

The Life of Christ

Book II - His Temptation and the Beginning of His Ministry

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1. Preface

"God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."(John 4:24)

"Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."(Matthew 4:4)

2. The Devil Tempts Christ

At the beginning of the childhood of Jesus, we saw something of the works of the Devil which were manifested in the actions of King Herod, but we have not yet heard any mention of the Devil's name nor read about him explicitly. Now, however, we shall see him as his three titles describe him: the Tempter; Satan (the accuser); and the Devil (the enemy or adversary). The Gospel shows him trying to tempt Jesus to sin in the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13).

The Bible teaches us that the Devil is a very wicked and real spiritual being, without a material body. He is the head of the evil angels. Christ said that the eternal fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). We also read the following words in the sixth verse of the epistle of Jude: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day." Satan is also called the ruler of the world (John 16:11); the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4); and the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

Satan cleverly dominates mankind in a powerful and mysterious way. The greatest proof that he is an important and real person, and also very effective, is that Christ taught his disciples to mention him in their prayers, however briefly. Thus, we are taught to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). It is not deliverance from evil things about which we are to pray, nor from evildoers; but from the evil one!

The Bible also tells us that the only thing constraining the Devil from totally dominating mankind is divine permission. The Devil recognises this fact and has to ask for permission to act. When God grants this permission, it is because of his great love towards those who are tempted. Through temptation, the victorious believers are purified, strengthened, and later glorified. We know, without a doubt, that pure love is at the root of divine testings because, during Christ's temptation in the wilderness, it was the Holy Spirit who led him to be tempted by the Devil.

2.1. The First Temptation: Hunger

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." ' " (Matthew 4:1-4).

There are two types of temptation which are clearly different. There is the temptation of suffering, which is positive and helpful; it serves as a test that aims to purify, strengthen, and glorify us, as God did with Abraham. The Apostle James found this kind of temptation to be an occasion for great joy: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,...." (James 1:2). The second type of temptation is the temptation to commit evil; it serves to destroy and humiliate. In regard to this type of temptation, James writes: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

The temptation of Christ is one of the most challenging events to interpret and explain. One of the difficulties is how to reconcile his perfect purity with the saying, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15). How can we compare the temptation of the Holy One with that of the sinner? What we know of Christ's perfect character leaves no room to think that his temptation was figurative or imaginary, for he himself was the source of this account because no one else was present with him. He would not have told us about an encounter with a person who did not exist, nor describe fiction as fact. We also believe that his apostles would not have invented such a story about a decisive encounter with the Devil, which their teacher and master had had. This means that the story of the temptation is real and not imaginary.

In the account of his temptation, Jesus Christ revealed to us a deep secret from his spiritual experience, a terrible ordeal through which he passed all alone. Since Jesus himself related this incident, it is important for the reader not to make any assumptions, but rather, to adhere closely to the text, as well as maintain the utmost reverence for it.

Some people like to regard the Devil as an excuse for their own evil, explaining away the inherent corruption in themselves, which leads them as well as all mankind to sin. But the temptation of Jesus contradicts this idea because his heart and thoughts were sinless. In other words, the temptation did not come from inside him. This means that it came from a satanic force outside of him. Jesus finished his years of preparation and was about to start his public ministry, but first he had to pass through the fires of temptation in order to demonstrate his fitness to be a Saviour. By so doing, he had to fight the leader of the forces of evil and defeat him in order to fulfil the first of the Old Testament prophecies given our original parents in

the Garden of Eden: "...(Christ) will crush your head, and you (Satan) will strike his heel...." (Genesis 3:15). He had to defeat the Devil, the lawless one, whom no man had ever conquered. By defeating Satan, Christ would open the only door to victory for all those who put their trust in him. It is only through the name of Christ that victory can be won by the power of that same Holy Spirit who led Jesus to the wilderness and crowned him with triumph.

Jesus, as the Son of Man, submitted himself to the same earthly conditions to which all mankind is subject; he was not spared the cycles of human experience. Behind every high mountain is a deep valley, and after great joy, there is often a season of sorrow. Thus, Jesus had been elated and overjoyed when he was baptised, but now came the time for his humiliation and distress in the Wilderness of Temptation. Holy Scripture teaches us that Satan awaits a man's joy in order to defeat him, much to the pleasure of the Tempter and the greater distress of the fallen. The examples of Moses, Elijah, Peter, and Judas Iscariot are sufficient proof of Satan's schemes. The Devil caused Moses to fall into the sin of anger. This barred him from entering the Promised Land after forty years of tribulation in the wilderness, depriving him of reaching the peak of his aspirations (Numbers 12:3 and 20:8-13). On Mt. Carmel, Elijah had won a striking victory over a king and the priests of Baal, their god. Only a day later, the Devil caused him to fall into the sin of despair. He fled dejected to the wilderness of Sinai, away from the scene of his ministry, and asked to die! (1 Kings 18:30-40; 19:1-10). Peter felt as if he were in heaven when Jesus praised him highly. However, he soon fell into the sin of pride and Satan prompted him to discourage Jesus from going to the Cross. Little did he realise that this was a Satanic suggestion seeking to prevent Christ's work of Redemption. That is why Jesus rebuked him sharply and said: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me..." (Matthew 16:13-23). Judas Iscariot after years of enjoying spiritual benefits in the company of Christ, was plunged by this evil tempter into the sin of greed; and his name, to this day, has become a byword for ugly treason and extreme hard-heartedness (Acts 1:15-20).

The tyrannical Devil followed the very same plan with Jesus. He saw him highly exalted at the time of his baptism, rejoicing in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his Father's commendation. Then, he sprang to the attack and tried to get Jesus to fall into sin. He tempted Jesus intensely for forty days. Before that, he had entrapped the whole human race without exception, causing everyone to stumble. He now hoped to defeat the Son of Mary, because Christ seemed to be an easy prey, at least outwardly.

2.2. A Comparison of the Temptation of Adam and Jesus

The Devil tempted the first Adam, causing him to fall, while he was in a magnificent garden full of all the pleasures imaginable. There was no Sin or corruption around him; even the animals were tame and obedient. Adam did not know what sickness, sadness, or fatigue were.

He knew that as long as he remained in the position where God had put him, this blissful condition would last indefinitely.

The Devil found Jesus, the Second Adam, in a wilderness with no physical comforts or food, and surrounded by wild animals. His earlier life, unlike Adam, had been spent with sinners. Worse than all this, Jesus knew that if he stood by his purpose, years of weariness, misery, insults, and great suffering would be awaiting him, ending with death on the Cross. Under these circumstances, how easy it would have been for him to break his resolve! His only companions in that wilderness were wild animals. One concludes, from the Scriptures, that the first Adam, before his fall, was the master of both wild and domesticated animals. The hostility of beasts towards Adam was a result of his sin. When one reads that Jesus was among the wild beasts, one imagines him regaining that authority which had been lost, somewhat like Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6). His reverential holiness protected him from their sharp teeth. It is conceivable that one of the results of Christ's atonement for Sin will be the eventual return of man's lost authority over the animal kingdom. Kindness to animals, one of the aspects of religion and morality, will be restored as well.

Jesus had not eaten for forty days and nights in the wilderness. The Tempter took advantage of his physical weakness, exhausting him with powerful temptations. The fact that Jesus fasted was understandable since he was in a desert where there was no food. He was in a place where one cannot find provisions easily, and he was occupied with spiritual things. This left him with no time to think of food. He would not have left the desert to look for something to eat unless he was guided by the Holy Spirit who had led him there. He did not feel the hunger keenly until this long period was over.

When the Devil tempted Eve, he took the form of a serpent, because there was no human he could use. As soon as he had seduced Eve, he left the serpent; fallen human beings would now be available for his use. Temptation is much stronger when the Devil uses those who are close to us to lure us. Therefore, when the Devil wanted to divert Christ from his redemptive purpose for the world, he used his outstanding disciple, Simon Peter (Mark 8:33).

Divine revelation is completely silent as to the form in which the Devil appeared to Jesus. It is reasonable to think that he did not appear in a demonic form; his evil work would have been hindered because Jesus would have recoiled and fought back. Most likely, the Devil appeared personally to Jesus, Since Jesus had no internal Sin, temptation could not come from inside him. The Devil probably appeared first as an ordinary person who approached Jesus in the wilderness. If this assumption is correct, he must have expressed his surprise at Christ's hunger which resulted from the Spirit's guiding him to the desert without providing any food, a basic necessity of man. Then, he probably added, in a kind way, how easy it would be for Jesus, as the Son of God, to meet his own needs conveniently. Since he had created the stones to begin with, he could change them easily into any other form. If Jesus did not do this, he would be creating doubt as to whether he was truly the Son of God, and

since it appeared as if the Father had neglected him by not giving him anything to eat, it was amazing that Jesus continued to await his Father's orders! He could rightfully have doubted his Father's love, murmuring at divine providence.

Today, we ask why Jesus didn't respond by changing the stones into bread to satisfy his hunger? What was the sin which the Devil wanted to plant in the heart of Christ? One cannot say that Jesus refused this suggestion simply because it came from the Devil. Jesus did not refuse the Tempter, but the temptation, no matter what its source. Whatever the exact form of these temptations was, we can gain knowledge from the replies and objections of Christ, for he took his answers from the Holy Scripture, and on it he built his case.

The first answer of Jesus was: "it is written..." By responding in this way, he presented himself to the world and to Satan, not as an authoritative person, but as a human being subject to the Law and its observance. By quoting the Scriptures, he showed also that they are the final reference in matters of religion. Jesus could have answered the Tempter by philosophical reasoning, but when he said, "it is written...", he showed that the power of religious argument comes from the Word of God, not from human knowledge. The Word of God is like a two-edged sword by which man can conquer his greatest enemy the Devil. Jesus used this weapon which is available to everybody, and with it, he triumphed over Satan.

The Tempter acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God because, if he would overcome him, his satisfaction would be that much greater. Despite his overwhelming intelligence, Satan failed to realise that if Jesus were exclusively the Son of God, he would not be hungry nor would he eat bread; he could not be tempted at all. But this illusion was shattered when Jesus confronted Satan as the Son of Man. Christ did not insist on reminding people that he was the Son of God. He said it only ten times in the Gospel, whereas he used the title "Son of Man" fifty times. If the divine nature of Jesus had helped his human nature during his temptation, it would have implied that his human nature alone was unable to resist temptation. It could not then be said of him that he was tempted in every way as we are, and he would not have been an example for mankind. He didn't do, in the time of temptation, what his followers cannot do. This was reason enough for refusing to change stones to bread. In addition, Jesus wanted to experience the pangs of hunger himself, for this is the lot of many people in the world.

