

# The Life of Christ

## Book IV - His Great Miracles

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## 1. John The Baptist Doubts Jesus

**"He sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' When the men came to Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"". At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'" (Luke 7:19-23)**

King Herod had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. John the Baptist rebuked him for this. The king was furious. He ordered the imprisonment of John in Makheros Castle in Berea, where he stayed for more than one year. But his confinement did not stop his disciples from visiting him. They told him about the many miracles that Jesus was performing, the most marvellous of which was the raising to life of a young man, the son of the widow of Nain. They also told him about the crowds that were flocking to Jesus, amazed by his words and deeds.

John the Baptist had already declared his loyalty and love toward Jesus. He had no doubts whatsoever about Jesus' love for him; but he was wondering why Jesus ignored him in his prison for so many months. Was not Jesus the promised Christ -- the champion of the aggrieved? What could be more dreadful than the injustice done to the Baptist because of his zeal for the truth? How could Jesus, his beloved kinsman, not extend to him his powerful hand and rescue him from his dangerous situation, even if a miracle had to be performed? Maybe John expected Christ's kingdom to be an earthly one, surrounded by glory and splendour. He must have asked, "Where is this kingdom whose approach I have heralded? Where was the love and mercy that Jesus, King of this kingdom, should have shown?"

As John was a fallible human being, exposed to Sin, he must have had fits of despair and doubt in his extremely uncertain circumstances, especially after all the freedom, power, and greatness he had previously had. It must have been very hard for him, in his prime, to be chained in jail doing nothing, after years of hard work and great activity. A day came when he lost his nerve; his patience gave out. He sent two of his most loyal disciples to question Jesus if he really was the promised Christ, or if this Christ was yet to come.

When the two disciples came to Jesus, they asked him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" While they were there, Christ cured many people of their sicknesses. Then, he turned to them and said, "Blessed is the man who does not fall

away on account of me." From this statement, directed at the two disciples of the Baptist, we deduce that John's question had originated from real doubts. Yet, this was the only recorded lapse of this great man of God. The Bible mentions many mistakes committed by prophets and apostles. The Psalmist says, "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12). Solomon also said something similar: "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16).

It is fortunate that John's doubts directed him towards Jesus, not away from him. Out of selfish motives, some people express doubts to show how knowledgeable they are, or to prove that they are not in the wrong. God will punish these people. Others' doubts stem from clinging to certain things. Those people cannot find the truth unless they repent and leave behind their sins, whether they are done openly or secretly. Those whose doubts result from lack of knowledge can only come to faith through study, inquiry, and heavenly guidance, while doing their duty honestly, in a timely manner. John the Baptist was a mixture of love, zeal, humility, and fear. His doubts inevitably cleared as the sun of faith and certainty shone upon his heart.

Some people have suggested that John the Baptist did not doubt but that he wanted his two messengers to receive a convincing answer from Jesus, which would be useful for the rest of his disciples. If that is so, then John the Baptist, till the end of his ministry, endeavoured to guide people towards Christ. Previous to his imprisonment, he had announced that Jesus was greater than he was, and that although Christ had come after him, he had actually existed before him.

God, in his love and mercy, willed that John should die as a martyr to gain a double reward in eternity. From John, we have an effective example of a courageous person who obeyed God's orders without fearing man, even though that man was King Herod. John's predicament served as an excellent example of proclaiming the Good News and God's principles, despite outward circumstances. That is why Jesus did not rescue John from his ordeal.

Jesus preferred to answer John's question by deeds rather than words. "...At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind" (Luke 7:21). After this tangible proof that he was Christ, Jesus told the two messengers to convey to their noble master what they had seen and heard of his divine miracles and teachings. He wanted them to know that someone who had gained so wide a reputation, shown so much power, and took such kindly interest in teaching the poor, must be the Christ. He was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that says: "Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 29:19); also: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1).

**"After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.' (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)" (Luke 7:24-30).**

In his answer to John's question, Jesus emphasised the importance of his deeds as evidence of his heavenly origin. If he were really the Christ, it would be shown in his deeds as well as his words. Fearing that his silence, his method of answering John's question, and his restraint in saving him might be misinterpreted as neglect, Jesus praised him as soon as John's two messengers had left. He did not want his praise to reach John's ears, fearing it might be taken as consolation, or even flattery. Praising people, when they are not around, doubles the value of a compliment.

Jesus reminded his hearers of John's days of success. John's listeners had left their homes and work, flocking to him in the wilderness to hear his words, and to be baptized by him. Jesus asked the people if they had found John fickle, riddled by fears or ambitions, a reed bending in the wind. The answer was, of course, in the negative. Was it John's firmness, determination, or assertiveness that had been the reason for his imprisonment? Had the crowds found John to be a selfish man, searching for the luxuries of life? Was any contradiction, between John's actions and words, a reason for disobeying his teachings? Did they not rather find him extremely self-denying, giving his whole self to the service of God by serving mankind? It is therefore unfair to regard John the Baptist's questions concerning Jesus, through his two messengers, as an indication of weakness or indecisiveness.

If the people considered him to be a prophet, they were right. But he was also greater than a prophet. Neither Moses who gave them the Law after delivering them out of Egypt, nor Elijah who resisted idol worship and performed amazing miracles, nor David who looked after his people as a king for forty years and gave the world his wonderful Psalms, has rendered the world a more essential service than John the Baptist. John paved the way for Christ and directed people towards him.

If the saying is true that "the creation is God's dependent, and his most beloved is the most beneficial of his dependants", then John the Baptist is truly his most beloved. Jesus' testimony about John proves these words: "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). This means he was greater than any other prophet who was born naturally, excluding Jesus. John the Baptist excelled all other Old Testament prophets by actually seeing Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Christ ended his words by saying, "...yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). This means that the lowliest believer in the New Testament realises and understands more -- than any Old Testament believer -- that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual one, and that Jesus came to redeem his people by his death.

Jesus censured the elders of the Jews because they were the ones about whom one could say, "Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13:30). Instead of being the first to benefit from John's service of preaching and baptising, they rejected God's will for themselves, and refused to be baptised by John because of their knowledge and position in society. Sinners, however, obeyed God's righteous demands and were baptised by him. They approved of God's goodness which was shown by John's proclamation. Jesus said that the elders of the Jews criticised John for remaining distant, keeping away from people, and choosing an ascetic lifestyle. They said that John was possessed, so they rejected him. Then, they criticised Jesus for living among people, being near them, choosing to live a simple life, sharing with others their joys and sorrows. They said he was "...a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'" (Luke 7:34); so they rejected him too. These elders proved to be insincere in levelling both charges, making clear the fact that true wisdom can never be shown and promoted except by its true sons.

Dear Reader, do not be unbelieving but trust in Jesus Christ. Open your heart now and receive him as your Lord and Saviour. He is God's only way to salvation.

## 2. Jesus Visits A Pharisee

**"Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner.'" (Luke 7:36-39)**

Simon, the Pharisee, invited Jesus to dine with him along with some other guests, and Jesus accepted. We do not know Simon's reason behind this invitation because we do not know his character. He might have had the good intention to simply honour a famous man and witness his deeds and hear his words. He may also have had the malicious intention, along with his colleagues, to catch Jesus in his words. Jesus' motive in accepting the invitation is clear, however, because we know his character and the principles by which he lived. Jesus loved his enemies even though they tried to kill him. He proved himself to be zealous in seizing every opportunity to win men's souls, whether they were great or not.

Although Simon respected Jesus for his miracles and widespread reputation as a prophet, he had some contempt for him because of his humble background. Jesus was a poor man from Nazareth. He had not graduated from Jewish theological schools and did not observe the Pharisaic traditions and customs. Simon despised Jesus from a religious standpoint. This is why he did not offer Jesus the due respect and service he deserved as his guest. It appears that Simon considered his invitation alone to be sufficient honour for that Nazarene.

The news of Jesus being invited to Simon's home reached every part of town; maybe also the news of his not being honoured. In response to this, a woman, known to be a sinner, became enthusiastic. She could not tolerate the poor treatment of such a great prophet and teacher, and wanted to compensate for the lack of hospitality he had received. Arriving with a bottle of rich perfume, she stood at Jesus' feet. This was because she knew her humble position as a sinner in the eyes of all those gathered. She also felt the heavy weight of her sinful past. She did not dare to anoint Jesus' head with her rich perfume. Instead, she poured it over his feet. Can we not consider her to be one of the tired, weary, heavy-laden people who had heard his holy call a few hours earlier? She accepted his invitation and came to him in repentant faith.

We can picture her standing behind him, applying the perfume to his feet. But more precious than this were the tears of her repentance streaming down her cheeks and mixing with the fragrance. Some of her tears were those of shame, due to her shameful past. Others were tears of joy because of her gratitude to Jesus for the new life and forgiveness he had granted her. In him, she found rest and peace for her soul. Her honourable deed was familiar to the onlookers. What they could not understand was seeing a wicked woman shedding tears of repentance before their eyes, respectfully wiping Jesus' feet with her hair, the dearest thing to her. They may have attributed what she had done to her being drunk, little realising that she did what she did out of humility, accepting her forgiveness with thanksgiving. She kissed the feet of Jesus who had led her to repentance and salvation.

