if you had a son who came to you and said such a thing, would not first of all faint. But when they threw the water on you, and you recovered, what do you think you would say to your son, who has come to you in such appreciation, giving himself totally to your disposal? Would you try to think of the rottenest, most miserable job that he has been slacking on for months, "All right, I've got you where I want you, you know. First of all, start with those smelly garbage cans, and scourer them, get them clean." And lay out all of those miserable tasks. I don't think so.

If you're anything like me, I would be so pleased to see this attitude in my son. I'd want to make this a great day for him. I love him. He may not be as appreciative as he should, but I still love him. And the fact that he is showing some appreciation, I want to do something good for him. I say, "why don't we forget everything today, and let's go water skiing. Or, "I hear the surf is up, why don't we get our boards and go down and spend a day at the beach." I'd want to do these things that he would delight and be pleased in.

And you know our heavenly father is no different. When you come to God and say, "Oh, Lord I appreciate so much being your child. You've taken such good care of me and I really thank you and appreciate all that you've done. I don't have to worry, because you are watching over me, and I just want to give myself to you completely. Whatever you want me to do, Father, I am available to you."

Well, God doesn't think of all the miserable, nasty, rotten things now. Do this, do that, and make you rue the day that you committed your life fully to Him. He said hey, why don't you go fishing, that is, if you enjoy fishing. He let you do the things you like to do. He delights in giving good gifts to His children.

Matthew 18:1-35 (AMP)

1 AT THAT time the disciples came up and asked Jesus, Who then is [really] the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2 And He called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Truly I say to you, unless you repent (change, turn about) and become like little children [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving], you can never enter the kingdom of heaven [at all]. 4 Whoever will humble himself therefore and become like this little child [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving] is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever receives and accepts and welcomes one little child like this for My sake and in My name receives and accepts and welcomes Me. 6 But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in and acknowledge and cleave to Me to stumble and sin [that is, who entices him or hinders him in right conduct or thought], it would be better (more expedient and profitable or advantageous) for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be sunk in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world for such temptations to sin and influences to do wrong! It is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the person on whose account or by whom the temptation comes! 8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble and sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; it is better (more profitable and wholesome) for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into everlasting fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to stumble and sin, pluck it out and throw it away from you; it is better (more profitable and wholesome) for you to enter life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the hell (Gehenna) of fire. 10 Beware that you do not despise or feel scornful toward or think little of one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always are in the presence of and look upon the face of My Father Who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of man came to save [from the penalty of eternal death] that which was lost. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray and gets lost, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search of the one that is lost? 13 And if it should be that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not get lost. 14 Just so it is not the will of My Father Who is in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost and perish. 15 If your brother wrongs you, go and show him his fault, between you and him privately. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two others, so that every word may be confirmed and upheld by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 17 If he pays no attention to them [refusing to listen and obey], tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you forbid and declare to be improper and unlawful on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit and declare proper and lawful on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven. 19 Again I tell you, if two of you on earth agree (harmonize together, make a symphony together) about whatever [anything and everything] they may ask, it will come to pass and be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For wherever two or three are gathered (drawn together as My followers) in (into) My name, there I AM in the midst of them. 21 Then Peter came up to Him and said, Lord, how many times may my brother sin against me and I forgive him and let it go? [As many as] up to seven times? 22 Jesus answered him, I tell you, not up to seven times, but seventy times seven! 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a human king who wished to settle accounts with his attendants. 24 When he began the accounting, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents [probably about \$10,000,000], 25 And because he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he possessed, and payment to be made. 26 So the attendant fell on his knees, begging him, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. 27 And his master's heart was moved with compassion, and he released him and forgave him [cancelling] the debt. 28 But that same attendant, as he went out, found one of his fellow attendants who owed him a hundred denarii [about twenty dollars]; and he caught him by the throat and said, Pay what you owe! 29 So his fellow attendant fell down and begged him earnestly, Give me time, and I will pay you all ! 30 But he was unwilling, and he went out and had him put in prison till he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow attendants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and told everything that had taken place to their master. 32 Then his master called him and said to him, You contemptible and wicked attendant! I forgave and cancelled all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 And should you not have had pity and mercy on your fellow attendant, as I had pity and mercy on you? 34 And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (the jailers), till he should pay all that he owed. 35 So also My heavenly Father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart his offenses.

Now at the same time there came disciples to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (Mat 18:1)

Oh, boy how they longed for this. You're talking about motivation, and the disciples were not pure in their motivations. They were always wrangling about well, I am going to be bigger than you. I'll be better than you. I have a better place than you, and their motivations were not always the purest. And they, many times, were arguing about these things, the greatest. In fact, even the mothers of the disciples sometimes got in on this. They said, "Lord when you come into your kingdom, would you let one of my sons be on your right hand?" (Mat 20:21). Little Jewish mothers wanting to set up their boys. And that's very typical. God bless them. And so the disciples came and said, "Who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom?" And Jesus called a little child unto him, and he sat the child in the middle of them, and he said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not even enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mat 18:2-4).