The first temptation was the same subtle trick which the Devil used to persuade Eve to doubt God. She wanted to be independent of her Creator because he had ordered her not to eat from a tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3). The Devil used the same trick, in the matter of food and drink, to make the Israelites grumble and question the will of God in the wilderness (Exodus 16:3). However, Jesus showed the Devil that he would not grumble against the Father when he was hungry, since he has the living Word of God. To him, the Scriptures were more important than physical food. Jesus would never have acted

independently of the Father's will and he would not have avoided hunger, except by God's direction. On another occasion, he expressed the same idea when he said, "...My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

Through this temptation, the Devil also wanted to make Jesus attend to his personal needs first. If Jesus performed his first miracle for his own personal gain, it would have been a great success for the Devil and it would have hampered the work of Salvation because Christ would then have been living for himself, not for others. Christ's aim in performing all his miracles was for the good of others, even his enemies. He even healed the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, who was part of the group that came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:51). He didn't perform a single miracle to please himself. How true were the words of Paul: "For even Christ did not please himself..." (Romans 15:3). Thus, even the insults of his enemies supported the reality of his selflessness as he hung on the Cross: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One" (Luke 23:35). The first requirement and guiding principle for his followers was to be self-denial. One of his greatest commandments is: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

Through his works and sayings, Jesus strongly attacked selfishness. The Tempter wanted him to put physical things before spiritual matters, so as to have him seek to please people and win a large following. He would have had quick, visible success. Jesus rejected this trick because his principle was: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (John 6:27). By these words, Jesus taught mankind, at all times and in all places, to give priority to serving souls over serving bodies. True charity is what benefits human souls rather than just bodies. Serving physical needs is intended incipially as a means to serving the immortal human soul.

The one who was tempted as we are, and who won the victory for us, is present with us in every battle which the Devil wages against us. If we are sensitive to his presence with us in times of temptation, he will give us victory over the Enemy, so that we can rejoice with the Apostle Paul, singing, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Jesus won the victory in the first temptation. He refused to change stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. He overcame this temptation when he said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"

2.3. The Second Temptation: Sensationalism

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels

concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:5-7)

The Devil was defeated the first time he tempted Jesus, but he didn't give up easily. Cunning as he is, he began again to attack in a different form. He stopped his simple approach and used a more subtle one. He knew that every victory leads to another, so he acted as if he approved of Christ's obedience to what "is written", as well as his claim of unity with the Father. It seemed to him that Jesus placed priority of the spiritual over the physical world, so he asked Jesus to do something that did not yield physical advantages, although it would put his body in great danger. He asked him to do something that would have a great religious impact. It would have the element of self-denial and service. He would prove to all the people of God, who were assembled in the Temple, that he really was the Son of God. The only similarity between the first and second temptation was the expression, "if you are the Son of God..."

The Gospel says that the Devil took Jesus to the Holy City of Jerusalem and asked him to stand on the outer wing of the Temple. He said, "If you are the Son of God... throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" It is likely that the Devil took the form of an angel of light. Paul described Satan in this way when he wrote the following: "...Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). He appeared as one of those angels, referred to in the Psalms: "They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Psalms 91:12). The Devil seemed to tell Jesus that he himself would protect him from harm, even if he threw himself from that high place. If Jesus would do this, he would show the multitudes and the world the proof that he had come down from heaven, from God. From Christ's answer, we understand the nature of that temptation. He said, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" From this response, we can see that what the Bible mentions in one place should be interpreted in light of what appears in the rest of it. The Scriptures are their own best interpreter. We understand one verse by what is said about the same subject in other verses. This is the key to sound Biblical exposition. Experience has shown that using verses out of context and taking figurative passages literally can lead to many harmful errors.

The Devil called on Jesus to take pride in his God-given power when he tempted him the second time in public view. However, the spirit of the Scriptures and their content give sufficient reason to say that God does not permit man to put himself in danger without sufficient reason. To depend on God's protection in such situations is wrong. It is not appropriate for a person to ask the Lord's protection when he takes unnecessary risks through pride or love of sensationalism. Surely, this was tempting to the Lord. Jesus avoided danger during his life until the hour came when he had to present his life as a sin-offering. Another

aspect of this temptation is that the Devil asked Jesus to resort to an action, which would appear like magic, in order to make people believe in him. He would have thus depended on the power of the miraculous rather than the power of truth; on intellectual persuasion rather than heartfelt perception; on dazzling those around him instead of teaching them. If the Devil had succeeded in diverting Jesus from his desire to impress people spiritually, he would have kept his dominion over mankind, no matter how many wonders the people would see!

Jesus did not fall into the trap which the Tempter had set for him. Yes, he was going to perform many miracles after that, but he was not going to do them for the sake of sensationalism or for making people have faith in him. He would perform these miracles to establish believers in their faith. Mankind's faith in him would not depend on his power but on the supreme authority of truth, on the basis of his holy qualities, and out of love for him. The seat of religion is the heart, not the head. People will never see God's light, unless their hearts are touched. This is why Jesus always refused the Jews' request when they asked to see miracles from heaven.

2.4. The Third Temptation: Polytheism

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you', he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." (Matthew 4:8-11)

After the Devil had failed in both his simple and subtle plans, he resorted to boldness. We see him changing his request. He asked Christ to do what was forbidden; namely, to kneel before him. In exchange, he promised something of incalculable value. In a way which we do not understand, the Devil took Jesus to a high mountain from where he could see all the kingdoms of the world and their glory in an instant. "All this I will give you", he said, "if you will bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9).

In Christ's answer to this temptation, we do not find the least hint that the Devil was lying, or that his promises would have been false. Actually, Christ could have compelled the Devil to fulfill his promise. He refused what the Devil had asked because worship is due only to God. If worship is hypocritical and not from the heart, it is not acceptable. Jesus does not sanction evil to achieve good. This is always the Devil's ploy, and it robs the compromiser of God's true blessings.

This third Satanic temptation urged Jesus to adopt hopes of worldly glory. Even the apostles of Jesus and John the Baptist were tempted in this area. They were expecting and desiring a great worldly kingdom which Jesus would set up. Now the Devil also wanted to promote this popular Jewish dream for him. This would have saved Jesus the trouble, scorn, and suffering of his crucifixion, as well as the agony of having to wait patiently for hundreds of years to

establish his final authority on the earth in place of Satan's. Thus, it would appear to Jesus that he could achieve his purposes quickly and easily.

Here again, the appearance of the Devil to Jesus probably quite subtle so as not to evoke revulsion or offence at the thought of bowing to him. Yet, it was bold for him to suggest that the holy Son of God should behave in a religiously forbidden way, and it reveals the fallen state of his spirit. For this reason, Christ rebuked him firmly, saying, "Away with you, Satan." Even though he said these words, Jesus did not deny Satan proof of his resolve, for he again quoted the words of Moses: "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name" (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Jesus ordered the Devil to go, but he left for a while only. When the triumph of the Prince of Righteousness over the Prince of Evil was decided, and the Devil escaped in defeat, the attendance of the heavenly hosts was evident, for we are told that angels came to serve him. They offered him divine tribute for his victory and expressed God's great pleasure in him. How happy were the angels now to serve the prince who had defeated the Devil.

In that desert, Jesus faced three types of temptations: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The temptation of the flesh was physical, concerning food; the temptation of the eyes was mental, drawing the attention of men to a sensational achievement; the temptation of the pride of life was spiritual and its aim was to gain worldly power, splendour, and glory. Jesus was enticed like ail of us so that he could empathise with us in our temptations. As a result, Jesus was strengthened and glorified. The Devil testified to the power of Jesus because his first temptation was to have Christ change stones to bread -- something not bad in itself. Yet, the Devil was hoping for Jesus to yield to it so that he could gradually lure him with more wicked schemes.

We consider the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness as his third baptism; it was the baptism of fire after the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit. There was also a fourth baptism through which he had to pass: the baptism of blood and the Cross.

The first Adam represented all mankind when he was tempted and failed. He, along with all his descendants, deserve hell. The Second Adam, Jesus, also represents mankind. When he was tempted, remaining steadfast, he made it possible for his followers to enter heaven. With the failure of the First Adam, the garden of Eden became, as it were, a desert. Because of the perseverance of the Second Adam, the desert became a paradise. The wilderness of evil became a paradise of righteousness; the wilderness of hatred, a paradise of peace; the wilderness of divine anger and eternal condemnation, a paradise of God's pleasure, mercy, and eternal life; the wilderness of enmity against God, a paradise of sonship to God; the wilderness of despair and destruction, a paradise of hope and salvation.

3. Jesus Choses His First Disciples

"The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?' They said, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.' So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)." (John 1:35-42).

John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus coming. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" One of these two was Andrew from the city of Bethsaida on the Northern side of Lake Tiberias, in Northern Galilee. He had come from afar to become a disciple of John the Baptist. The second was John, the Son of Zebedee, who also came from Bethsaida.

We do not know what they had previously heard from their master, the Baptist, about Christ. But they heard him say that Jesus was the Lamb of God. The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). This title agrees with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

John the Baptist was the son of a priest. The special work of a priest was to sacrifice lambs in the Temple. The sacrifice was to be without blemish. When John said that Jesus was the Son of God, he was implying that Jesus was perfect and without blemish. This great solitary man and able preacher was full of the Holy Spirit. He knew very well that animal sacrifices in the Temple were symbols of the only real and original sacrifice; namely, the Lamb of God, slaughtered according to God's previous purpose, before the foundations of the world were laid (1 Peter 1:18-20). He knew that animal sacrifices could not remove Sin because this was to be the function of Christ, God's sacrificial Lamb.

The effect of the Baptist's witness about Christ was evident. Andrew and John promptly followed Jesus with full respect and without saying anything. When Christ noticed them, he turned and asked them, "What do you want?" (John 1:38). Christ usually asks this question to everyone who appears to want to follow him. His followers' motives differ widely and need to be dealt with accordingly. He once said to those who wanted to follow him, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (John 6:26). This is why he did not accept them as disciples.

Andrew and John answered the question of Jesus with respect and reserve. It was as if they

wanted to come at a suitable time to listen and learn from him. They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" (John 1:38). He refused to tell them, because he wanted them to know that he expected them -- and still expects everyone -- to follow him at once. He rejects those who delay in following him. He urges people to follow him promptly, otherwise he might not receive them. He told Andrew and John, "Come and see." When they obeyed him, he asked them to stay with him the whole day. This is still the divine order of doing things. A person accepts the Faith, not because another person witnesses to him, but because he experiences it personally. He has to see it for himself, as David put it: "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:8).

The lives of Andrew and John changed completely after they met Christ. Although Andrew did not become so well-known, he did bring his brother, Simon, to Jesus. It seems that Simon had also been a disciple of the Baptist. Andrew looked for Simon until he had found him. He then told him about a great treasure he had discovered with his friend, John. He said, "We have found the Messiah..." (John 1:41). This expression encompasses the way of salvation. Whoever finds Jesus has found everything, and does not need any other person. Jesus is the one about whom David said, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" (Psalm 23:1). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); whoever finds these three has found everything. Andrew was not content with words only, but followed them with deeds, for he led his brother to Jesus. All who truly find Jesus should hasten to invite others and bring them to him, beginning with the closest, as Andrew brought his brother.