Simon, the Pharisee, avoided tax collectors and sinners completely. That is why he was so unhappy to have such a woman in his house. He was also offended by what she had done to Jesus. He must have been astonished at Jesus for his acceptance of what she had done to him. Did he not know who she was? If he did, then he was wrong in allowing her to touch him. If he did not, then he could not have been a prophet. These thoughts had been turning in Simon's mind, but he did not say a word. Jesus knew what Simon was thinking. He told him a parable:

**"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher', he said. 'Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.' 'You have judged correctly', Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has**

**not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"** (Luke 7:40-50)

A creditor had two debtors; one owed him fifty silver coins, the other owed him five hundred. He cancelled the debts of both. Which one then will love him more? Simon replied, "...the one who had the bigger debt cancelled." Jesus made it evident to Simon that he was the one who owed little, whereas the sinful woman was the one with the larger obligation. Jesus contrasted the tears she shed on his feet with the customary foot washing that Simon did not offer him. He also showed the difference between her kissing his feet and the kiss Simon never give him. Thirdly, he contrasted the rich perfume she poured upon his feet with the common oil he should have put on his head, but did not. Jesus interpreted her good deed as an appeal to have her sins forgiven, and he granted her request. Her loving thankfulness to the one who forgave her came as a result of her awareness of the greatness of her sins. Simon did not feel the real weight of his sins, and so did not feel any grateful love. Simon could not understand her feelings.

Jesus' statement, "... her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much...." is read along with this parable. Jesus declared to Simon that a sinner loves much because he has been forgiven much. It is not to be concluded that a sinner's love precedes forgiveness or causes it. A man is not forgiven because of his great love, but he loves much because he has been forgiven an enormous debt.

Jesus then said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." When Jesus knew that the onlookers were criticising him, as they did when he forgave the paralysed man, he said to the woman: "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." Those who are forgiven much, make every effort not to return to their sins.

Even today, Jesus is still the only Saviour who can forgive the sinner and turn him back to the right way. Have you found this Saviour, the only one who can truly save?

### **3. The True Relatives Of Christ**

#### **3.1. Curing a Demon-Possessed, Blind, and Mute Man**

**"Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive**

**out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.'" (Matthew 12:22-29)**

People brought to Jesus a sick man who was demon-possessed, blind, and mute. When Jesus cured him completely from his three afflictions, people rejoiced and questioned whether this wonderful benefactor was indeed their promised Christ, the Son of David. The Pharisees and scribes, who came down from Jerusalem to watch Jesus, could not keep silent concerning the emotions of love and respect which the crowds began to show toward him. They used their political influence to try to keep others away from Christ. They said that he was a tool in the hands of Beelzebub, the chief of the demons, spreading this rumour among the people who had not heard Jesus personally. Jesus knew what was in peoples' hearts and realised what the leaders of the Jews had said about him. Again, he made clear to them his divine ability to know their hidden thoughts without seeing or hearing them. He called them and refuted their evil judgement in three ways:

1. The first argument of Jesus disproved the accusation that he was guided and helped by the Devil. It could not be true that the Devil would assist Jesus, the one who resists him and snatches away his victims. If the Devil would assist Christ, his own kingdom would fall because it would be divided.
2. The second argument of Jesus dealt with the Jewish elders charging him with having cast out demons by Satan's power. If this indictment were true, it would also apply to the other Jews who said they drove out demons. Thus, these other Jews prove the elders to be liars, and become the judges who condemn them. Because these Jews declared that they drove out demons by the power of God, however, they silenced their elders.
3. The third argument of Jesus showed that his driving out demons was the work of the Spirit of God who announced the advent of the new kingdom of Christ. Jesus attacked the Devil, tied him up, and snatched his prey from his clutches. When Jesus drove out the demon from the demon-possessed man, he proved himself to be a powerful Saviour who saves to the utmost. How could Jesus have been the Devil's partner if he is the one who binds him with the chains of his authority?

Is it not strange that the Pharisees saw only the power in Jesus' miracles, but not the mercy? The Devil has great power but it is not tempered with compassion. The elders of the Jews had not seen the element of tenderness in Jesus' miracles. They could not see what was as clear as the daylight; namely, that the nature of the Devil and all his deeds are contradictory to the works of mercy and goodness. How great was their blindness when they ascribed to the Devil the good works that no one could undertake, except the Creator of all good things.

### **3.2. Neutrality in Religion is Impossible**

**"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." (Matthew 12:30)**

After having explained that his miracles were from God, Jesus proved that we cannot adopt a neutral position in religion. Every man is either for Jesus or against him. Whoever does not do Jesus' works is not with him, even if he pretends to be. All who do not do Jesus' works perform the work of Satan, his enemy; they do not gather with him but scatter. From birth, everyone is in the service of Satan and cannot stop this service except by moving, intentionally, into the service of Christ.

In the spiritual world, there are only two kingdoms, and there is an ongoing war between them, which does not end. There is no reconciliation or truce between these two opponents. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of light, truth, and righteousness. The kingdom of the Devil is the kingdom of darkness, vanity, and iniquity. A position of neutrality is impossible between these two kingdoms.

Jesus performed all his miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit led Jesus and strengthened him from start to finish. The elders of Israel insulted the Holy Spirit by attributing Christ's deeds to Beelzebub, the chief of demons. This is why Jesus condemned them openly for misleading the people. It was not the first time that they passed an unjust judgement on him. They had done it before when he said to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). Jesus now passed a fair judgement on them. What they thought and said about his driving out demons was blasphemous.

In the midst of Jesus' severe judgement on the elders of the Jews, he pronounced the greatest consolation to sinners. He proclaimed that God's forgiveness includes all sins, however grievous they are, as long as there is true repentance with faith. There is no excuse left for the greatest sinner to postpone his salvation from Sin and its results. There is no reason for any sinner to despair, however great his sins, as long as he repents and asks for forgiveness. What was prophesied by Isaiah confirms what Christ said:

*"'Come now, let us reason together', says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'" (Isaiah 1:18)*

### **3.3. Talking Blasphemously against the Holy Spirit**

**"And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:31,32)**

Jesus made clear to the elders of the Jews, and to the whole world, one kind of sin that is excluded from any hope of forgiveness: talking blasphemously against the Holy Spirit. He

said that all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven; but whoever talks blasphemously against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. That person will be condemned forever. True repentance is by the work of the Holy Spirit. Whoever insults the Holy Spirit forbids his work within him. He deprives himself of the only way he can reach repentance and the forgiveness that follows it. Whoever fears talking blasphemously against the Holy Spirit proves for sure that he has not done it. The real blasphemer completely loses every spiritual perception and thus loses every hope for forgiveness because there is no hope of his repentance. A total indifference towards the matters of the Spirit had killed his conscience. Thus, he deliberately refuses to repent, hardens his heart, and insists on choosing darkness until the Spirit of God finally leaves him.

From Christ's words about how bad blasphemy is, we have proof that the Holy Spirit is a person, a member of the Holy Trinity in the One God.

### 3.4. Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaks

**"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:33-37)**

Jesus drew the attention of his audience to the fact that words are the fruit of one's thoughts. Words cannot be corrected, unless thoughts are first put right. The evil thoughts of the Jews' leaders could not but lead to their telling lies. They could not say anything good. This is why they deserved the title which John the Baptist gave them, and which Jesus himself repeated: "brood of vipers". Their situation was even more difficult because their poison was inherited. In this context, Jesus wisely said that the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. Jesus taught that even a single bad word will be judged at the Day of Reckoning because it is proof enough of the corrupt condition of the heart which is the final test for condemnation or justification.

### 3.5. The Religious Leaders Ask for a Miracle

**"Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. When an evil spirit comes**

**out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.'" (Matthew 12:38-45)**

The elders of the Jews asked Jesus to perform a miracle. They wanted to be amused. They deserved a bitter reproach for their spiritual blindness. Jesus said these evil and godless people asked him for a miracle but that they would not be given one except that of the prophet Jonah. The root of that generation's corruption was that their hearts turned from the love of God, and they chose instead to adhere to the teachings of men. Those elders pretended to be ready to believe in Jesus if he would satisfy them with miracles. They had seen more miracles than they needed in order to be convinced that Jesus was the promised Christ, and to believe in him. Unfortunately, we find many like these Jews in every generation. They find excuses for their rejection of Christ in what they call "lack of proof or evidence". The real situation, however, is that they do not want to believe. They refuse to believe even if the proofs are multiplied.

Jesus referred them to the miracle of Jonah, which was familiar to them. In it, there is a prophecy that he would stay in the tomb for three days and three nights. Jesus' quotation has proved the historical authenticity of the story of Jonah, for he would never have used a fable to prove and illustrate his great work on the Cross to redeem his people. The great fish in the story of Jonah is not imaginary. Jesus said that God, on the Day of Judgement, will prefer the pagan men of Nineveh and the pagan Queen of Sheba to those who claim to be men of God but do not repent. The men of Nineveh repented of their sins when they heard Jonah preach. The pagan Queen of Sheba travelled a long way from her country and believed what Solomon said. Jesus, who is far greater than both Jonah and Solomon, appeared to the Jews and talked to them with heavenly words of wisdom, but they did not believe in him.

Jesus likened this "wicked and adulterous generation" to a man who was demon-possessed. The demon went out but soon came back again with seven more evil spirits. The application of this illustration is that, at the time of John the Baptist, the Jews went to him, repented through his teaching, and accepted his baptism; but they did not believe in Jesus nor accept his Holy Spirit to live in them. Thus, their hearts remained empty and the previous evils came back to them, redoubled. Jesus asserted that the end of this evil generation, to whom he was speaking, would be more evil than its beginning. His prophecy came true. Their evils increased until they overflowed. Then, a time of immense destruction and fearful agony came, which Jesus described as a great anguish that has never been before and will never be again.