The true path to greatness is always the path of humility. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11). Humble thyself in the eyes of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

And Jesus takes a child and says, "look, you've got to become like a little child, even you, even going to enter the kingdom of heaven. And so if you humble yourself as a little child, that person will be the greatest". The path to greatness is the path of servanthood. How important that we learn to serve, that we not be looking for ourselves, but we only be looking for our Lord and to exalt Him.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receives me (Mat 18:5).

Oh how the Lord loves the little children. How he loves their beautiful little faces. How He loves that simple faith and trust that is in the heart of a child. There is something about their innocence and simplicity that is absolutely glorious. I love it. But He said,

Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mat 18:6).

I love Jesus; He is a man's man. Sounds like the Mafia here, but I am all for it. I mean, He is straight. I think that the most heinous sin anyone can commit is to seek to destroy the faith of a child in God. That is one of the worst sins that anyone could ever commit. To take this pure little child with his simplicity and trust in God, and deliberately seek to destroy that child's faith in God, in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "look, it'd be better for a man if he just took a millstone", and these millstones weigh about three to four hundred pounds, "tie it around his neck, and toss him into the sea. Better that that happen to him than he offend, destroy the faith of one of these little ones who believe in Me".

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (Mat 18:7)

Be careful, offenses are going to come. But be careful that you're not the cause of the offenses.

Wherefore if your hand offends you, then cut it off, cast it from you: it is better for you to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet and to be cast into the everlasting fire. If thy eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. So take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven [and I love this] their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven (Mat 18:8-10).

The angels that have been given charge over us to keep us in all of our ways. The angels, who are watching over our little children, their faces are before the Father continually there in heaven, beseeching the Father for these precious little ones.

This business of, if thy hand offend thee and all, is something that Jesus meant to be repugnant. He means it to be shocking. To maim my own body, to me is a very repugnant idea. To lose a hand, to lose an eye by my own doing is just a horribly repugnant thought. And Jesus wanted it to be. He did not literally mean that we are to cut off our hand or to pluck out our eye, but He is only illustrating how vital it is that we enter the kingdom of heaven. It is worth more than having a whole body.

As we were talking to you last Sunday about the trapping of muskrats, how that if you catch them by their paws, they turn around and gnaw their leg off and leave the paw in the trap. Again, that's a thought that gives us a -- we react mentally to that, as uh, horrible, but yet how wise as far as the muskrat is concerned. For he figures it's better to be a free muskrat with three paws, than having four paws be tacked on a fur board.

So Jesus is saying much the same thing here. If there is something in your life that is causing you to stumble, if there is something in your life that is creating an offense, cut it out, get rid of it.

Sometimes when a person comes into the office and sits down and begins to pour out their story, and they say, "Well, Chuck I am really in a mess. I never thought it would happen to me. I can't understand it, but, man I am involved in an affair, and I don't know what to do. It's just ripping me apart; it's tearing me up. My wife doesn't know it, and I just don't know what to do about it, and all." I say to them point blank, "cut it off, not tomorrow, right now, cut it off, "Oh, but I"- don't, cut it off.

I said, "If I were a surgeon and you came to me, and you said, "Oh, I am having these lumps under my arm, and they are sore, and they really bother me." If I didn't bother to take the biopsies and determine whether or not you had cancer of the lymph nodes, but I just said, "Oh, probably you've got cancer in your lymph nodes. You --that's a painful operation. We don't want to go through the pain of it. Why don't we just sort of take aspirin, so you won't feel the pain and forget about it." Well you file a malpractice suit against me for quackery for saying, "We'll, just let it go and see what happens".

And I said, "You're coming to me with a spiritual malady that is more deadly than cancer. I am the surgeon and I am telling you, we've got to operate immediately. Your life depends on it, you got to cut it out." And if there is some sin that you are tolerating, allowing, playing with, and messing around with, you cannot do it. Jesus is saying, " cut it off. Better to go through life maimed, than into hell whole."

Then Jesus in verse eleven says so beautifully,

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost (Mat 18:11).

I love that. We get to that when we get to Luke's gospel. It amplifies it a little further.

Now Jesus said,

What do you think? if a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine and go into the mountains, and seek the one which has gone astray? And if it so happens that he finds it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more for the one sheep, than for the ninety-nine which never went astray. Even so it is not the will of the Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Mat 18:12-14). Your Father is watching over them. Their angels hold their faces before the Father continually, and He isn't willing that any perish. Be careful that you do not offend one of those little ones, who believes and trusts in Him.

Moreover [Jesus said] if your brother trespasses against you, go and tell him the fault between you and him alone: and if he hears you, then you've gained your brother (Mat 18:15).

This is the way differences are to be resolved and settled within the church.

Now if he does not hear you, then take with you one or two witnesses, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established (Mat 18:16).

Take another person with you or another two people with you, and face him with the issue again.

And if he neglects to hear them, then take him before the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, then let him be as a heathen, a publican [a sinner, a rank sinner]. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing, that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven (Mat 18:17-19).