As soon as Jesus saw Simon, he knew him. In fact, even before he saw him, he knew his virtues, talents, and future. From the very first meeting, he gave him a new name: Peter (Greek) or Cephas (Aramaic), both meaning "rock". Peter did not deserve this name until the Holy Spirit had filled him, allowing him to exhibit the talents that made him worthy of this name.

"The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me'. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see', said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.' 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.' He then added, 'I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'" (John 1:43-51).

Simon immediately joined Andrew and John. The three became disciples of Jesus. Thus, the purpose of Christ's visit to Bethsaida was fulfilled. The next day, Jesus prepared to return to his hometown in Galilee. However, before he left, he called a fourth disciple: Philip, who

was also from Bethsaida. Jesus found him and said, "Follow me" (John 1:43). The general principle in the Christian faith is: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). God also confirmed this principle through the prophet Jeremiah: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). But this rule has exceptions; Philip and Matthew are among them. For them, the words of the prophet Isaiah were true:

"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'" (Isaiah 65:1)

The zeal for winning souls for Christ appeared in Andrew and Philip immediately. Philip found his special friend, Nathanael, from Cana of Galilee, and told him that Jesus was the one about whom Moses had spoken in the books of the Law, as well as the one written about in the Prophets (John 1:45). Nathanael doubted this news since he believed that the Messiah could never come from Nazareth -- an insignificant town with a bad reputation, because of the wickedness of its people. Nathanael objected to Philip, asking if anything good come from there. Philip told him to come and see for himself (John 1:46). He knew that the best thing for him was to meet Jesus himself, instead of entering into an argument. Quite often, arguing over matters of religious belief is futile and sometimes even harmful. The best testimony from the mouth of believers is "Come and see" (John 1:39). The Holy Spirit spoke through Jesus when he told the two disciples, "Come and see." He spoke again through Philip with the same words. Nathanael was satisfied with this invitation and did not call for more proof to support it. He put full trust in Philip's perception and integrity, and agreed to meet Jesus personally.

Jesus knew Nathanael's background and qualities, without needing to meet him or hear anything about him from anyone. As Nathanael was approaching Jesus with Philip, he said to those around him: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). Nathanael was startled by this fine testimony from a stranger. "How do You know me?" he asked. Jesus showed him that he had seen him with supernatural eyes even before Philip had called him. He saw him as he was sitting alone under a fig tree meditating and praying, thinking no one could see him. He was to discover that Jesus was all-knowing, and he believed in him immediately. He said to Christ: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49). It may be that Nathanael had heard the Baptist's testimony of Christ as the Son of God, either by himself or through others, and so he repeated the witness that John the Baptist, his first teacher, had given. It was Nathanael, however, who was the first to give Jesus the title, the "King of Israel".

Jesus replied to the testimony of Nathanael by saying, "...You shall see greater things than that." Jesus meant to say that heaven would open to mankind after having been closed because of Sin. He, as the Son of Man, would bridge the gap between earth and heaven and

send angels to serve mankind. They would watch over believers and carry them to heaven after death (see Hebrews 1:14; Luke 16:22). Angels would also serve Jesus, the Son of Man, when necessary (John 1:50,51).

We have a triple testimony that Christ is the Son of God: the heavenly voice at his baptism, John the Baptist, and lastly, Nathanael. But we have here, for the first time, a testimony from Christ himself that he is the Son of Man; that is, the Son of Adam. Other prophets had used this title before, especially Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1). Jesus gloried in this title and did not think it was too humble for him. Even so, he praised Nathanael for believing him to be the Son God and King of Israel. Would Jesus have praised Nathanael for a lie, superstition, illusion, or exaggeration? Would he have accepted a blasphemous statement without protest? How could he have approved of the title, "King of Israel" if he were merely the Son of Mary, a human being?

In Christ's answer to Nathanael, we find his first testimony about himself. No prophet, apostle, or human being had ever said this about himself before. When an upright and knowledgeable person says something about himself, it is crucial to understanding the truth about that person. That is why Jesus said, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going" (John 8:14). It would not have been possible for Christ, being who he was, to have made false claims about himself because his integrity would have guarded him from deceit, and his understanding would have protected him from any error. Had he accepted false praise, he would have been either incompetent or morally defective. An honourable person would refuse any attribution beyond what he deserves, be it over virtue, ability, or rank. How much more would Jesus have refused to claim for himself what was contrary to the facts!

The Jewish elders knew the importance of the words spoken by an upright man about himself. Therefore, they asked John the Baptist who he was. They asked him for an answer that they could take back to those who had sent them. "...What do you say about yourself?" they asked (John 1:22). John the Baptist's description of himself was less than he deserved. No one would have considered the Baptist to be better or more knowledgeable than Christ who surpassed everyone in intelligence, honesty, and humility, and whose words are pure truth. That is why we attach the utmost importance to Christ's words about himself.

It is clear that if anyone other than Christ would say what he claimed for himself, this person would only earn insults and contempt from intelligent and pious men. An atheist, in conversation with the famous English writer, Carlyle, stated flippantly, "I could say of myself what Jesus claimed for himself, 'I and My Father are one.'" Carlyle replied: "Yes, but the world believed Christ's assertion. As for you, who believes you?"

4. The First Miracle Of Christ

"On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.' This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (John 2:1-11).

We should not call any action a miracle if we can find a natural explanation for it. Today, believing in miracles has increased because man has extended his control of natural laws, using them to produce amazing results. The scientists of our day have surpassed the scientists of former times in producing wonders which used to be considered miracles -- exploits like flying or sending a rocket to the moon. If created beings occasionally invent great things, how much more can the Creator do with the laws of nature which he set in place? Thus, discoveries and inventions, which increase as time goes on, prove the possibility of divine miracles. They are reasonable -- indeed necessary -- as tangible evidence of a Creator who is in control of his creation. Authentic proof is crucial, for it is one of the most effective means for God to reveal to man what he needs to know about himself and his will.

We do not claim that the documentation of Christ's miracles is essential to proving his greatness. The writers of the four accounts of the Gospel did not refer to Jesus performing any miracles before he began his evangelistic ministry at the age of thirty. This is an important indication of the writers' authenticity. However, if we believe that the prophets and apostles performed miracles by divine power, given them from God, how much more should we believe that the source of power -- God incarnate -- would perform miracles in his own right, excelling anything others had done!

The miracles of Christ were miracles of mercy, not malice. Only two miracles which Jesus performed resulted in harm or material damage, their purpose being to teach us a spiritual lesson (see Luke 8:26-33; Mark 11:12-14,20-24). He never performed miracles for his own selfish purposes, to amaze people, or to attract others to faith in him. Instead, they were to confirm believers in their faith, for he refused to perform miracles at the request of the Jews to make them believe. In his first miracle, he showed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. In all his miracles, there was deep meaning and a spiritual aim. Through them, he revealed his thoughts, principles, and noble teachings as well as his beautiful and holy

qualities. Furthermore, we would not have learned much of his movements and travels had it not been for the account of his miracles. For example, we mention his travels to the region of Tyre and Sidon where he performed one of his miracles. We would also not have known of his compassion towards all people which was evident in his healing miracles and his feeding of the thousands. He demonstrated his authority to forgive sins when he healed the paralytic in Capernaum. If the miracles were removed from the record of Christ's life, it would tear at the very fabric of the Gospel, causing the account to be incoherent. It would put the truthfulness of the Gospel record, as a whole, into question. Moreover, Christ's miracles have supported the truth of his claiming that he came down from heaven. The sincere people of his day believed him; his Jewish opponents felt the same way, although they never confessed it.

4.1. Changing the Water into Wine

The changing of water into wine is a miracle without natural explanation. It is the first miracle of Jesus which took place in Cana of Galilee, the hometown of his new disciple, Nathanael who surpassed all the other disciples in the power and clarity of his testimony of Jesus. In his love for Christ, he invited his new master and his friends to be his guests, as Matthew would also do when he would first believe (Luke 5:19-39). This is also what Lydia did in the days of the apostles (Acts 16:15).

During this visit to Cana, Jesus was invited to attend a wedding, along with his mother, brothers, and disciples. They had to travel from Nazareth to Cana, a two-hour walk. Maybe the disciples did not expect Jesus to accept this invitation, thinking that he might be like their former master, John the Baptist. They thought that Jesus would follow in the same path as the Baptist and his great predecessor, Elijah, who shunned worldly pleasures and led the life of a hermit and ascetic. They may have thought that a great religious leader like Jesus would keep away from week-long wedding celebrations, where the festive spirit would often overshadow the religious. But Jesus could attend this sort of ceremony because it was customary for a bride and groom to spend the day prior to their wedding in prayer, fasting, and confession of their sins.

The Saviour of all mankind would not be like the Baptist; he did not come to present the solemn, harsh side of religion, preaching hellfire to sinners. He was to share mankind's joys and sorrows because he came to show the love of God to all men. With a smile on his face, he proclaimed that he was the author and subject of the good news of his Gospel. He completed the picture of religion by fostering sociability, fellowship, and clean earthly pleasures. These are symbols of the spiritual joys which are one of the pillars of his kingdom.

John the Baptist represented religious harshness, while Christ, in the main, exemplified religious mercy. John pressed people to repent, but Christ invited them to penitence. John did not eat or drink with people, but Jesus did. He accepted the invitations to their banquets. John

wore skins and garments of camel's hair, but the robe of Christ was of fine linen; Roman soldiers cast lots for it during his crucifixion. When introducing his sermons, John the Baptist declared, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Matthew 3:7). But Jesus began his sermon by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The disciples of Jesus followed in the steps of their new teacher, and when he accepted the invitation to the wedding at Cana, they went with him.

During the wedding ceremony, the wine ran out. Mary knew of this because of her close relationship to the people of the wedding, but the other guests were unaware of the problem. She told Jesus that they had no wine left. Maybe her hopes in him were renewed after hearing what had taken place on the banks of the Jordan. Maybe she wanted him to demonstrate to the people the abilities which she knew he possessed because of his origin. She may just have also wanted to look good, out of motherly pride, or she may have felt that the presence of Jesus and the large number of disciples somehow accounted for the wine running out. Perhaps it was some other reason of which we are unaware.

Christ's answer to Mary's petition showed that she interfered more than she should have. He told her: "Dear woman, why do you involve me? ... My time has not yet come." (John 2:4). Jesus knew that she needed stern words in order for her to understand his new authority, the new experiences which lay before him, and the total change which was now about to occur in his relations with his family. These words of Jesus were like a new barrier between him and his mother; they separated his past and future. Jesus wanted to teach her not to interfere in his ministry. When he said to her, "Dear woman, why do you involve me", she realised that the authority she had had over him would no longer apply. She was no longer his mother; therefore, he used the term "woman". Before that, he had learned from her and obeyed her, but now she had to learn from him. He was no longer in need of her human guidance. Mary accepted this gentle rebuke, submitted to him respectfully, and told the servants to do whatever he told them.

Christ knew that his time for performing miracles had come. Thus, he showed the multitudes proof of his divine work and authority. Everyone knew, especially his disciples, that his humbling himself through the Incarnation was by choice and not compulsion. He wanted to establish his followers in their faith. He also wanted to develop the kind of renown that would draw multitudes to listen to his teaching. He wanted to invite them to salvation in him by faith. He also wanted to demonstrate his love to all mankind as well as to the Father who had sent him. His hour for performing a miracle would not come until all human effort had failed. Then, divine help would be available.