The lesson we learn from this parable is that the mere quitting of evil deeds is futile unless we fill their place with good things which are opposed to these evil things. If we do not

replace the spiritual vacuum which is left after an evil spirit has been cast out, the demon will return with new evil spirits. The heart can never remain empty. Unless the Spirit of God comes into the heart and indwells it in place of the Devil, the Devil comes back more active than ever, and possesses that heart more fully than before. Returning to sin is much worse than committing it in the first place.

### 3.6. Jesus' Family Seeks Him

**"While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.' He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" (Matthew 12:46-50)**

Jesus' relatives knew about his disciples and the crowds pressing around him. This pressure left Jesus with no time even to eat. His relatives went out to lay hold of him, for they said that he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). They should have known that a religiously zealous person is not the one who is out of his mind, but rather an undedicated religious person.

We cannot measure Christ's sadness as his mother and brothers came to take hold of him. They were unable to reach him, however, because of the pressing crowds. Is it not strange that people respect a person who is devoted to raising money, fighting enemies, or studying hard, whereas fervency in religion is considered "madness"? When Christ's family was unable to reach him, they sent someone to call him, saying that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him. They wanted him to go with them, so that they could find a cure for him. They would have even taken him by force, if necessary, and cruelly claimed that he was mentally ill and in need of treatment.

Jesus found this an opportunity to teach his relatives, his disciples, and his audience some essential lessons which he hoped would take root in their hearts. He taught them that he was not from this world. He did not consider his real mother, brothers, or sisters to be different from other people. His temporal, earthly relationship with his relatives had disappeared. A new, permanent, spiritual bond had taken its place. This kinship is independent of earthly ties, and it binds him to all who unite with him spiritually. He stated this in his question to the one who spoke to him. He said: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Then, he pointed to his disciples, both men and women, and said: "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus' love and respect for his mother, Mary, and his human brothers was much stronger and purer than that of any other human being. Jesus was an example of perfection in this matter, as in any other. But his faithfulness and devotion to his relatives was subject to his honesty

and love for the Father who sent him. It was also governed by the spiritual love which binds him to his real family, the spiritual children of the Heavenly Father. From Jesus' answer, we learn that all those who do the will of God are the people nearest and dearest to him.

One can imagine how comforting these words were to Christ's messengers who, in the coming days, would suffer bitter persecution at the hands of their enemies. Jesus rewarded everyone who did good to his messengers, and punished all those who did evil to them, even those who merely neglected to do them good. They experienced what Zechariah described: "...whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

Jesus refused to be led by natural human love for his relatives. This kind of love is dominated by spiritual short-sightedness. Jesus then left the house, went toward the sea, and began to relate a series of parables to explain and clarify what the kingdom of heaven is like.

## 4. Jesus Teaches in Parables

Jesus often taught in parables, but these were free of mystical elements or humour, for they revealed to his audience the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

### 4.1. The Parable of the Sower

**"Then he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.'"**  
(Matthew 13:3-9)

In this parable, Jesus divided his audience into four groups. The people in the first group hear the Word only with their ears. They do not understand with their minds, either because they are preoccupied with other things, or because their hearts are hardened from previous indulgence in sin. These people are no different from those who do not hear. Their lack of benefit is seen quickly, for they do not taste the sweetness of this spiritual food. Christ likened these people to the seeds which fall on the road, being trampled by people and snatched away by birds. They do not bear fruit.

The second group consists of those who understand the teaching and accept it joyfully. Their joy is superficial and temporary, however, for they neither count the cost, nor prepare themselves for the potential internal and external resistance which awaits everyone who loves the Word of God. That is why, whenever troubles occur, they fall away from what they first professed and rejoiced in. Jesus likens these people to the seeds which fall on shallow, rocky

ground. They sprout quickly but dry up soon and bear no fruit when the sun shines on them, for there is no depth of soil.

The third group comprises those who understand the teaching and accept it with joy. They stand steadfast in the face of opposition, unshaken by persecution and whatever losses result from it. But their firmness comes from their natural stubbornness, for they consider themselves to be the martyrs of religion. They do not bear fruit because they neither glorify God nor benefit mankind. They are absorbed with worldly matters. If they are poor, they are preoccupied with their need. If they are rich, they are distracted by their possessions and many activities. Jesus likens them to the seeds which grow well -- those in which other people see all the symptoms of fruition. Only at the harvest does their fruitlessness become known. They did not bear fruit because the "thorns" of life overcame and choked them.

The fourth and last group embodies those who are free from the defects previously mentioned. These people ask first for God's kingdom and righteousness. They are not distracted by worldly affairs -- whether they are rich or poor. Therefore, they are not affected by their tribulations but see them instead as opportunities for developing perseverance (Romans 5:3). They understand well what they hear and bear much fruit for the glory of God and the well-being of others. But their fruits differ according to their gifts, opportunities, and prevailing circumstances. Jesus likens these to the seed sown in good soil, which pays off thirty, sixty, or one hundred times.

In explaining this parable, Jesus gave a clue which helped to explain all the other parables for which he provided no explanation. When he began this parable, he alerted his audience by saying "Behold..." When he ended it, he said "He who has ears, let him hear!"

## 4.2. The Parable of the Weeds in the Field

**"Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 'An enemy did this', he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No", he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"**  
(Matthew 13:24-30)

This second parable is based on the fact that the enemy, the Devil, injects into the external kingdom of Christ -- the Church -- people who are not God's own. These cannot be identified at first; but when the truth begins to emerge gradually, godly people will want to separate them and remove them from the Christian Church. This separation is dangerous, however, because the leaders of the Church can not know what is in people's hearts. They could turn

out a repentant disciple and, at the same time, end up keeping a treacherous deceiver who has no genuine Christian qualities. God asks the leaders of his people to be careful and reflect sufficiently before they turn out weak and fallen persons, so that they will not misjudge and act unjustly.

In this parable, Jesus likened himself to a man who sowed good seeds in his field. His enemy, Satan, is likened to another man who sowed weeds in the same field. Jesus likened his angels to the reapers, and the Day of Judgement to the harvest time. He ended his parable saying that the Son of Man will send out his angels who will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin, and all who do evil. They will throw them into a fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

### 4.3. The Parable of the Secret Growth of Seeds

**"He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'" (Mark 4:26-29)**

Jesus told this third parable without explaining it. He expounded on the fact that growth in his spiritual kingdom on earth is a natural process that is inevitable. It comes gradually and not suddenly, and has a secret, mysterious origin which no man can understand or explain.

### 4.4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

**"He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.'" (Matthew 13:31,32)**

When Jesus told this parable, it was the beginning of winter, and farm work was evident all around him. Christ told his audience a wonderful parable, related to agriculture, to show that his kingdom in this world is small to begin with, but great at the end. In terms of external growth, it will become so large that it will be able to serve people very well. Jesus likened his kingdom to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds which grows little by little to become a tree -- one in which birds come to build their nests. Due to its medicinal uses and its painfully sharp and pungent properties, the mustard seed is a good example of the new kingdom brought in by Jesus Christ. The mustard seed also has healing properties when it is crushed, and it is the same with the power of the Saviour. His work of Redemption on the Cross depended on his being bruised.

#### 4.5. The Parable of the Yeast

**"He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.'" (Matthew 13:33)**

This is the fifth parable which Jesus told. In it, he explained that the growth of the kingdom is not outward but inward, as with living organisms. The success of the Church of Christ does not depend on external causes, but internal ones. Thus, political power and material wealth, as a rule, do not promote the growth of the true Church of Christ. Quite often, they restrain that growth although they may nurture outward manifestations which may wrongly be called the Church of Christ. The true Church grows only by its members who obtain heavenly power which indwells them by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also said that true religion, by its nature, penetrates and controls every minute detail of the believer's life; the body, mind, and soul are kept wholly under the influence of the faith in the heart. Jesus illustrated these facts with a story about some yeast that a woman mixed into a large amount of flour until the whole batch of dough rose. It was appropriate for him to liken his influence in his kingdom to the effect of yeast because although it is unseen, it increases all the time. Also, just as yeast works its way through flour, so that in the end both the yeast and the flour are of one nature, so too Jesus became one with mankind. He was made man to save man; he works his way through mankind to save souls. Likewise, we too become one with the needs of suffering humanity in order to save others. The salvation of mankind cannot be accomplished by angels, but by man.

These beautiful parables of Christ are some of those that have been preserved for us. In the Gospel according to Mark, it is written: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything..." (Mark 4:33-34). He did this to make what the Psalmist had said come true: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old..." (Psalms 78:2).

#### 4.6. Why Did Jesus Teach in Parables?

After addressing the crowd at the lake, Jesus left with his disciples and went home. The disciples asked him why he preached in parables that needed explaining. He answered that he intentionally meant to hide the truth from those who rejected the light that had already been given to them. They had lost every right to be given any more light. The disciples then asked Jesus to explain to them the parable of "the Sower". He censured them, saying: "...Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" (Mark 4:13). "...I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Matthew 13:17).

In spite of being upset over his disciples' lack of understanding, Jesus was tolerant and explained to them the parables of "the Sower" and "the Weeds". This explanation made it easy for them to understand the other parables. From the other parables that Jesus gave, we could think that the success of the kingdom of God is not certain, but in the two parables, "the Mustard Seed" and "the Yeast", we see that the success of the kingdom of God is certain even though it starts out small.