So here Jesus is speaking about loosening and binding, loosening the work of God, binding the work of Satan, and then declaring that if two of us agree, so the value of prayer together, in agreement in prayer. Now most of our prayer is done in private, but there are times when agreement in prayer is extremely valuable. And I encourage every one of you to have a prayer partner. Someone that when something really is troubling you, you have someone who can pray with you, and bear that burden with you. "For if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it will be done for them by my Father which is in heaven." The power of agreement in prayer.

Then Jesus goes on with His two or three concepts. He said,

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Mat 18:20).

So the simplest form of the church is just two or three people getting together to worship the Lord, to pray together. And whenever there are two, there are always three, wherever there are three visibly present, there is always four. Jesus said, "I am in the midst of them". I think that it is important that we have, and somehow can conceptualize this. Jesus isn't like some today who say, "Well, the crowd's too small. I am not going to go out tonight." He said, "if two or three are gathered, I'll be there." Now what you need to conceptualize and to realize is the fact that Jesus is here tonight.

Now if you have a real need and you knew Jesus was there, what would you do? You say, "Lord, problems." And don't you know that if you could see Him, if He actually stood here visible, if you could reach out and touch Him, you know that the problems would all go away. He could do it, you know He can do it. So many times you probably wish, "Oh, if I could only be at Capernaum, and Jesus was there, and if I could only have Him lay His hands on me."

Hey, He is here. The fact that you cannot see Him is of no import at all. Because He said He would be here in the midst of us, and you can reach out by faith and touch Him tonight. And He will reach out and touch you. All you have to do is to make that contact of faith with Him. He is here. Realize that; bring before Him your needs. Believe Him and trust Him and He will work in you.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Seven times? (Mat 18:21)

Now I imagine that Peter at this point thought I am really setting a great example here. I am sure that he was stretching in his own mind his knowledge of his own ability to forgive. I am sure when he said "seven times", he was going far beyond what he knew he could do. I am sure Peter was thinking, "Well, I might be able to forgive a guy a couple of times, but it sounds good to the other disciples if I say 'seven'". And Jesus will probably say, "Look, here is a guy that's really getting a lesson. Listen to it, fellows. Peter has really got it here: "Lord how often shall I forgive my brother the very same offense, he is doing the very same thing seven times?"

Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Mat 18:22).

Now what Jesus is pointing out basically is that forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics, it's a matter of spirit, that you should have the spirit of forgiveness. And I am certain that He is certain that if you take the four hundred and ninety, that you'll lose count before you'll ever get there. And you'll just realize, hey, it isn't a matter of numbers, it's a matter of spirit. I am to have the spirit of forgiveness. And then Jesus went on to illustrate it. He said, Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take a count of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents [about sixteen million dollars]. But inasmuch as he did not have any money to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, his wife, and his children, and all that he had, in order that a partial payment might be made. And the servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, O Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and he freed him, and he forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence [about three thousand dollars]: and he laid his hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, You pay me what you owe me. And the fellowservant fell down at his feet, and he begged him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. But he would not: he had him cast into the debtors' prison, until he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very grieved, and they came and told their lord all that he did. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me to: Should you not also have had compassion on your fellowservant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was angry, and delivered him over to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due from him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you [careful note] if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (Mat 18:23-35). Heavy duty, lesson on forgiveness.

Now the analogy is very clear and obvious. God has forgiven you so very much, all of your past sins. Who are you to hold a little crutch or a grievance against your brother, not forgive him, because of some slight, or some mean thing that he has said about you, or some dirty thing that he has done to you. Who are you to hold this bitterness and unforgiving spirit? Jesus said, "Look, if you don't forgive them from your heart, your Father won't forgive you your debt."

Now that is heavy. You say, "Well, explain it to us." I can't. If you want me to explain it away, I can't. You say, "Well, isn't that works then, forgiveness on works?" I don't know what it is, but it's the word of Jesus, and you better take heed.

Now the Lord has never commanded us to do anything, but what He will give us is the capacity to do it, if we are willing. The problem is, we are not often willing to forgive. The Lord is saying it's got to be more than just a forgiving of words. "Oh, I forgive you, but you do that again, you're going to get it. I forgive you, but I won't forget. I'll bury the hatchet, but I leave the handle showing so I can grab it whenever I need it." The forgiveness is from the heart. Forgiveness is a matter of heart. It's a matter of spirit. And inasmuch as God has commanded it, God will give me the capacity if I am willing, but I've got to be willing.

And so I have to pray, "Oh, God give to me that spirit of forgiveness. God I am bitter. God I am angry with what they've done. Lord I am upset over this thing, and I don't want to forgive. I want vengeance, God, but I know that that is not of you. Father give to me the spirit of forgiveness. Give to me forgiveness in my heart. God take away this bitterness. Take away this unforgiving spirit that I have." And I will receive God's help, if I am willing. But I must be willing, but I must do it. That is a must.

(Through The Bible c 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; Bible commentaries,1979-1986)

The Lord bless you and watch, guard, and keep you;

The Lord make His face to shine upon and enlighten you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up His {approving} countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Numbers 6:24-26

(Amplified Bible; Joyce Meyers; 2006; Faith Words; Scripture; Commentaries; pages 1399-1402)

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