There were six water jars in the house, each holding about eight buckets of water. There were so many guests that just their ritual washings, according to Jewish law, would have left all these jars empty. When Christ's hour to perform his first miracle arrived, he told the servants to fill these water pots with water. They filled them to the brim. Jesus then directed them to

draw out the wine and serve the master of ceremonies first. When this man had tasted it, he commented on how good the last of it was. He said this publicly and thanked the bridegroom personally for keeping the best wine to the end.

Christ wanted to save the people of the wedding from embarrassment, on account of the wine being insufficient for the group. He did this with a clear miracle which did not need to be explained. He produced wine from empty stone water jars to prove that it was made from water, not from wine mixed with water. He chose large water jars to avoid the impression that he had brought wine from outside. He asked the servants, not his disciples, to serve it so that no one would think he had deceived them; he instructed them to fill the jars to the brim, so that no one could accuse them of having added wine to the water.

This miracle was observed by a large number of people from the town, including the servants who had never met Jesus. It is inconceivable that all of these would have agreed to play a trick on the rest. A responsible person confirmed the high quality of the wine. Thus, no one would think that it could have been wishful thinking on the part of those who drank it. The person in charge of the feast informed everyone that a miracle had occurred, and people started talking about the delicious new wine. Everyone discovered that Jesus had performed a miracle and, as a result, "He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (John 2:11).

The one who related this miracle was the Apostle John who said about Jesus, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). It should not then be surprising that Christ, who can convert water into wine in the vine, by a natural process, can turn water into wine in a supernatural way.

People were convinced of the genuineness of this miracle because they saw, tasted, and smelled the wine. This miracle shows the philosophy of Christ's work, for it is he who changes the good to the best. He changed the Old Testament Law into New Testament grace. Likewise, he expanded the baptism of water into the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and added to the words of religious guidance the eternal cup of salvation for his followers.

Among the things which reveal Jesus as the best example for mankind is the fact that he approved the use of wine, offering it to those who attended the wedding because he knew their hearts. He did not want the people to become drunk, however, because that would have hurt them. What we know of Christ's principles and conduct assures us that if there had been harm in using wine that evening, he would not have made it. If enjoying what is lawful turns into a stumbling block to others, it becomes wrong. Drinking wine in order to get drunk is also wrong.

The first miracle Jesus performed was at a wedding. Thus, he sanctified and crowned the marriage ordinance which is the oldest institution of mankind. God started it in the Garden of

Eden, when our first parents were in a state of complete innocence. All other ordinances came after the Fall. Although Jesus himself did not get married, his presence at the wedding showed his approval of this social institution; in fact, its importance was shown to be two-fold. His presence at the wedding at Cana, confirmed the words, "Marriage should be honored by all..." (Hebrews 13:4). It also refuted the harmful view, held by many, that marriage is a concession to the weakness of human nature and that it was ordained to keep mankind away from evil. Along with that view came the idea that abstaining from marriage is a virtue. As a result of these mistaken ideas, some people despised marriage and elevated celibacy. Christ's attendance at the wedding contradicted these wrong ideas; so did God's order to Adam and Eve before the Fall: "...Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28).

Christ's presence at this wedding was a beautiful example of his presence at every believer's wedding, whose marriage is "in the Lord". At the end of time, we shall celebrate the great Marriage Feast of Christ who changed water into wine at the wedding of Cana. When this heavenly "Bridegroom" sits on his royal throne, the "Bride" will consist of all the believers who make up his beloved Church. That Marriage Feast will not last seven days only, but for all eternity! Blessed are those who are invited to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:1-10)!

When we honour marriage, we also honour family relations. The circumstances of the ministry of Christ and his disciples made them neglect their family responsibilities for a while. But Jesus, as if to correct this imbalance, attended a wedding at the outset of his ministry to show his high esteem for family relationships. At the same time, he placed spiritual fellowship on an even higher, more noble and sacred plane, for it relates people to God, their Creator; to Christ, their Saviour; and to the rest of mankind, who are their spiritual Brothers and Sisters.

5. Jesus Cleanses The Temple

"After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not

entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." (John 2:12-25)

Jesus was angry because the Jewish priests had turned the house of worship into a den of thieves. In his anger, he cleansed the Temple as a symbol of preparation to clean the hearts of man which are, in fact, the temples of God. Jesus was ready to work and he was not slack in his task. He made a whip of cords and drove out of the Temple all those who should not have been there. He did not use violence with the merchants or money changers because he wanted them to know that his anger was not directed against them personally, but against their evil deeds. He drove out the animals and overturned the tables of the money changers. There was no other person who could have done this. He did not allow the pigeons to escape because, if he did, they would have been lost for good. He merely told their owners to remove them. Then he said to everybody, "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

Who was this person who separated himself from the rest of the people of God and said "My Father's house"? Did ever a prophet, apostle, or angel from heaven speak such words? Who was this man who stood before the multitudes in the Temple, ordering them to change their ways, denying them the use of the area of the Gentiles to secure their business endeavours? Who was this man who directed them to go out to the market instead, in order to buy what they needed? Who was this who stood against the leaders of religion, in their place of authority, breaking their contracts with the merchants and money changers? What right did he have to drive away their cows and lambs, upsetting the way they organised their currency and accounts? How could he hurt the interests of the religious leaders and merchants during the high season of the Feast? How did he dare to despise the leadership of the whole Jewish nation which was backed by the might of the Roman government? How could Jesus do such a thing while the many priests and the Levites were moving about daily, performing their religious duties? Had not the High Priest given the merchants, whom Jesus evicted, the right to use the Temple facilities for these commercial activities? Were not the Roman soldiers also given access to help keep order in the Temple?

How could Jesus act in this way or expect to succeed once he had started? The answer is that the consciences of the people helped him to succeed, for sinners are cowards in front of their own consciences and before others. A righteous man, however, is bold. Solomon, the wise man, said, "The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). The consciences of the Temple rulers and merchants helped Jesus in his work. When he ordered them with authority to stop making his Father's house a place of merchandise, they submitted to him. Furthermore, John the Baptist's testimony about him confirmed his right to drive the merchants out. Previously, the religious leaders had sent a delegation to John the Baptist in order to inquire about Christ. Maybe they had heard about his miracle in Cana too, which confirmed his spiritual authority. Moreover, the strong

spiritual awareness among the multitude, as a result of the ministry of John the Baptist, prepared the hearts of many for acts of reform. Thus, the leaders must have reckoned with some reaction on the part of the pious in the nation, even though their number was small.

Such reasons paved the way for Christ's success in his opposition to the corrupt religious leaders. The distinctive holiness of his person, coupled with his detachment from others in his relation to God, was reflected in the words, "My Father's house". The reverence that holiness produces is incalculable.

The chief priests were content to protest his action by telling him that he had no right to interfere with their arrangements for the Temple unless he was a prophet or an apostle sent from God. If this were indeed so, he was to prove his divine mission by performing a special miracle in front of them which would oblige them to acknowledge his religious authority.

Jesus did not yield in the matter of giving those evil men the right to judge his authority. He gave them no chance; he stayed completely silent. This, in fact, meant that his person was a sufficient miracle in itself; indeed, it was the greatest of miracles! If they wanted to know this, then they would have to kill him, and he would rise from the dead after three days. He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

If it were not for the hardness of their hearts, the chief priests would have understood what Jesus meant. They had failed to pay close attention to what the prophet Isaiah had said:

"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:1,2)

The disciple Stephen explained these words when he said, "...However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men" (Acts 7:48). Jesus' reply, which they did not understand, angered them since they took his words, "Destroy this Temple...." to be outright blasphemy.

How could this new teacher, a Jew, invite them to tear down God's holy Temple -- the greatest pride of the nation! Who was this who could say he could build one like it in three days, whereas King Herod, with all his riches, influence, and energy spent 46 years just to maintain and improve it; even so, he did not complete the work. How could this poor, young Galilean rebuild it again in three days? What Jesus said about destroying the Temple was not clear to his disciples either. They did not understand his words until after the Jews had crucified his body, and he had risen from the dead on the third day. It was then that they understood how the Temple had represented his body. It was then that faith in their master was established, though their own nation had rejected him. They knew that the boldness he had shown in his opposition to the elders of the people was the fulfilment of David's words: "...zeal for Your house consumes me....." (Psalm 69:9).

The rulers remembered Jesus' reply three years later and they used it as a pretext for killing him. When they had taken their revenge on him, they taunted him with the same words. When they asked Pilate for a guard at Jesus' tomb to prevent his resurrection, they quoted the same words. These words kindled the fires of hatred in their hearts which finally consumed him on the Cross, fulfilling the prophecy that described how zeal for his Father's house would consume him. Jesus knew that the results of cleansing the Temple would soon disappear and things would revert to what they had been before. We find him having to repeat this cleansing at a similar time three years later during the Feast. The fact that he had done it previously did not stop him from repeating it. In the same way, when the results of good works disappear in our lives, we need to begin again and persevere in them.

Since this is the first instance where we see Jesus angry, we can ask, "How can this anger fit in with his perfection?" The answer is that anger can be a virtue, just as kindness can be a vice. A condition of holy anger is that it should be free from all selfish motivation or impropriety. Paul said: "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26,27). We have seen Jesus angry when this holy place was defiled, because it represented the affairs of a holy God in the physical world. The name of God, his house, his day, his words, and his servants are sacred. They should be respected for the sake of the holy God. Whoever takes these things lightly will fall under God's anger, as was the case with those who desecrated the Temple.

Christ was also angry because people loved money which, according to the Gospel, is the root of all evil: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil..." (1 Timothy 6:10). The words of Christ, "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!", made it clear that commercial gain had displaced God's love in their hearts. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24). Your actions will show whether you serve God or money. Money in itself is good, but when it is loved to such an extent that the sacred is defiled and religion is exploited for commercial gain, then it is evil. Preferring money to religious duty is also idolatry.

In this battle, Jesus overcame the Jewish leaders. He also conquered the Devil who is the source of all evil. Although Jesus refused to perform the miracles they wanted, he did perform some helpful ones in Jerusalem, and many believed in his name. One would assume that this would have made him happy, had not the Apostle John added that "Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men" (John 2:24).

It would seem that the faith of these people was that of the mind, but not of the spirit or heart. They were like plants in shallow ground. They did not survive long, for when the heat of persecution came, they withered and died. Some of those who accepted Christ backslid under persecution from their own people or from the realisation that Christians do not always enjoy temporal blessings. Others turned away when they discovered that Jesus did not come to

establish a Jewish political kingdom. The Gospel gives us a testimony about Jesus, which was not given to anyone else and cannot be said of any other man: "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (John 2:25). No such comment was ever made about a prophet or apostle. From this, we understand clearly that the combination of the divine and human natures in Christ greatly increased his practical perception of peoples' hearts. We shall see how much good has come out of this heart-knowledge.