#### 4.7. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

**"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." (Matthew 13:44)**

At home, Jesus taught his disciples three more parables. He wanted to show them that the value of his kingdom is greater than anything else in this world. If a man sacrifices everything for it, he is a wise man. Jesus also wanted to show that some people, though they do not search for the real treasure of religion, find it accidentally while doing other things. This is what happened to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22). He was like the man who found a treasure hidden in another man's field. He went and sold everything he had, and bought that field to obtain the riches.

#### 4.8. The Parable of the Precious Pearl

**"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:45-46)**

The accidental finding of treasure, which we read earlier, is not the rule, whereas the serious search for it is. Here, we see a man searching among all the world religions, who then comes upon Christ's spiritual kingdom. He forgets everything else and spends everything near and dear to him in order to secure it. To illustrate this principle, Christ told a parable about a man looking for fine pearls. When he found one that was very precious, he sold everything he had and bought it.

#### 4.9. The Parable of the Net

**"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-50)**

Jesus ended the series of parables that day with a parable referring to the end of the world,

when the angels of the Divine Judge will separate the evil from the righteous. The evil ones will be thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This teaches the sinner not to take comfort in the illusion that God's mercy will last forever, but to pay attention now. Jesus alerted the sinner in the parable of the net cast in the sea, which gathered fish of every kind. When it is full, it is pulled to shore and the fish are separated. The good are gathered in vessels while the worthless are thrown away.

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. 'Yes', they replied. He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.' (Matthew 13:51,52).

Jesus asked his disciples if they had understood all this. They said that they did. He told them that every learned person in the matters of the kingdom has to take out of his treasury new and old things. The old things are the words of Scripture. The new are whatever is derived from them, which deserves careful consideration for understanding the intended meaning. The things we heard as children are old, but the lessons we learn from them are new and suitable for every new day's need. All the facts of God's Book are the old and precious treasures from which we take the new in order to strengthen the weak in faith, show the way for the ignorant, comfort the sad, and guide the errant.

## 5. Christ Calms The Storm

**"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'" (Mark 4:35-41)**

The day was about to end and evening was near. The disciples sent the crowd home and took Jesus with them, setting sail to the other side of the lake. Other boats followed them. As they sailed in the dark, Jesus was sleeping on a pillow in the back of the boat. The Scriptures mention that Jesus hungered, thirsted, was sad, tired, wept, and rejoiced; but it was never mentioned in the Bible that he slept, except on this occasion. As the Son of Man, he slept. This gives decisive proof of his true humanity. Regarding his divine nature, however, David's words are still true: "He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:4). Thus, in spite of this physical sleep, he was awake and watching over his companions in the boat while they were steering it into the coming storm from the surrounding hills. The disciples had spent most of their lives by this lake and had encountered many storms in its

waters. That is why they began to prepare the sails and oars for a possible emergency which this violent tempest might bring.

It did not take very long for the waves to wash over the boat, filling it with water. The situation became dangerous. Long ago, an ark carrying eight people -- the family of righteous Noah -- survived a mighty flood. Would this small nucleus of Christians in the world, consisting of Jesus and his disciples, survive this storm? Was not their safety as important as the safety of Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth?

We see in this storm the devastating powers taking advantage of Christ's sleep, trying to destroy him and his disciples. We can imagine those fishermen and their courageous efforts in trying to withstand the storm. We can hear them shouting instructions to one another over the wind and roaring waves. We can see them staggering under the violent swells, in the dark of the night. They made every effort to empty the boat. A ship can weather an unsettled sea, but when the angry sea gets inside the ship, it can never survive. In the same way, if a man faces a storm of evils in this world, he can save himself. But when the storms of evil rage in his own heart, he can never survive. The ocean storms do not drown a man. What destroys him is the storm within his soul. This is true of a Church, as well as of its individual members. The wicked around it can never destroy it, but the evil ones within it can!

Did it occur to the disciples that Jesus could keep the boat and its occupants from all harm, even though he was sleeping? We do not think so. Great fear can disturb the mind and drive out faith whenever it is weak. The disciples lacked faith in Christ while he was asleep, as we lack faith in him because he is out of our sight. The disciples may have noticed the coming of the storm before they put out to sea, but it is not safe to assume that they blamed Christ for having insisted that they leave the shore after they wanted to stay in the harbour. Maybe they wondered how he could still be asleep, despite their cries and the roar of the storm. How could he be so indifferent to the great danger facing them?

It could even be possible that, after the storm became worse, Jesus meant to put their faith to the test. At first, their love and respect for him probably stopped them from waking him up. They did not expect any help from him in guiding the boat. But when all their devices were exhausted, and all their efforts had failed, there was nothing left for them but to do but to wake him. Did they not have a right to ask for his help with this great danger facing them? They shouted, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" It seems they quickly forgot what they had learned about his divinity and tremendous power, and, in their ignorance, they thought that harm could come to a boat carrying a man whom they had come to know as the true Lord. At last, they mustered up the courage to wake him -- the one who "...gathers the waters of the sea into jars" and "puts the deep into storehouses" (Psalms 33:7); the one who said: "Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD. ``Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it" (Jeremiah 5:22).

When Jesus woke up, he found two tempests: one on the lake, the other in his disciples' hearts. Although he was interested in reproofing the second one more than the first, he, in his kindness, began by rebuking the stormy sea. He knew that calming down the disciples would not be effective unless he first quieted the storm; so he did just that. The Master of the Sea said, "Quiet! Be still!"

This miracle is different from Moses' miracle when he held his rod over the sea by God's order. Jesus only had to speak in order to subdue the roaring waves. He was the one about whom it was written: "Who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations" (Psalm 65:7). To him, we witness and say with the Psalmist, "You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them" (Psalm 89:9). The one who reproofed the Sea of Galilee is the one, who in the past, had parted the Red Sea. The Israelites then walked upon the dry sea bed. God ruled over the Red Sea to serve the people who feared him. He quieted the roaring of the Sea of Galilee to allow his disciples to sail on. As sheep do not recognise or obey anyone except their shepherd, so too the winds and waves only recognise and obey the voice of their Maker. Upon his order, the wind became silent. This sudden stillness was unusual because, normally, the sea becomes calm gradually after a storm. In this way, this miracle was doubly effective.

In this story of the storm-tossed boat, we see an analogy of daily life. The safety of Christians and of the Church, in life's tempests, rests in Christ truly being present in the hearts of his people. He is the only one who can rebuke the forces of evil and bring about victory and tranquillity.

In this miracle, we have a glimpse of God's intention to restore man's sovereignty over nature, which he lost through the Fall. God secured this through the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross, and its outworking is twofold. First, a believer can meet all the dangers and harmful effects of nature without fear. Second, because of Christ's power in each believer, it is possible for them to overcome dangers and benefit from them. Just as the force of wind can be utilised to generate electricity, so too the believer can confront many other forces, avert their harmful effects, and make use of their benefits.

The wind represents the external misfortunes that overcome man, like the natural forces which kill the body. The waves of the sea represent the internal troubles seething within the human soul. They are Satanic forces that destroy the personality. In this double miracle, Jesus declared his intention to perform a double work within everyone who is buffeted about by the storms of life. He is the one who provides safety from both misfortunes, and grants the victory too. Misfortunes and tests are like the melting pot of a jeweller. Although the pot does not transform gold into copper, nor copper into gold, it does bring forth the genuineness of a substance and removes any impurities. It also makes gold brighter than the copper. In the same way, trials do not make the good, good, nor do they make the evil, evil. But they do bring out the truth and expose the corruption of wicked people, just as they reveal the

goodness of the righteous and increase it.

Once the tempest on the sea was stilled, Jesus turned his attention to the storm raging in the disciples' hearts. He calmed it by a kind reprimand when he asked why they were frightened. Did they still have no faith? He demonstrated his power in dealing with external misfortunes as well as with internal trials which are more dangerous. At his word, both tempests were stilled, and through this experience, the disciples learned a valuable lesson. God permits trials and misfortunes to happen only for our good. We remember what the Apostle Paul said: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

## 6. Jesus Heals A Demon-Possessed Man

**They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!' For Jesus had said to him, 'Come out of this man, you evil spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'My name is Legion', he replied, 'for we are many.' And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.' He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man-- and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. " (Mark 5:1-20)**

After calming down the storm, something happened which turns our attention from Christ's works to the works of his adversary, the Devil, who was never silent about Christ during the whole of his public ministry. He tried to make up for failing to defeat Jesus in the wilderness by doubling his control over some people, and using them in his fight against Christ, his great enemy.

Among the Devil's human tools was this demon-possessed man wandering in the wilderness at the place where Jesus decided to get out of the boat. When this man saw Jesus' boat

coming, he left his shelter among the rocky graves and went to the place where Jesus would arrive. Previously, he had cut off all roads leading to the area, probably intending to attack any people who would enter that way -- especially Jesus, for he knew him. He came shouting and bleeding because he had cut himself with stones. At this, Jesus ordered the evil spirits to come out of him. Immediately, the man shouted, saying, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" The first effect of Christ's ordering the evil spirits to leave was torture for the possessed man. The Devil does not leave a person before he tortures and hurts him, throwing him to the ground. He finds pleasure in tormenting and destroying man. That is why the possessed man was frightened and asked to be rid of his pains. The Devil's anguish occurs when his victims are snatched from his grip. Thus, both the Devil and the demon-possessed man were shouting, "Do not torture me."

What a touching scene on the side of the lake. Jesus is standing, crowned with holiness, authority, and compassion. Behind him, the disciples are in great confusion as a result of their exhaustion from the previous night. They are also facing the new threat of the possessed man, and are uncertain as to their fate. In spite of their confusion, we can see on their faces the signs of pity for this man who was tortured with evil spirits. Here before them was this wild man, naked, bleeding, and bowing before their master. On his face was a look of hope -- the look of a man seeking help from someone whom he felt could deliver him from his pitiful condition.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" The man answered, "My name is Legion; for we are many." The demons suggested that Jesus allow them to enter a herd of pigs rather than be sent to the bottomless pit. Jesus granted their wish. There were about two thousand pigs feeding near the mountains, some distance from them. Owing pigs was forbidden to the Jews. The fact that some Jews owned pigs shows their preference of financial prosperity over religion. Jesus punished them by letting their unlawful herd perish. This was also a visible proof that Satanic possession is real, and that recovery from this condition is genuine and permanent. Everyone could see how enslavement to the Devil was to be punished. It was also proof of Christ's authority over the material goods which he disposes of according to his wisdom. The one who allowed such a loss to occur to the owners of the pigs is the rightful and original owner. Does he not allow such things to happen daily in this world, even among his followers? Every devout person should say to the Lord: "Everything you give me, I accept gratefully. Everything you take away, I offer gladly. Everything I wish to possess and do not receive, I forego, without grumbling." "...The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

When Jesus told the evil spirits to go, they went out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd then rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned. The men who were looking after the pigs were amazed at what happened, and they ran to tell their

story in the village and town. Those who heard rushed to the place where this strange incident occurred. When they arrived, they saw what had happened to the pigs, and noticed the demon-possessed man dressed, sitting quietly at Jesus' feet, listening to his teachings about the kingdom of God.

We would expect the people to have rejoiced at seeing Satan's power bound and his victim delivered from slavery. We would also think that they would have thanked Christ for his miracle. The strange thing is that they expelled Jesus from their town, for they counted the loss of the pigs greater than the benefit of having the Devil conquered.

What would this man, who was cured, do? Would he ask to return to his home and work, in order to make up for the long years he had lost? If his cure had been physical only, he would have done so. But Jesus never healed a body without healing the soul which is immeasurably more important. This man's spiritual cure is apparent because he asked to be with Jesus.

We have, in this demon-possessed man, a true example of a sinner. Surely, Sin is the madness of the soul, and the madness of the mind is merely a symptom of true madness, which is Sin. The demon-possessed man preferred his home to be the unclean graves rather than a clean house. His work was to hurt himself and any other person who passed his way. He shunned the company of healthy people and chose to associate with other men like himself, as well as with the wild beasts. He said to Jesus, "What do you want with me?" But Christ, in his infinite compassion, saved this man from his oppression. There has never been and never will be a saviour from the madness of Sin and its consequences, other than the Saviour who delivered this demoniac of Gedara.

## 7. Jesus Raises The Daughter Of Jairus From Death

"When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' 'You see the people crowding against you', his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, "Who touched me?"' But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.' While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. 'Your daughter is dead', they said. 'Why bother the teacher any more?' Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.' He did not let anyone follow him except

**Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum!' (which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.' (Mark 5:21-43)**

Jesus went to Capernaum after being driven out of Gear where he had cured the possessed man and destroyed the pigs. There was a man in this area named Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. He had a daughter who was about to die; there was no hope left but to resort to the famous Nazarene.

Jairus must have decided to go to Jesus, asking him to come to his house. But he found it difficult to leave his only daughter in her condition at the time. He also did not expect Jesus to come to his house if he sent for him, and he was unable to take his daughter to Jesus while she was so ill; so Jairus hurried to the shore, fell at Jesus' feet, and worshipped him. How great was everyone's astonishment when they saw their religious ruler in such a humble posture before the poor carpenter from Nazareth, the friend of tax collectors and sinners. However, what Jairus and the people of Capernaum had heard about Jesus probably helped them to understand Jairus' reverential behaviour. Great misfortune had humbled Jairus and led him to Jesus, where the door of mercy was opened before him. His misfortune was to turn into a greater blessing.

Jesus waited while Jairus described his daughter's condition, begging him earnestly for help. Jairus showed complete faith in Jesus, saying: "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." Jesus can never ignore a request like this accompanied with faith; for faith is the only bucket with which we can pull up the life-giving water from the well of salvation. It is the only eye with which we can see the way to heaven and walk in it, "for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

Here we face a question: Why did Jesus not order the girl's cure, without going to the house? He had done this twice before. Would it not have been a greater miracle and a more powerful reason for the crowd and the people of the town to believe in him? Maybe Jesus acted in this way because he knew what Jairus and the others did not know: the girl had already died after her father left the house. Jairus was the chief of the synagogue and, as such, would not ordinarily have been friendly to Jesus. Because Jesus went along with Jairus, he showed us an exemplary love -- that of one's enemy. Because Jairus completed the four essential conditions for receiving the Saviour's blessing, he received what he wanted; Jesus went with him to his house. These were the four conditions:

1. Coming to Jesus.
2. Humbling oneself before him.
3. Making one's request with fervour and earnestness.
4. Having a living faith in him.

While Jesus was walking towards the house of Jairus, he was thronged by the crowd and unable to walk quickly. This must have annoyed Jairus; minutes must have seemed like hours. What must have made him even angrier was another delay on account of a poor woman who needed help. She suffered from excessive bleeding. But this delay, as we shall see, brought blessing to Jairus, for it strengthened his faith and revived his hope.

This woman, who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years, approached Jesus. Her illness had wasted her strength, and she had spent all her money on medicines -- to no avail. Because of the nature of her illness, she was considered to be unclean according to the Law of Moses. That is why she could not have met Jesus alone to tell him about her sickness, nor could she speak about it in public. What could she do?

She had the power of faith in Jesus, along with her need of him. She must have said to herself: "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well. I do not have to disturb the teacher, nor do I have to face the crowd." She did not allow anything to stop her from doing what she thought was necessary. The crowds did not hinder her. She came behind this healer, touched the hem of his garment, and was cured immediately. Her restoration was sudden and unexpected.

This woman came from behind Jesus. She did not touch his body. She thought that he would never see her, nor be aware of what she had done. But, because he sees the unseen, he stopped walking and asked, "Who touched My clothes?" Peter responded, saying, "You see the people crowding against you, and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus was not inquiring about a random touch, but about the touch of faith; for nothing interests him more. This woman's faith distinguished her from many others like her who wanted to be cured. The mere touch of Jesus' clothes, accompanied with faith, led her to salvation. Without faith, even living with Jesus and sharing his company for three years will not bring about any significant results, as was the case with Judas Iscariot, the traitor. Judas had had the privilege of being with Jesus, yet did not have faith; so his condemnation doubled.

By this miracle, Jesus intended to bring about a physical and spiritual cure. He meant to strengthen his disciples' and Jairus' faith as well. Scripture says, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:10).

Jesus looked behind, saw the woman, and indicated that he knew her. She became terrified, for she did not know how tender and loving he was to people. She feared she might be

punished for taking something she had no right to take, or at least be sternly rebuked in front of the crowd. She could do nothing but to confess publicly. She came to him, bowed, and told him everything about her illness. She confessed what she had done secretly and how she had been wonderfully cured. He spoke to her with great pity and compassion: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Jesus resumed his walk towards Jairus' house. A messenger came from the house, saying: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any more?" Did Jairus feel sorry for his humility before Jesus? Did he regret leaving his house at the time of his daughter's death? Did he expect his comrades, the Pharisees, to be angry with him because he had gone to Jesus -- a man whom they hated for not submitting to their authority? Jesus realised all that was going in the mind of Jairus and comforted him, saying, "Do not be afraid; just believe."

When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house, he ordered his disciples to stay with the crowd outside, except for Peter, James, and John, whom he had begun to favour over the others. Thus, he took them with him to witness this great miracle. When he entered the house, he was disturbed by the crying and wailing, and he rebuked what was going on. He tried to remove their misconceptions about physical death by returning a soul to its body after it had departed. He likened death to sleep, in relation to the life to come. When a person sleeps, he wakes up refreshed. He said to those gathered: "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."

They (especially the hired mourners) mocked Jesus for not knowing the difference between sleep and death. He turned them out of the room. Nobody witnessed the battle by which Jesus overcame death except the father, the mother, and the three disciples. It was said of him by the prophets: "He will swallow up death forever..."; "[He] will ransom them from the power of the grave; [He] will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?..."; "...[He] has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...." (Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14; 2 Timothy 1:10).

Jesus said that no one could take his life from him but that he would lay it down willingly, for he had the power to lay it down and to take it again (John 10:18). He entered the room of death with these five persons, and, with his authority, held the girl's hand and spoke to the soul which had left the body. Jesus said, "Little girl, I say to you, get up." Then, life returned to the body; the girl got up at once and started walking around. Jesus told her parents to give her something to eat. This miracle caused great amazement.