6. Nicodemus Visits Jesus

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.' In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked. 'You are Israel's teacher', said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God'" (John 3:1-21).

On a quiet night, a notable Jew named Nicodemus came to visit Christ. His titles were "the teacher of Israel" and "ruler of the Jews". He was a councillor, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body consisting of seventy scholars. Nicodemus was an important person in Christ's life, for he was the first of the Sanhedrin to be influenced by his teaching; he was responsible for drawing out Christ's first religious address. One would expect such an address to focus on a fundamental principle of religion.

We can imagine Christ and his disciples at the home where they were being hosted that evening, after returning from Capernaum. There would be a strong commotion as Nicodemus

suddenly arrived in his gorgeous robes. As a Pharisee, he was among those who proudly exhibited their head-dresses, wide tunic borders, and other visible signs of high station. As he moved about, he was received with the utmost respect, for, in his person, he combined wealth, learning, position, leadership, eldership, and practical goodness. He had honoured that simple dwelling by arriving at an unexpected time of night. His coming had also awed the community, not only because he was a Pharisee and a member of the supreme council, but especially because he visited Jesus after he had cleansed the Temple, enraging the chief priests.

We can visualise everyone standing up out of respect for this ruler. Christ and his companions were to wait for their distinguished visitor to start the conversation and reveal the purpose of his visit. When Nicodemus spoke, he showed personal respect for Christ. He used the word Rabbi which means "teacher". This was the highest religious title among the Jews. It was given only to those who had graduated from theological seminaries. No one expected Nicodemus to give this noble title to a young man who had not graduated from or even entered one of those institutions. Nicodemus then made his confession: "We know you are a teacher who has come from God." By admitting this, Nicodemus elevated Jesus to a much higher position than the other rabbis of his people; these men were not sent from God, but took their title from the rulers and their schools. He then supported his opinion with proof because, as a learned man, he did not admit to anything unless it had a strong argument. He said that no one could perform the miracles Christ was doing unless God were with him. Nicodemus was like Simeon -- a righteous and devout old man who was waiting for the advent of the Messiah to Israel. That is why Nicodemus came to find out if this new teacher was the Christ or not. From Jesus' answer, we see that Nicodemus was proud of himself and dependent on his own righteousness and ancestry for salvation. He had also fulfilled Moses' laws meticulously and had become rich, not only in money but also in good deeds. Because he was an expert on God's laws and religious discourses, people thought he would be the first in the kingdom of heaven. His stature and dignity, in the eyes of his people, made it appear as if a high position awaited him with the saints in paradise. How many people are like Nicodemus in their reliance on religious knowledge, denominational precepts, or outward charities for salvation!

We believe that Nicodemus thought he had greatly honoured Jesus by his words. He then waited for Christ's gratitude and recognition. There is no doubt that Jesus' disciples were proud of Nicodemus' testimony, and optimistic too. But Jesus, as a faithful, spiritual physician, recognised the spiritual disease in his visitor's heart. Christ meant to wound him in order to take away his delusion, applying the proper medicine where necessary. The first step in saving erring souls is to bring down the vain supports on which their hope of salvation rests. With his words, Jesus tore apart all the wrappings with which Nicodemus had enveloped his fancied hope of salvation. He did not respond to Nicodemus' honourable and gracious words. Instead, he said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God

unless he is born again." It was as if Jesus were telling him, "Because you are not born from heaven, you cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was not ignorant of the subject of the Second Birth because it is found in the Old Testament. But the Jews had interpreted it as applying only to pagans who could not be saved unless they accepted Judaism, were circumcised, and kept the Law of Moses. Since every Jew thought that he possessed these things already, he felt that he did not need the Second Birth. That is why Nicodemus was perplexed about Jesus' statement. He answered Jesus with words that showed his strong doubts about its truth. He also showed that he had taken Christ's words regarding birth in the physical sense.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, saying: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out..." (Isaiah 42:3). This prophecy was fulfilled in Christ when he sought to lead Nicodemus toward a new faith. Thus, he did not reprove him for his hardness of heart and his literal interpretation of spiritual teachings. Jesus upheld Nicodemus' first words by repeating them, adding some explanation to his statement. He revealed to Nicodemus that the heavenly birth is one of water and the spirit. By water, he was referring to repentance, of which water baptism was a symbol and a seal. By Spirit, he meant the Holy Spirit who brings about this Second Birth, with an internal cleansing, and its corresponding sign of outward cleansing in baptism. This is the result of what we call "death to sin" and "new life unto righteousness" (Romans 6). No one inherits the kingdom of heaven except God's children, and there is no way to become a child of God, except through being born of him. This can only be spiritual, for a person is born physically of human parents, but he is born spiritually by the Holy Spirit.

Christ knew that rational philosophy could not accept this because it does not comprehend it. He did not blame Nicodemus for failing to understand the fact of the Second Birth which is spiritual and mysterious. However, he did ask Nicodemus to accept and yield to spiritual realities, even though he did not grasp them. To illustrate this, Jesus said to him: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8). Because these words did not remove all doubts from Nicodemus' mind, he asked how this could be. As a learned man, he requested further clarification. Christ turned the questioning of Nicodemus into a great message of eternal blessing for the whole world. He made him aware of his shortcoming with a mild rebuke: "You are Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things?" This was the occasion for delivering an extremely valuable discourse which includes the golden text, accepted by most of the world as the most important and beautiful verse in the Gospel:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

At the beginning of his dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus asserted his right to speak with authority about heavenly matters. He spoke of what he knew and reported about what he had seen: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man." Hence, his words about the necessity of being reborn from heaven need to be accepted, however mysterious they might seem. These words are based on the fact that a sinner's natural heart is dead in sins and wickedness. This is true spiritual death. However, those who are in heaven are spiritually alive; there is, therefore, no place for the dead among the living, and no harmony exists between the fallen nature of man and the purity of heaven. Even if we suppose that a man, with a fallen nature, should go to heaven, he would not find things to his liking there because all his pleasures are merely physical. He himself would not want to stay there. Likewise, heaven's citizens would not accept him either, since they would detest the corrupt nature more than the living hate decomposing corpses.

True religion, according to Christ's teaching, is internal, not external. It is principally God's gift of life to man, and is followed by spiritual fruits resulting from that gift. Transition from the state of a purely physical orientation to the condition of spiritual rebirth, by God's unmerited favour, is the only key unlocking the door through which we can pass from the state of grace to eternal glory. In order to secure God's gift, our minds must change through enlightenment; our emotions, through sanctification; our will, through renewal; and our walk, through righteousness. If we are not reformed in these areas, we shall never see the Heavenly City.

This transformation is what makes the believer say, along with Paul, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). With this renewal, man can do everything which he could not do before: loving his enemy, devoting himself to the service of others, giving up his life for strangers, and finding pleasure in personal prayer and spiritual study.

Moreover, Jesus declared that the light which he brings to people is not generally accepted. The reason for this strange fact is that their works are done in the dark, and cannot stand exposure to the light. By contrast, righteous people love the light and are not afraid of their deeds being uncovered so that people may see God's hand at work.

In this first recorded discourse with Nicodemus, we find an adequate presentation of the main cornerstone of the Christian faith. In it, we see Jesus as the Son of Man and, at the same time, the only son of God. We also find a mention of the three persons of the Trinity as one God, which supports the truth of the Trinity as well as unity of God. Finally, we find a declaration of the work of Christ as a prophet, priest, and king.

People need prophets to prophesy and explain the coming events to them. They also need priests to represent them before God, and to make atonement for sins. Finally, they need kings to rule and manage the affairs of a country. These three functions are sufficient for all

civil and religious needs, and Jesus had combined them all in his unique person. No one else in Israel's history has ever occupied all three of these positions. Prophets, priests, and kings were all symbols, pointing to Jesus; they were consecrated by a holy anointing and sometimes they were called Messiahs. When Jesus came, he accomplished forever what had been required of the three roles before his advent.

Jesus is the prophet who speaks about heavenly things. He reveals God's will and attributes, as well as the hidden thoughts of the human heart. He is still the teacher whose Spirit teaches people all that is necessary for their well-being.

Christ is the one who functions as a priest for man, for he offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all. As the Lamb of God, he is the redemption for everyone's Sin so that none who believe in him will die eternally. He secured this by hanging on the Cross like the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness:

"So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived." (Numbers 21:9)

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14,15)

Jesus declares complete, immediate, and free forgiveness to any individual soul that repents. As an intercessor before the heavenly Father, he presents the requests of believers and pleads for them.

As King, he reigns over his peoples' hearts voluntarily. He also provides for their needs, defeats their enemies, and makes them share in his eternal spiritual kingdom. Had he not been the king, he would not have asked people to believe in him for salvation. Instead, he would have asked people to believe only in God, as the prophets had done. In his role as a prophet, priest, and king, he now performs spiritual miracles far greater than those material ones which he did while on earth among men.

7. Jesus Meets A Samaritan Woman

"When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not as-sociate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

'Sir', the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this

living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?' Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband', she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.' 'Sir', the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.' The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he'" (John 4:3-26).

Jesus was travelling from Judea to Galilee. The easiest and shortest way for him to travel through Samaria was between Judea (where Jerusalem is located) and Galilee, his home. He chose this route because he had to go through Samaria; the hatred

between the Jews and the Samaritans had been increasing all the time, due to the natural ties between them. Hatred between relatives is often the bitterest of hatreds! The Jews regarded the Samaritans as unclean because they were pagans. They did not sit with them, talk to them, or pass through their areas unless forced to do so. There had been many clashes as well as acts of sabotage between the two groups until the word "Samaritan" became an insult to the Jews. But Jesus decided to pass through Samaria because he was against narrow-mindedness and wanted to root out bigotry and fanaticism from his disciples' hearts. He sought to sow spiritual seeds along his way among those who were strangers to Israel and wanted to convince his apostles that the kingdom of God is not only reserved for the descendants of Abraham.

There was a well called "Jacob's Well" on the main road which passed through Shechem (Nablus), between the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. It has become famous since that occasion. Because Jesus was tired, he sat by the well and sent his disciples to Sychar to buy food for themselves. We conclude from this that Jesus, despite his and his disciples' poverty, did not always depend on the hospitality of others, nor on begging for his livelihood. He spent the money given to him by those who loved and honoured him, and he entrusted these funds to one of his disciples.

At that hour, he experienced fatigue, hunger, and thirst, so that he would be able to understand our weaknesses, and sympathise with suffering humanity. Someone might ask, "Why did Jesus not perform a miracle to satisfy his and his followers' hunger?" The answer is that whenever natural means are available, there is no need for a miracle. Jesus never

performed a single miracle to benefit himself. When he felt hungry in the desert where he was tried by Satan, there were no natural means available to satisfy his hunger. Yet, he did not perform a miracle to help himself. The angels came and served him, we are told.

While Jesus was waiting for his disciples to return, a Samaritan woman came from the neighbourhood to fill her jar with water from Jacob's Well. Maybe she preferred to come to this well because she considered its water holy. Perhaps she was hated and despised in her home town and wanted to stay away from her people. She must have been greatly annoyed when she saw a Jew at the well, especially when his appearance and clothing indicated that he was a teacher of religion. Normally, people in this position hated the Samaritans with a passion.

There were big barriers between Christ and this Samaritan woman which deserve our attention:

1. The first was that she was a Samaritan woman and he was a Jewish religious teacher. Her people were a mixture of Jew and Gentile, and they were religious rivals of the Jews who claimed racial purity. No doubt, the bitterest disputes among people are religious in nature!

The Jews, after their return from captivity in Babylon, had refused to allow the Samaritans to take part in restoring the Temple. They also treated them badly. In revenge, the Samaritans defiled the Temple by throwing dead men's bones in it, thereby widening the gulf between the two groups. The Jews barred the Samaritans from entering the Temple in Jerusalem, which forced the latter to choose another site for worship on Mount Gerizim which they claimed was even holier than Jerusalem because of its longer history. They also, claimed that Abraham brought Isaac to this place to offer him as a sacrifice to God.

2. The second difficulty was that she, as a woman, knew quite well how much Jewish men, especially teachers of religion, avoided speaking or being seen with women in public, even if they were their wives or sisters. In fact, among their prayers, there was one which thanked God that they had been born male and not female. How much more would be their contempt then be for a woman of Samaria!
3. The third hindrance was that she was a fallen woman. How could anything or anyone bring together a respectable Jewish teacher and a miserable fallen woman who had spent all her life in sin and was still enslaved to it?

Because of these three obstacles, it is right for us to say that this Samaritan woman was greatly disturbed when she saw Jesus sitting at the well after her long walk. She definitely would not have expected him to talk to her; likewise, she would not have wanted to speak with him. But Jesus loved the soul of this Samaritan as much as he loved the soul of a Jew, for he is the Creator, Saviour, and Judge of all. Jesus does not differentiate between a man

who loves and a man who hates, because he wants to save everyone. Jesus did not share the Jewish scorn for women, but respected women greatly. What is needed in religion is faith in the heart, the rule of the Law in the mind, and dignity in behaviour.

Jesus seeks the salvation of all mankind -- men and women alike. That is why he could not disregard this Samaritan woman. He was not like the ascetic Baptist who was bound by his people's traditions which forced him to avoid women. Rather, Christ allowed them to follow him, honour him, and support him with their resources. In his meeting with this Samaritan woman, Jesus proved his great interest in the conversion of women. As Satan hastened to make Eve fall, at the beginning of human history, Christ lifted up Eve's daughters at the outset of his ministry. One of the distinguishing features of Christianity is that it elevates women socially, morally, and spiritually. By being born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus lifted the shame that had been attached to the female gender since Eve's fall in the garden of Eden. During the years of his service, and at his Cross and resurrection, Jesus honoured women who have proved, in turn, to have outdone most men in religious zeal and faithfulness to the Saviour.

The Samaritan woman was a sinner. Why did Jesus agree to sit, talk, and give her his attention? The Apostle Paul asked: "...For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). But we understand the principle of Jesus who said, "...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). He also stated, while in the house of Matthew the tax collector, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). The reason anyone goes to the doctor is that he is sick, not because he is well. The physician gives attention to those who are suffering, not to healthy people. He gives even more attention to the critically ill!

Jesus initially gave his attention to young people, the poor, and the simple, who all represented the majority of the disciples whom he called. Then, he attended to the salvation of Nicodemus, an old, rich, upright theologian. All of these people were Jews. He now wanted to show his great concern for the salvation of someone who would represent women, outcasts, and Gentiles. When he dealt with this Samaritan woman, he was able to express the great value he attached to the eternal soul, even after it had sunk deep in sin. He demonstrated that he is able to save, to the uttermost, the very worst of sinners.

Jesus ignored social barriers and began his talk with the Samaritan woman by asking her to give him a drink. His motive was not so much his thirst, but his yearning to save her perishing soul. It was because of the utter humility of this great Jewish Rabbi that he honoured this woman by allowing her to satisfy his need with something she had. In this, he gave us a model for the soul-winner. Her answer was not courteous, as one would expect from a woman like her. She said, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Jesus then changed his tone to help her know who he really was. He had

no need of her, but she was in need of him because he could have given her the gift of God if she only asked for it. This gift was like living water. When she expressed her astonishment and lack of understanding, he added that the water he gave was different from the water she had come to draw from Jacob's Well. The living water quenches thirst eternally, becoming a spring of water in the one who drinks it, welling up into eternal life. As a result of this, she made a request of him who had first asked her to give him to drink: "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

The first condition for receiving salvation is the awakening of the conscience, so that the sinner feels the need of a Saviour and shows true repentance. Therefore, we see this physician having to wound her before healing her. The skill of the Surgeon was evident from the kind of wound he caused her. He cleansed her, body from the sickness which afflicted it. Jesus asked her to invite her husband. When she confessed that she did not have one, he disclosed to her that he knew her shameful past as well as the miserable situation she was presently living in. His kindness was not a result of his ignorance of her corrupt situation. In this, we find a good example for attracting souls to Christ. We do not always win souls to Christ by bitter attacks on their faults. But Satan, the enemy of souls, is ever watchful. When he noticed that she began to heed the Saviour, he resorted to one of his famous devices; he tried to engage her attention to the sectarian argument between the Jews and Samaritans as to the right place of worship. Satan led her to an argument which still deceives millions of religious people; namely, the belief that religion is something one inherits from one's parents. Thus, many people are satisfied to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors. However, faith had been born in the heart of this Samaritan after her conscience was awakened. She saw, in this Jewish stranger, a prophet, for she said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet." Thus, she opened a new door for Christ to reveal to her the truth regarding religion.

From that pulpit, the rim of the well, and in front of an audience that consisted of only one sinful Samaritan woman, Jesus delivered a vital sermon. It was concise as well as masterly. In it, Jesus announced that holiness does not reside in temples or in consecrated vessels, but in hearts. The coming of Jesus ended the era in which the worship of God was only in special places where people went to present their sacrifices. False pagan gods are housed in specific places of worship, but the one true God is spirit, and he accepts all who worship him in whatever place, as long as they worship in spirit and in truth. He accepts no others, even though they may kneel in the most sacred of places. The time about which Malachi prophesied had come:

"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations", says the LORD Almighty." (Malachi 1:11)

This truth, however, does not rule out the consecrating of special places of worship, and

giving them due respect. This can be an acceptable religious custom, but we must not go to extremes in ascribing holiness to these places. We should not think that we receive blessings from relics of saints, or the mere substance of church sacraments, or by touching certain persons or religious buildings.

When Jesus excluded Jerusalem from consideration as a holy place, he was saying that one could worship in any place since God is spirit, and worshipping him must be in spirit; it is not dependent on external ordinances. We have to worship him from the depths of our hearts. Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman that God's door of acceptance is open to all who worship him in spirit and in truth, including those Gentiles who were excluded from the Temple in Jerusalem. God accepts those with a shameful past. The change in the heart of the Samaritan woman allowed her to welcome, with all her soul, the coming of the Messiah who tells mankind all that God expects of them in matters of religion. When she opened her heart to the light of truth, God at once gave her more light. He honoured her by revealing to her what he did not disclose to the Jewish elders, loyal Nicodemus, or to his friends, the disciples. He said to her, "I who speak to you am He." Up till then, Jesus had not told anyone that he was the Christ, but he declared this truth to the Samaritan woman because she confessed that he was a prophet.

"Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?' Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?' 'My food', said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, "Four months more and then the harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying "One sows and another reaps" is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.' Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world'" (John 4:27-42).

None of Christ's disciples were present during the conversation between him and the Samaritan woman. No doubt, John, the beloved disciple, had heard about it either from Christ or the woman. He tells how astonished he and his fellow disciples were when they returned from Sychar with the food they had gone to buy. They marvelled because they saw their master talking earnestly to a stranger, a Samaritan woman. They noticed her excitement as she left her water jar and rushed back to her town, as if on a very important errand. We are not surprised at the amazement of the disciples. Instead, we praise them for their conduct and

observance of propriety, considering the circumstances. None of them dared to ask him what she had wanted or why he was speaking with her. When they put the food in front of him, he did not eat as they were expecting; so they said, "Rabbi, eat something." As they had marvelled at his conversation with the woman, they were now amazed at his not eating. Their astonishment increased when he answered, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about receiving eternal life by being born from above. Nicodemus did not comprehend what he meant. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman about the living water which gives life. She did not grasp this either. He spoke to his disciples concerning his food which they did not know about. They too did not understand and began asking one another: "Could someone have brought him food?" Jesus was quick to remove their doubts, and he explained that his food was to do the will of the Father who sent him, and to accomplish his work.

The Samaritan woman was so happy that she had met the Messiah, heard his message, and believed in him, that she left her water jar beside the well and ran to Sychar, her town, to announce the good news to her townspeople. But who would want to listen to the preaching of a harlot? They probably asked themselves the following question: "Would the Messiah first appear to a woman like her?" One concludes that her message must have been effective. It seems that the change which had taken place in her heart showed in her countenance, gestures, and tone of voice. Her countrymen respected her testimony when she said: "Come, see a Man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" She wanted them to see and hear Jesus for themselves, so that they could make up their own minds in this matter.

She had given her witness and had left the outcome to the consciences and minds of her listeners. In this, she left us with an excellent example for sharing the Good News with others. The power of effective witnessing lies more in having a good testimony than in giving advice. The intelligent soul-winner says what the Psalmist had said: "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).

When Jesus bade his disciples farewell before his ascension, he told them that their basic duty would be to witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The wonderful results which followed were due to the disciples' obeying Christ's command, and the people paying attention to their words. An intelligent listener can extract the necessary advice from a testimony that is given. Thus, mere advice, without a testimony to support it, tends to be weak. The Samaritan woman forgot the sacredness of Jacob's Well when she found the living water that Jesus had offered her. This water became a spring, welling up to eternal life for others also.

The words of the Samaritan woman about Christ moved the hearts of the people of Sychar to leave their city and come to Jesus. When Jesus saw them coming from afar, he spoke to his disciples in symbolic language. He said: "Do you not say 'Four months more and then the

harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." Those approaching Samaritans, ready to accept the good news of salvation, were the white fields. Jesus was so happy to see them because he could see that they were the firstfruits of the great harvest of the Gentiles. They did not come to him because they saw one of his healing miracles, nor were they seeking worldly benefits. They were coming solely to see him and to listen to his teachings. They were the harvest of his labour in which he led a sinful woman to salvation through repentance and faith.

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the testimony of the woman. Many more believed in him after they met and heard him. They asked him to stay in their city. This again was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (Isaiah 65:1). Jesus behaved differently from the traditions of his nation. He wanted his disciples to follow his example. He spent two days in that Samaritan town. This harvest was the beginning of a much greater harvest in these cities which would be reaped during the time of the apostles, after his ascension.