## **7.1. Healing Two Blind Men**

**"As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord', they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to**

**your faith will it be done to you'; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, 'See that no one knows about this.' But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region." (Matthew 9:27-31)**

After Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter from death, he returned home. On his way, two blind men came behind him, shouting and begging for mercy. They showed their faith by calling him "Son of David". The Old Testament prophets asserted that Jesus would be the Son of David, the Messiah. Those two blind men, who could not see with their eyes, saw with their spirit and recognised Jesus as the Christ. Men of sight have not seen what these two blind men saw. They saw in Jesus what David had talked about: "He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death" (Psalm 72:13). They knew what Isaiah had said about Jesus -- that he would give sight to the blind. At first, Jesus did not grant their request nor pay attention to them. But his seeming indifference did not discourage them. Instead, they followed him and renewed their petition.

Why did Jesus appear to be indifferent towards them at first? He meant to test the power of their faith. He did not ask them if they believed that God was capable of healing them, but asked instead, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Because the two men were blind, they could not see the love in Christ's face that accompanied his power. Therefore, he declared his love to them with his hands. He touched their eyes, and their sight was restored at once. By opening their eyes, he opened to them the way to salvation, saying, "According to your faith will it be done to you." The reason for their success, was not in their knowledge, social status, or goodness, but in their faith.

## 8. Jesus Sends The Twelve Disciples To Preach

**"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" (Matthew 9:35-38)**

Jesus left Nazareth and began moving through the towns and villages serving the people, proclaiming the Good News, teaching in the synagogues, and curing the sick. He was disturbed by the peoples' condition. He likened them to a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Yes, they had shepherds, but only by name. These shepherds were hirelings who did not care about the sheep. They did not lead them to the green pastures, nor did they take them to the thirst-quenching waters. To such miserable and wretched sheep came the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for them; "when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them...."

Jesus began training his disciples to be able to take part in the harvest of souls. He called his

twelve disciples and sent them out, two by two. He had taught them for a long time. Now it was time to send them to serve others. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." He taught them that the owner of the harvest sends the reapers. They go in answer to prayer.

It is essential that the spiritual shepherds should be ready for their work. First, they have to volunteer. Then, they have to be chosen by the appropriate people. But their work can never succeed unless they are sent by the Spirit of God. Successful spiritual work does not depend on the theological schools which believers attend, nor on the salary they are offered, but on their being sent by the Lord of the harvest.

**"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.'" (Matthew 10:5-10)**

Jesus supplied those appointed disciples with enough resources as they went out, two by two. He gave them miraculous power and authority to heal, drive out demons, and raise the dead. Through these miracles, their proclamation would be verified. He also gave them what was more important: the direct instructions concerning the content and method of their preaching. Jesus made clear to them the difference between the people to whom they would preach and the elders of the Jews who made religion a business from which to gain material profit.

The good that is done by someone, who is not repaid, has a double reward. That is why Jesus gave his disciples this rule: "Freely you have received, freely give." To make it easy for them to follow that rule, Jesus guaranteed their material needs for their trip. He told them that these would come to them without their making any arrangements. He would care for their earthly needs as long as they continued to care for his spiritual interests. All things will be increased to those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

**"Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.'" (Matthew 10:11-15)**

Jesus reminded his disciples not to wander from one house to another in the same village. There would not be enough time to bring about the desired effect if they would go to more than one dwelling. The disciples had to get one household on fire with the Good News in each town, so that, when they left, the people of that home would influence the rest of the city. Since they would be representing the King who sent them, Jesus reminded them to give

stern warnings to those who would reject them and their teachings. Whoever would insult them would also be offending the King who sent them. Jesus would punish everyone who would harm them. All who reject a messenger representing the Heavenly Throne can never get away with it. They will face a fearful punishment.

**""I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."" (Matthew 10:16-20,28)**

Jesus prophesied to his disciples that they would face fierce persecution from those whom they served. They would be like sheep among wolves. Their work in proclaiming the Good News would expose them to hate and persecution by kings and rulers. They would have to be as gentle as lambs, avoiding viciousness and revenge. They also would need to know that the Spirit of God would never leave them and that they would need to rely on Him for defence. Jesus would be treated in the same way they were going to be treated. This would console them when they faced hatred by everyone for his name. The danger of physical torture or death would not justify their being scared or over-cautious, compared to the peril of eternal spiritual torment. God's care for them would include everything; even their very hairs were numbered (Matthew 10:30). Whoever confesses the Saviour here on earth without fear, will, in the end, get the Saviour's acknowledgement in heaven.

**""Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ``a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."" (Matthew 10:34-42)**

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. His kingdom is the kingdom of peace. But peace sometimes necessitates spiritual conflict to maintain it. Revealing the truth causes those in error to fight back, for Jesus did not come to bring peace to the world, but a sword. His work must separate the closest of relatives in many instances. This will make clear who it is that prefers to please family rather than God, forsaking the Heavenly King in favour of relatives. He who disowns God and denies his faith to save his life will be the loser. Whoever remains faithful will

receive a reward for the good things he does, however simple they are. Even giving a cup of cold water to one of Jesus' disciples, as a sign of love, will be rewarded. When Jesus had completed this speech, his messengers went everywhere to begin the crucial work that he had entrusted to them.

**"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."  
(Mark 6:30-34)**

After Jesus had sent his disciples to preach, King Herod beheaded John the Baptist. This was at the request of the wife of Herod's brother, for Herod had married her. When the twelve disciples came back from their service, they were surprised by the news of John's death. They must have been deeply affected; especially those who had first found the true way through his preaching.

When the disciples had told Jesus about the various teaching and preaching experiences they had throughout the country, the crowds began to flock to them, demanding so much service that there was no time left for the disciples to eat. Jesus thought it wise to take the disciples with him to a quiet place to rest. Also, John had recently been beheaded, so Jesus decided to keep out of sight with his disciples for a while. To the government officials, all of the people around Jesus could appear as if he were mustering together a mob in retaliation to John's being beheaded; so Jesus sent them away. He wanted to disperse the large crowds -- a situation that could be used as a pretence for his arrest.

The boat that was selected for his service was waiting, and their weariness called for some relaxation. The sea was the best place for Jesus and his disciples to withdraw from the crowd and the pressure of work. It was also a wise choice for them to leave the province governed by John's murderer, Herod. They went to the province of Herod's brother, Philip, who was a much better ruler than Herod. By relocating, Jesus would be better able to teach his disciples certain things which he could not teach them in town. He boarded the boat with them and set out to sea. Because the wind was not favourable, the ship was going slowly, which gave them an opportunity to rest.

The crowds, however, went ahead to Bethsaida, walking along the northern shore of the lake. The moment the ship arrived, the crowd, along with many of the local inhabitants, met Jesus and his disciples. His kind heart did not allow him to send them away, treat them badly, or scold them. As long as they sought him, he would respond to their needs. He restored those who needed healing, and then withdrew again. He took his disciples and went up a hill. As

soon as he sat down, a large crowd started coming towards him. He did not show signs of anger, but expressed compassion when he saw their hungry souls like stray sheep without a shepherd. He showed mercy toward them and healed those who were sick. The crowd remained with Jesus until evening. Then, he had a new problem: Who was going to feed these thousands?

## 9. Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

**"By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. 'This is a remote place', they said, 'and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?' 'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.' When they found out, they said, 'Five-- and two fish.' Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand." (Mark 6:35-44)**

That evening, the disciples were wondering what to do. They huddled together and decided to tell Jesus their proposal. They had not yet learned to be patient and wait for instructions from their master. They had also forgotten that he did not need anyone to remind him what to do. They must have thought that they had a better estimation of what was good for the crowd, for Jesus, and for themselves.

They came to Christ, saying: "This is a remote place .... and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." It seems they feared that the crowd might ask them for a meal. They thought these men, women, and children -- some of which were sick -- would suffer in this wilderness once evening came.

Jesus asked the disciples about some place where food could be obtained. They were quite aware of the difficulty of the situation into which Jesus had put them. They made their calculations and found that the bread alone would cost more than two hundred silver coins. Where was the money to come from? Did Jesus have it? He did not even have a place to lay his head. Even if they had found the necessary money, there was not enough time to go to several villages to buy such a large amount of food -- even bread alone -- and it was already getting dark. Above all, how would they transport that amount of food? A small amount of bread would not be a generous meal which a man like Jesus would offer to his guests. That is why they said to Jesus, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" They thought this answer would

convince Jesus to take their advice and send the people away.

Jesus knew quite well that they had no food. But he wanted to teach the disciples that those who want to do good to others would need him, for they have nothing to offer in and of themselves. At the same time, Jesus referred to the fact that God uses people to bring about his purposes in the world. He does not distribute his spiritual and earthly gifts directly, nor does he use angels, except occasionally. This law is for the benefit of those who give and those who receive, for it gives a chance for a love relationship to develop between the giver and the recipient. It also gives a chance for the benefactor to practice self-denial in the service of others.

The disciples objected to Christ's order, saying, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" Jesus asked: "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." By saying this, he reminded them that God works in co-operation with man whenever possible. Jesus did not want to create bread out of nothing, as long as there was something already there. He first used what was already the disciples' hands in order to teach them never to ask from people, nor even from God, what they already have available by God-given means. They have no right to ask for anything else until these means are exhausted. Dependence on others, when we are able to help ourselves, is worthy of rebuke. If we expect God to do whatever we want, we become lazy and over-dependent. It is only when human means fail or end that we should ask for God's intervention.

According to the account of this story in the Gospel of John (chapter 6:1-14), it was Andrew, Christ's first disciple, who noticed a boy among the crowd, having five loaves of bread and two fish. The boy may have been selling food. Andrew spoke to Jesus with some reservation, saying, "...but how far will they go among so many [people]?" (John 6:9). Jesus did not respond by saying: "Leave it. It is not worth mentioning"; neither did he say, "Give it to the crowd." Rather, he told them to bring it to him in order to teach them that he is the source of all good things and every blessing. He is the king and rightful owner. Everything we have is his, and he can do anything he wants without objection from anyone.

Because law and order are so important, both in the sacred and secular world, we find Jesus concerned about it. He ordered the people to sit in groups on the green grass. If the food were to be distributed haphazardly, the people would trample on one another, and the strong would overpower the weak. Some would take much, and others would get nothing. But with order, distribution would be fast, adequate, and fair. Just by looking at nature, it becomes obvious that God delights in harmony and order.

Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven, and thanked God. By so doing, he taught his disciples that every good thing we have, even the food we buy, is a gift from God. We should always give thanks to the generous Giver whenever we eat. We need

not only give thanks at mealtimes, but whenever we receive anything good. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

When Jesus thanked God, he blessed the food, broke the loaves and the fish, and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people sitting on the grass. Thus, he taught them to feed others first, and then themselves as is appropriate for all believers.

During the distribution to this large number of people, the miracle of multiplication took place. It is written: "He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied." The number of pieces that remained was greater than that which was there at first.

Through this impressive miracle that was full of lessons, Jesus taught his followers that he was ready to accept their feeble religious service and simple words, increase their power and influence, and make them many times more effective. He takes what is given to him and multiplies it, and then he returns it much increased. If we devote everything to Jesus -- our souls, bodies, talents, family, knowledge, possessions, time, efforts and all kinds of endeavours -- Jesus will accept and bless them, multiplying their value and usefulness. The greatest encouragement to even the most modest of benefactors comes from his certainty that the one who fed the thousands with very little can also increase his meagre service with overflowing blessings, so that it will do much.

There is another lesson we learn from Christ's interest in the leftovers. He feared that his disciples might make light of what was left, after the great miracle they had seen. He did not want them to think that he who had created enough for this large crowd out of so little would not care about the leftovers on the green grass. Indeed, he cares; one of his laws is: "...so that nothing is lost."

After Jesus fed the multitude, they wanted to crown him king. Jesus' first reaction was to separate his disciples from the enthusiastic crowd. He made them get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the lake, so as to give himself a chance to dismiss the people. It was not easy for them to leave their master in the midst of his great success and growing popularity. It had become clear to them that the door to worldly greatness and wealth was being opened to them. Jesus sent them away abruptly, for they had failed to understand his way of thinking. But we find him following up his abruptness with kindness, for it is mentioned that he bade them farewell. Though he would only be away from them a few hours, he parted from them warmly, showing his affection for them.

The second thing Jesus did was to send the crowd away, and the third was to go off alone to pray. His growing popularity, with the crowds, reminds us of Satan's tempting him in the wilderness two years earlier. Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Jesus was now facing the same temptation. This situation required personal prayer to

the Father in order to avert this new danger. That is why he went up the hill alone. When the people saw that Jesus did not return home with his disciples, they did not return to the far places from which they had come. They expected to see him at the same place the next day.

Jesus went off alone to a hill to pray as he had often done. But this time, after feeding the five thousand he had many reasons to do so. Among them was the Baptist's death. Other reasons for his departure were: the crowds' misguided belief in his earthly political kingdom, the disciples' approval of such a misconception, and his very own foreknowledge that most of those who pretended to be with him would, in the end, desert him.

## 10. Jesus Teaches About Faith

### 10.1. Jesus Walks on the Water

**"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost', they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you', Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come', he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith', he said, 'why did you doubt?' And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:22-33)**

Jesus was praying alone on a hill that night, while his disciples were in their boat. A strong wind arose and churned the lake, so that it was tossed about by the waves. The disciples had not forgotten what Jesus had done to the storm nearly six months earlier when he was with them, sleeping on the boat. But now, he was not with them. Did they believe that he who cured the sick from a distance with a word could really preserve their lives and keep them safe from a distance too?

They kept battling against the waves until the break of day, without managing to cross the lake. Jesus knew of their trouble from his quiet place of prayer. He was loving and did not want them to suffer more than was necessary for their own good. When he saw their confusion and the danger they were facing, he went down from the hill and walked over the ruffled waves, as if they were solid ground. He hurried to save them from their ordeal.

He is the "Word" about whom John, the beloved disciple, had written. The "Word" is he through whom all things were made (John 1:3). Job said about him, "He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8). Jesus did not go directly to the

boat, lest he should frighten his disciples. Instead, he walked beside them as if he were passing them. No doubt, they were familiar with the superstitious stories of their age, which included the supposed appearances of unpleasant phantoms. Now, for the first time in their lives, they were seeing what appeared to be a ghost or apparition. They cried out for fear. Maybe they hoped to frighten the ghost so that it would keep away from them! But that supposed "ghost" answered them with an unmistakable voice and with these loving, comforting words: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid!" This tender, encouraging voice is still heard whenever there is a confused believer who is troubled with the problems and fears in his life, especially when his troubles are a result of his sins, and he fears eternal isolation from God.

When the speaker, whom the disciples recognised, drew near, the daring Peter hoped he could walk on the water like his master. He shouted, "Lord, if it is You, tell me to come to You on the water." Would Jesus allow him to have what he asked for, despite his saying, "if it is You..."? Would Jesus allow him, after he had just said, "it is I"? The answer was "Yes!" if that was the way he could show his disciples that everything is possible with God, and that he can give anything to people whenever he so desires.

Peter succeeded at first when he got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. When his mind and eyes were directed at Jesus, he was not afraid; he could do the impossible. But his success led to failure, because he began thinking of himself and felt pride in doing something that no one else had done before. He turned his mind and eyes away from Jesus towards himself. The angry waves started to frighten him, and he began to sink. Even though he knew how to swim, it did not do him any good; he wanted to be with his comrades in the boat, despite the fact that they had probably envied him for walking on the water. He shouted, "Lord, save me!" immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and pulled him up. Then, he rebuked Peter, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" What David had written was fulfilled: "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters" (Psalm 18:16).

Peter was rescued from sinking, not because he took hold of Jesus, but because Jesus took hold of him. In the same way, the sinner is rescued when his hands get tired, his eyes close, and his hold of the Saviour is loosened; he sees nothing before him except death. But when he realises that the powerful Saviour, who does not sleep, is holding his hand, hope takes the place of despair.

When the disciples in the boat thought they saw a spirit, they cried out in order to keep it away. But after they knew it was Jesus, they received him on board, and so he came into the boat. The moment he entered, the wind diminished and the boat reached its destination. The Bible says that the disciples had not understood the miracle of the loaves, because their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52). When they saw this second miracle on the same day, they were amazed and astonished, even though Jesus had silenced the same sea for them a few months

previously. The moment the boat reached shore, they bowed before him for the first time as a group and said, "Truly you are the Son of God."

## 10.2. Jesus, the Bread of Life

**"The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?' Jesus answered, '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. 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.' Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.' So they asked him, 'What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."'" (John 6:22-31)**

At dawn the next day, those who were waiting for Christ on the other side of the lake began to search for him. They knew he had not entered the boat with his disciples, but had gone up the hill alone. They knew that there was no other boat to take him to the opposite shore. The crowd spent the night in the wilderness, intending to return home with a procession led by Jesus, after he returned from the hill in the morning.

When they found that he had preceded them to the other side, they were amazed. But Jesus, who was above all personal ambitions, ignored their praise. When they asked him how he had arrived, he answered, "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." He said they were looking for him, not because of the spiritual teaching -- the bread of life which lasts forever -- but because of the material food which spoils. He was ready and able to give them the food which lasts for eternal life, for he was the Son of Man. He had God the Father's seal to do just that. Thus, they opened the door for him to deliver a discourse about the bread of life which is one of his best-loved ones.

What matters to us as readers, more than anything else, is what this address reveals to us about the truth of Christ's personality. In it, Christ referred to the necessity of eating his body and drinking his blood six times. He repeated thirteen times the fact that he came from heaven, and declared twelve times that he is the one who gives eternal life to all who believe in him. He also assured his audience six times that salvation can only be for those who believe in him, for he was sent by God to save his people. He said four times that on the Day of Judgement, he would raise from death those who believe in him. He set himself apart from the rest of mankind when he called God "Father". He also claimed to have seen God. How

could a mere human being have said such things? How outrageous it would have been, had these words been uttered by someone who was merely a prophet. It is clear that Jesus intended his audience to understand that he was more than a mere human being.

It was most difficult for Christ's Jewish audience to accept his words about eating his body and drinking his blood. It caused bickering among them, for eating meat mixed with blood was forbidden them. They must have found his reference to drinking his blood much more disgusting than words about eating his body. Those who did not recognise his heavenly origin had the right to grumble about his words, for they thought him to be merely human, and they knew his family well. They must have wondered, "What right did he have to say such things?"

It is correct to compare Jesus to bread for several reasons. First, just as bread is necessary for living, there is, likewise, no life without him; and that life is only available through crushing him. Second, bread must be eaten; and the life of faith is only for those whose souls are dedicated to him by virtue of faith, which he likens to eating. Unfortunately, the audience took Christ's words literally, and took offence because of them. It became a stumbling block, not only for the Jews, but for many of his disciples too. Jesus warned them against literal interpretation by saying, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Even today, there are many legalistic people who adhere to the literal meaning, just like the Jews of Jesus' day.