How great was the testimony of the Samaritans about Jesus! They said that he was truly the Christ, the Saviour of the world. They saw in him the only hope of salvation for all mankind. How generous was that well which provided rest to the human body in which the Second Person of the Trinity dwelled, the Eternal Son "who is at the Father's side" (John 1:18)! How sweet it was to the Samaritan woman who was perishing; she found beside it the living water. She wanted to quench the thirst of her body, but the Messiah she met, beside the well, gave her a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

8. Jesus, The Teaching Physician

Jesus did not begin his ministry in Galilee by performing miracles. He began by preaching the good news of the kingdom of God in the synagogue. His preaching was not to rebuke or terrify; it was the language of the loving Saviour who had come from heaven to proclaim God's love to sinners. He came to establish the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. Everyone who heard him, glorified him, even though they knew of his humble origin. Jesus proclaimed that the time was fulfilled and that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15). He was referring to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning his appearance. This was the fullness of time about which the Apostle Paul spoke: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law" (Galatians 4:4). The preaching of Jesus agreed with the preaching of John the Baptist who said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2).

8.1. Healing the Official's Son

"Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. 'Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders', Jesus told him, 'you will never believe.' The royal official said, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.' Jesus replied, 'You may go. Your son will live.' The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.' Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee" (John 4:46-54).

One year later, Jesus revisited Cana of Galilee where he had performed his first miracle. He also performed his second miracle there. We say that he performed his second miracle in Cana, but the one who was healed was not actually from this city. While in the area of Cana, Jesus healed a sick person in Capernaum which was a one-day trip from Cana. This is how it happened: One day, Jesus was in Cana when one of the officials of King Herod Antipas came to him. He lived in Capernaum, a few hours away from the capital, Tiberias. Jesus had not yet performed any miracle of healing in Galilee. However, when that official's son became very sick, nearing death, and when medical help could do no more, his father thought of coming to Jesus. After inquiring where Jesus was, he found that he was in Cana. He went to him there and asked him to go with him to Capernaum to heal his son.

A king's official, at that time, was highly respected and able to obtain what he wanted easily; so this man thought that Jesus would immediately do for him as he wished. He imagined that Christ would consider it a great honour that such a man, as he, would invite him to heal his son. He thought Jesus would seize such a chance to display his marvellous power. But the thoughts of Jesus were different. He wanted to lead this man to humility and brokenness of heart, so that he could receive divine blessings. He also wanted to show him that he was the representative of God Most High, even though his external appearance lacked signs of grandeur. He said to the official, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.." Jesus does not want faith to come as a result of seeing wonders; he wants us to believe as a result of the attributes and virtue that we see in him, and from what we hear him teach.

The king's official could not be patient enough to listen because his son was dying. He urged Christ, saying, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus answered the essence of his petition, but not in the way it had been asked. He did not go down with him, but he did heal his son. Instead of accompanying him, he told him, "You may go. Your son will live." In a wonderful way, the official believed the word that Jesus had spoken, and he went his way. He had faith that Christ could heal at a distance. Jesus did not have to touch the son, speak to him, or see him; yet, the father believed and returned home. As he was on his way, his

servants met him and told him that his son had suddenly been healed. They had come from Capernaum to tell the father in Cana the good news. When the father asked about the hour when his son began to recover, he discovered that it was the same hour when Jesus gave his order, saying, "Your son will live!" This strengthened the father's faith. His household shared the new faith with him, for when one member of a household is strong in faith, it affects the rest of the household.

The tragedy of the illness of this man's son became, a great spiritual blessing. Out of this misfortune came eternal salvation for himself, as well as his family. The heavenly Father, in his wisdom and love, allows us to pass through difficulties in order for us to receive blessings.

8.2. Teaching in Nazareth

"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum." I tell you the truth', he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed-- only Naaman the Syrian.' All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way" (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus returned from Cana to Nazareth after an absence of fifteen months. During these months, he had some spiritual experiences which were evidenced in the way he looked and acted. His countrymen noticed that he had changed; he was a different person. They had heard a lot about the miracles which he had performed in other cities. They expected him to do the same in Nazareth, especially because he was with his relatives and friends. However, Christ was more interested in teaching than in performing miracles. In Nazareth, he gave his first public sermon in the synagogue, on a Saturday. Luke says that he went to the synagogue, as was his custom. His visits to the synagogue during the previous thirty years of

his life could probably be counted in the thousands.

When Christ entered the synagogue, everything was the same as when he had been there before. He heard the usual prayers and, when the time came for reading the prophets, he stood up, indicating that he would read if the leader of the congregation would give him the opportunity. Jesus was given the book of the prophet Isaiah. The portion that Jesus read was the selection for that day. It was exactly what divine providence had chosen for him to announce. That portion of Scripture was a prophecy about the objective of his coming to earth and the nature of his kingdom which was now imminent. It spoke first about the anointing which gave him the title of "Christ" through God's setting him apart as prophet, priest, and king. His work as the Christ was to preach the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to restore the sight of the blind, to set at liberty those that are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Isaiah 61:1,2).

The acceptable year of the Lord, for the Jews, was the jubilee which used to come once every fifty years. That year was most likely a Jubilee. Jesus' listeners thought that releasing the captives and setting at liberty the oppressed meant freedom from Roman colonialism and captivity to a pagan king. For Jesus, the acceptable year of the Lord was not once every fifty years, but every day of every year.

Christ did not come to save people from political, earthly bondage; he had come to save them from their bondage to the Devil, which was the reason behind the oppression of the Romans. The slaves of Satan cannot escape physical, social, and economic captivity. Spiritual enslavement to the Devil leads to physical subjection to enemies. If Christ had saved his people from physical yokes which they knew, they could still have fallen under more cruel spiritual yokes which they did not know. Jesus knew this well; he had come to set his people free from the yoke of the Devil first. If they accepted him, he could have saved them from the yoke of the Romans too. He could have saved them from every other yoke except his own, for it is easy and light (Matthew 11:30).

It was the Jewish custom that the one who read Scripture could expound on it, if he so desired. He would announce this by sitting down after he finished reading. Thus, Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him because they all knew him. They had such great respect for him because of what they had heard about him during the previous fifteen months. Jesus began his sermon by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Thus, he presented himself to them as their Christ, dashing all their worldly hopes, and went on to explain the Scripture. All spoke well of him, wondered at his gracious words, and said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Christ had spoken gracious words. This shows the nature of his preaching. It was like cold water to a thirsty person. He came to announce the Good News of a new spiritual kingdom. He knew that the thoughts of his listeners were far from his own. They admitted that he

spoke gracious words, even though their understanding of grace was superficial. They wanted a worldly kingdom with material benefits and glory. They were astonished at his miracles. However, Jesus presented them with two proverbs. He said: "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" By this, they meant that Nazareth deserved more miracles than Capernaum had seen. "Why did he not give us the satisfaction of seeing his great miracles in his home town?" they most likely wondered. So far, they had not seen a single miracle. Then, Jesus quoted another proverb. He said, "...no prophet is accepted in his hometown." By this, he implied that they had the following thoughts about him: "Take your preaching to those who do not know your humble origin. Do not expect us to submit to your new teachings!"

The people of Nazareth were angry with Jesus. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built in order to throw him down. But Jesus passed through their midst, went away unharmed, and went toward Capernaum. He must have been very sad about his hometown. The people had not accepted his words, refusing to accept their Saviour. We wonder if Christ wept over Nazareth when he left it, as he would weep over Jerusalem later. It is understandable that he would have felt sad about leaving his hometown, after all the years he had laboured there. After witnessing to his own people by his words and deeds, he was not taking one disciple with him, not even from among his own brothers!

9. Jesus Calls Four Disciples

"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me', Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

Jesus called his first four disciples by the Sea of Galilee, better known as Lake Tiberias. They were Andrew, Simon Peter (Andrew's brother), James, and John (the brother of James). All four were fishermen, working from the shore or from boats. James and John were mending their nets with their father, Zebedee, when Christ found them. Jesus first invited Peter and Andrew to the more important job of being "fishers of men". They were to cast the net of the Gospel to save souls from the sea of destruction and bring them to the shore of peace. He then made the same call to the other two. All four immediately accepted his invitation and followed him. They left their fathers, the workers, their boats and nets, their jobs; in fact, everything. Previously, they had followed him in spirit and by faith, and had accompanied him on some of his journeys. From now on, however, they would be his constant companions. Christ had given examples of how to fish for souls in Judea and Samaria, but now he wanted them to leave their daily work in order to receive more training and instruction for their new vocation.

The sons of Zebedee left their father in the boat and followed Christ. They became the first of a chain of men who obeyed Jesus, leaving their relatives, if necessary, in order to follow the Master. No man has the religious or ethical right to demand that people put him before their relatives; but since Jesus was more than just a man, he was in a position to ask his followers to put him first in their lives. Had Jesus been a mere human, he could not have set aside the fifth commandment of honouring one's parents. He would not have asked the sons of Zebedee to leave their elderly father for his sake. They obeyed because they realised that he gave divine commands that come before human responsibilities, even the most sacred. Since he gave the Law, he had the right to modify it as he saw fit.

Abraham, the friend of God, left his original home, in Ur of the Chaldees, in answer to a divine call. Because he believed God, he became the ancestor of the people of Israel. This is why we call him "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). God told him, "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Moses was also obedient to a divine call. He left Pharaoh's palace, his royal adoption, and the comfort, learning, riches, and glory of Egypt. God had called him to lead and organise his people, and to be the recipient of the Law which is the basis of the Old Testament, and of our faith. These four disciples, likewise, left their work, homes, and relatives to follow this poor, humble teacher. Out of these few, and their weak simple colleagues, grew the mighty Christian Church -- that spiritual, royal order which has changed the face of the whole earth.

We read in the Torah that God chose David, his servant, taking him from shepherding flocks of sheep, making him the shepherd of his people. Now we see Christ choosing Andrew, Peter, James, and John from among the fishermen to promote them to the great position of apostleship. He would make them servants through miraculous happenings in their lives. They would be shining, living examples of the Gospel. Even when Christ was preaching and teaching the crowds, his first priority was to train these four who followed him, from town to town, as his disciples.

Those who heard Jesus speak at the synagogue in Capernaum marvelled, because the many great preachers they had heard before had only quoted the words of their predecessors. These speakers had the ability to memorise, and took great pains to absorb the sayings of the ancients, reciting their words in front of the congregations. Their popularity and reputation were based on this practice. Now, however, the people were faced with a new kind of preacher who did not care for the traditional learning, philosophy, or sayings of the old, celebrated orators. Instead of quoting from a famous rabbi, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth...." Whenever he quoted from the old teachings, he gave them new meaning and lustre. In expounding the Old Testament, Christ focused on the spirit of the teaching, not just the letter of the Law.

10. Jesus Casts Out Demons

"Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' Jesus said sternly. 'Come out of him!' Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!' And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area" (Luke 4:31-37).

When Jesus was in Capernaum, he went to the synagogue. Among those who attended worship on that Sabbath was a demon-possessed man. As soon as he saw Jesus, he cried: "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" Satanic hatred was evidenced in this sentence, and the man's speaking in the plural indicated that there was more than one spirit speaking. Also, the question, "Have you come to destroy us?" was a confession that Jesus had full authority over demons. Finally, the admission, "I know who you are...." shows us that demons know more about spiritual matters than human beings.

The Devil had confronted Jesus earlier when he was alone in the wilderness. He attacked Jesus again, under cover, when he aroused the people of Nazareth to kill him. Now, he came against the Holy Teacher openly. The Devil could not keep quiet while Jesus was explaining the way of salvation, proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand, and clarifying the conditions for entering it. The Devil knew that Jesus was fighting against him, and had come to destroy his works and his corrupt kingdom. Christ was about to bruise the Devil's head (Gen 3:15); how could he keep quiet?

We may be astonished at the Devil testifying openly that Jesus is "the Holy One of God". This must have been the first result of the authority of Christ who was about to cast out the demon from the man. The testimony of an enemy has double value, and Jesus wanted the crowd to see that even the Devil had to bear witness to him. This was the first public affirmation of the Devil concerning Christ, but it was not the last. As soon as the possessed man gave an open, clear testimony, Jesus rebuked him saying, "Be quiet! Come out of him." The whole crowd waited to see what would happen. The demon threw the man down in the midst and came out of him, leaving him unharmed. The whole crowd marvelled. Everyone was amazed and they probably began asking one another: "Who is this capable person who has come among us? What is this new teaching coupled with these miracles? Where did this son of the carpenter obtain such great authority which makes evil spirits obey him?"

In Jesus' first miracle in Cana, when he turned the water into wine, he showed his authority over the laws of nature. In the second miracle, the healing of the official's son, Jesus revealed his power over sickness. In this third miracle, Jesus announced his sovereignty over satanic powers. These three miracles, at the beginning of Christ's ministry, proved that he was qualified in every respect to be the Saviour of mankind.

The news of this great miracle filled the whole place. Reports went out about it to all the surrounding regions. There had been a battle between the Prince of the House of David and the Prince of the World, and the latter had been defeated and humiliated. The news about Christ spread throughout the surrounding areas. In the wilderness, Jesus refuted Satan; in Capernaum, he subdued him in the lives of others. Through his actions, he showed his new disciples, the Devil himself, the men of Galilee, and the people in future generations, that he is able to conquer the Devil in his own life as the Son of Man as well as in the lives of others.

We cannot leave this miracle without trying to clarify the subject of demon possession often mentioned in the days of Christ and after. It seems that the Devil redoubled his efforts in our world during the ministry of Jesus, as though it were of supreme importance to him. He wanted to control mankind more than ever. This was by God's permission so that the greatness of Christ's victory and its results would be manifested and intensified. The Devil knew the power of the mind in man. Therefore, madness became a part of the control he had over humanity. Many times, a sick person was just thought to be crazy. Is what the Gospel calls "demon possession" what we merely call insanity today? Such an interpretation might be permissible, had Christ been superstitious or prone to religious delusion. However, when he spoke to the Devil who possessed a person, as separate from the person himself, saying, "...come out of him" we know that the problem was not just insanity as we define it today. Also, if the demon-possessed man were just insane, he could not have made the amazing statements which he uttered about subjects that no one even understood in those days. Furthermore, if Christ had only healed mental disorders, there would not have been any of the spasms or painful conflicts which accompanied the exorcism of evil spirits from the demon-possessed victims. Dealing with the demon-possessed was a special type of work which Christ and his disciples undertook, apart from healing sicknesses. Based on the foregoing, we can say that the affliction, which the Gospel calls demon possession, cannot be considered to be the same as ordinary mental illness.

11. Healing Many In Capernaum

"Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ" (Luke 4:38-41).

Christ and his companions went to the home of Peter, either because Jesus was staying there or because Peter had invited him for a banquet to show his gratitude for the honour of becoming his disciple and a "fisher of men". Maybe Peter also expected his master to perform a healing miracle in his home, just as he had done in the house of the king's official.

Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. It seems that Peter did not consider it fit to ask Jesus to heal her. But others told Christ what was in Peter's heart, so Jesus rebuked the fever and it left her. We do not know the words which he had used to rebuke the fever. Christ took her by the hand, lifted her up, and the fever left her. Then, she got up and served them. That was a double miracle; the total weakness which normally accompanies a fever disappeared at once, so that she was able to start serving immediately. She became the first recorded woman who volunteered to serve Christ after the commencement of his ministry.

News of the healing filled the place. This miracle followed the healing of the demon-possessed man. On the evening of that Saturday, all the sick people in that district came to Peter's house. They had waited until evening, out of respect for the commandment to keep the Sabbath. It seems that no one was left sick in Capernaum. Everyone received healing from all kinds of afflictions.

Luke gives special attention to demon-possessed people. He says that the demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus laid his hands on sick people, but he did not do this with the demon-possessed. The demons were cast out by the power of his command. In the synagogue, Christ said "Be quiet" to the Devil, after he had testified that he was the Holy One of God. In the evening, the witness of the Devils concerning Jesus became more clear and powerful. They were crying, "You are the Son of God." Again, Jesus rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. It is not likely that the Devils would have glorified an ordinary person who cast them out; but Jesus had divine authority. One can feel sorry for the people of the city, who did not call on Jesus, the Christ, the Son and Holy One of God. Those who were healed should have been the first to give a clear testimony about the Saviour.

What a wonderful picture of Christ, the great healer! He stood in front of the door of Peter's house in the early hours of the evening, stretching out his kind hand to touch every sick person who came to him, proving his ability to sympathise with the tragedies of these poor people. He showed his power of healing, and his fingers transmitted restoration to their bodies, according to their need. In so doing, Jesus made it clear, to those who wanted to understand, that spiritual maladies can also be healed. He proved to them that he had the power to heal both physical and spiritual infirmities; all they had to do was ask him. Rightly, the prophet Isaiah said, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4).

This was the beginning of the long healing ministry of Jesus. In all the healing miracles which he performed, he first saw the relationship between sickness and Sin, for they are often related. Sickness is a disorder of the body and is a corruption of God's original good purpose. Sin is a disorder of the soul. Christ's intention was to show his willingness and ability to save souls from the sickness of Sin, for he had come to "he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). He had appeared as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world,

after coming down from heaven, granting all those who believe in him the forgiveness of their sins. Since all disease is the result of Sin, it became necessary for the one who would fight Sin to fight its consequences also; as he went for the root of the problem, he dealt also with its branches. Christ knew that people needed something to make them yearn for spiritual healing. Sin deadens a person to spiritual things, so Jesus wanted to wake people up by means of physical healing.

All those who have the Spirit of Christ are concerned about relieving the calamities of humanity, of which sickness is the greatest. It is the Holy Spirit that leads Christian doctors to sacrifice their money, time, and lives in serving the sick. They consider fighting disease just as important as fighting Sin, and caring for human bodies as important as their interest in the spiritual well-being of man. The Spirit of Christ lead Christians to hospitals and orphanages of various kinds which were not found in the world before Jesus walked the earth. Wherever Christianity has spread, institutions of mercy are to be found.

11.1. Our Physician Today

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"(Hebrews 13:8). That is why he desires to heal people, and as he sometimes healed without being physically present, he still does so today. He wants every sick person to come to him, to ask for healing, and to consider his personal doctor an instrument of Christ, and the treatment he uses as being sent from God. When healed, he should praise God, for he is the Great Physician, healing is a gift from him. The apostle James wrote: ">Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14,15). Every believer should regard Christ as the Great Physician. We can also view a doctor as a medical assistant who, does the will of Jesus, the Supreme Physician. Therefore, our greatest gratitude will always be to the Physician who guided a doctor in response to our pleas for help.

11.2. Jesus in Solitude with the Father

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" (Mark 1:35-37)

We have seen Jesus surrounded by crowds, but this is not what he wanted. He needed time alone with his Father. This is why Mark wrote: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Christ's ministry to people led him to pray to God. It was during this quiet time with the Father that he was equipped for his vital daily ministry among the people. His prayer time with God

prompted him to serve mankind out of love for his Father. He returned from his prayer to his ministry with a new vigour and redoubled joy. Life that is all prayer impedes ministry. Life that is all service lacks the power and spiritual benefits which we need to assist others. Even though Christ was completely pure, exceedingly powerful, and perfect, he needed to pray. This was his supreme joy. It was his vital spiritual breath. We need to learn from Christ how to spend time alone with God.

Neither the crowds nor the new disciples liked Christ's habit of solitude. Once, Peter and those with him searched for Christ. When they found him, Peter exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for You." They did not want to leave Christ, but he would not give any man the right to control his movements. He constantly followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit who had filled him at the time of his baptism. Although he does what people ask him, out of love, he is always independent of them and sometimes denies their requests. That is why he said, "Let us go somewhere else-- to the nearby villages-- so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." (Mark 1:38).

From that time on, Christ adopted a new plan of action which differed from that of the other religious teachers who followed the method of John the Baptist. These teachers had established places to receive people. Those who did not seek them would not see or hear them. Christ's plan, however, was based on the principle that "...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10).

John the Evangelist refers to three types of work that Jesus did:

1. Proclaiming of the good news of the kingdom, as we have seen him do in Judea.
2. Combatting Satan and liberating mankind from his control, as he did in the synagogue of Capernaum on one unforgettable Sabbath.
3. Healing all kinds of sickness and weakness in the people, as he had done the evening of that same Sabbath.

In the remaining five books of this series, we will see how Jesus carried on these three kinds of ministry.

12. Quiz

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

1. What are the three names of Satan? What is the meaning of each one?
2. How did Christ, coming from the seed of a woman, bruise the head of the serpent? (Genesis 3:15).
3. What was the sin committed by Moses, Elijah, Peter, and Judas Iscariot?

4. What was the first temptation which the Devil presented to Jesus? What was Christ's answer?
5. What was the second temptation which the Devil presented to Jesus? What was Christ's answer?
6. What was the third temptation which the Devil presented to Jesus? What was Christ's answer?
7. Mention four kinds of baptism which Christ experienced.
8. John the Baptist said that Christ is the Lamb of God. This is the fulfilment of a prophecy in the Old Testament. Give this prophecy and explain how it was fulfilled.
9. What was the highest service Andrew did for his brother, Simon?
10. What was Philip's answer when Nathanael questioned how the Messiah could come from Nazareth?
11. List three testimonies stating that Christ is the Son of God.
12. What was Christ's objective in performing miracles?
13. Why did Christ change water into wine in the wedding of Cana?
14. What did Christ mean by saying that the Temple was his Father's house?
15. What is the meaning of Jesus' words: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up?"
16. When can we consider anger a virtue?
17. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the second birth?
18. What is the work of Christ as a prophet?
19. What is the work of Christ as a priest?
20. What is the work of Christ as a king?
21. How did Jesus persuade the Samaritan woman to confess her sin?
22. What is the difference between the water of Jacob's Well and the living water?
23. How did Christ lead the king's official to an attitude of humility?
24. Why did the people of Nazareth refuse Christ?
25. What was the testimony of the demons concerning Christ?

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

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