Christ supported his words by referring to a coming event which was to be wonderful. He prophesied to them for the first time about his resurrection and his return to heaven, which many of his disciples who believed in him would witness. His fulfilled prediction would provide them with the best proof that he had come from heaven.

Jesus told his disciples that he knew what was in their hearts. He could also distinguish between true believers and counterfeits. He knew that the faith of some of his disciples was superficial, and that one of them was going to betray him; this he had known from the start. He referred to his substitutionary death for sinners by saying that he would lay down his life for that of the world. This speech came as a turning point between the Galileans' hailing him and their enmity which increased until it overwhelmed him on the Cross, in an act of ultimate rejection. After he had spoken, many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him. It could be that the twelve disciples' faith was shaken because of the others' desertion. Jesus, at this point, chose to open the door for them either to renounce or renew their allegiance to him. Peter spoke quickly for the twelve disciples, saying: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Even though Jesus was glad with Peter's answer, he felt sad for the one who would betray him, Judas Iscariot. He said in reference to him, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:70).

## 11. Rituals And Holiness Of Heart

**"Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!' Jesus replied, 'And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, "Honour your father and mother" and "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death." But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God", he is not to "honour his father" with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."' Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him "unclean", but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him "unclean".' Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' He replied, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.' Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us.' 'Are you still so dull?' Jesus asked them. 'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man "unclean". For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man "unclean"; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him "unclean".' " (Matthew 15:1-20)**

It seems that the later events in the life of Christ made the Jewish elders in Jerusalem eager to see him. They expected him to attend the Passover celebrations, and they hoped to find some fault in him to prosecute him and have him executed. But Jesus did not attend the feast. Disappointed, they sent some of their men to keep an eye on him, hoping that they could at least turn the crowd against him, his words, or his deeds.

But it was impossible to accuse Jesus of the least violation of God's laws. There was no way to attain their goal except through their extra laws which had evolved by the teachers of the Law. These were called the "traditions of the elders".

Mosaic Law was rigid on hygienic, moral, and spiritual cleanliness to show the importance of internal purity of the heart. In order to instruct people not to defile the soul with sin, Mosaic Law taught that lack of external cleanliness leads to internal defilement. As a result of this, the Jews, God's special people, separated themselves from the Gentiles around them. God wanted to keep them from acquiring the lifestyles and vain faith of the surrounding heathen peoples.

The Jewish elders, concerned more with the letter of the Law than its spirit, made the laws of cleanliness a heavy burden. They added many small rules to the Law of Moses. The famous Rabbi, Jose, said that eating with unwashed hands was a sin equal to adultery. The Jewish elders also taught that whoever commits this sin would be under the spell of a demon called "Sheta", while sleeping at night. It is said that when the famous Rabbi, Achiba, was in jail, he

was given just enough water for drinking and ceremonial washings. One day, the jailer did not bring him the necessary amount of water. Achiba was angry and decided to stop drinking and performing his ceremonial washings, saying, "I prefer to die rather than break my ancestors' rituals." The elders of the Jews insisted that washings should be on time, even if it took one and a half hours to draw the necessary water.

It was impossible for Jesus, as a reformer and teacher, to go along with these absurdities. His sensitivity would not allow him to approve of the heavy guilt the Jews placed on those who neglected the prescribed ceremonial cleansings. When Jesus refused to submit to these human precepts, his disciples did the same. The observers, who came from Jerusalem to watch him, noticed this violation and took advantage of it. They wanted to rebuke him publicly. For the sole purpose of criticising him, they asked him why his disciples did not follow the traditions of the elders. Jesus knew their malicious intentions and called them hypocrites.

Jesus did not strike at any particular kind of evil in the way that he lashed out at hypocrisy. He reserved his fiercest reproofs for hypocrites. How the world needs reformers to follow Christ's example in fighting this heinous sin! It also needs earnest men to expel this evil from religious circles, so that both the outer appearance and inner disposition of believers may be in harmony. Religion would then take on a new appearance, and God, whose name is "Truth", would be glorified.

We rarely find sarcasm in Christ's words. However, on this occasion, the Gospel according to Mark records that he said something to the Jewish elders that was quite ironic: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mark 7:9). He reminded them of their sticking to trivial points, while ignoring great ones. In Matthew 23:23,24, he said, "You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness.... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" Jesus' disciples saw the ceremonial washings as "gnats" while the elders of the Jews saw them as "camels". It should have been the other way around. The elders of the Jews were trying to take a speck out of the disciples' eyes but did not notice the plank in their own (Matthew 7:3,4).

Though the disciples followed Christ's example in neglecting these imposed cleansings, they did not understand the underlying principles. They asked him if he knew that the Pharisees were offended when he rebuked them. When they left the crowd and came into the house, they asked him to explain to them what he had said. He answered: "Are you still so dull? ... Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

## 12. Jesus Proclaims The Good News To The Gentiles

Jesus came to save the whole world. As he rendered his service to the Jews, he also served the Gentiles. He went into Phoenician territory with many objectives in mind. By moving into heathen areas, he gave himself and his disciples an opportunity to get some rest, physically and mentally. People there did not flock to him, for he was relatively unknown in those districts. He also found enough time to teach his disciples, in preparation for leaving them. By seeing new countries, the disciples' minds and horizons were broadened and they began to be ready for the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). They would also see, in this journey, a new witness to the truthfulness of his words when he said, "...many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). He wanted to teach them that salvation is not inherited, but attained only by personal faith in him. That is why he went with them to Tyre and Sidon, the best and most famous Phoenician cities.

Jesus entered a house there. Although he did not want anyone to know, he found it impossible to keep it a secret. How could the fragrance of his person stay hidden? News about his love and power had already reached those areas because some of the Phoenicians had gone to him in Capernaum.

It was impossible that such a traveller, as he, would enter a village with his disciples, without being noticed. A woman in great distress heard about him. She had a daughter who was demon possessed.

### 12.1. The Faith of a Phoenician Woman

**"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.' Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' 'Yes, Lord', she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour." (Matthew 15:21-28)**

Although the Phoenician woman and her people despised the Jews, she bowed before Jesus' feet respectfully. Maybe she understood that he was a descendant of the most noble family in Israel. She may also have known that the Saviour of the Jews would be called "the Son of David". She thought she was glorifying and pleasing him by calling him by this title. But if the Jewish concept about the Christ as merely the Son of David were true, it would do her no good, for it would mean that Jesus was only a worldly and political Saviour of the people

who considered her and her countrymen to be outcasts and dogs. It was fortunate that this Phoenician woman did not know all this. She asked him for mercy. She did not ask mercy for her daughter, but for herself. She said, "Have mercy on me..." for her distress was great.

The Phoenician woman honoured Jesus and bowed before him. She made an impassioned plea for his help, but he did not answer her. He paid her no attention, but she kept repeating her request. Still she did not despair, for she must have found true what she had heard about his kindness and compassion. She thought that by pressing her cause she would get his blessing. Maybe his silence resulted from his being preoccupied with other more important things. The disciples were disturbed by her persistence and asked Jesus to grant her request. But Jesus said to them, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

How could the Saviour of the world devote himself only to the sheep of Israel? The answer is that Jesus decided to begin his service by proclaiming the Good News to the Jews, for they had God's promises. If Jesus had begun his preaching to the heathen, the Jews would have refused to listen to him. Jesus did not want to serve the Jews and Gentiles at the same time because he did not have the time to do both. This is why Jesus entrusted his disciples with the task of taking the Gospel to everyone, whether Jew or Gentile.

It is rightly said that the wind which puts out a candle strengthens a big fire. This is also true of faith. The hardships which extinguish weak faith make strong faith more powerful than ever. We see this woman advancing towards Christ and renewing her appeal, as if his apparent rejection was strengthening her faith. She bowed again before him and shouted, "Help me!" The effect of this simple, single expression, coming out of a broken heart, was more powerful than all the eloquent prayers that were said in the great Temple that day. "Will he not now give in?" she thought. Was it not enough that her heart was burning? But the compassionate Master wanted to give her a greater glory by refining her faith with a new test which was more stringent than the first. He told her that he had come to first feed the children. It would not be right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. The superficial reader of this response suspects that it was fabricated or forged by someone who hated Christ. It seems impossible that these words would come out of the mouth of the one who loved the whole world, great or small, rich or poor, good or evil. He gave himself for all men. Yet Jesus said this. Through these words, he wanted to open the eyes of this woman to a spiritual fact that was still unknown to her. This woman looked at him as the Son of David and the Christ of the Jews. This meant that she had no right to share in his love and mercy until she knew and recognised him as the Christ of the Gentiles too. By his stern answer, he opened a door for her through which she could attain to this understanding.

In her great humility and need, she came back, pleading her cause. He told her that he wanted to first feed the children; then the dogs will take their part after the children, for they are entitled to the leftovers from the children's table. She decided to come, humbly asking for the dog's share.

By her action, she gave an example of great faith. Had her faith been mental only, like that of many others, she would have been persuaded, by the way Jesus treated her, to leave him and give up hope of getting what she wanted from him. But since her faith was that of the heart, she looked below the surface and became sure that Jesus would not refuse someone in great need, even if it seemed that he put her off. He granted her request by saying, "Your request is granted." Jesus never submitted to the Jewish philosophers in all his discussions with them, but silenced them with his persuasive answers. He showed them how far they were from the kingdom of God. But here, we see him yielding, with great patience, to this poor woman in her need, showing her how near she was to his kingdom.

### **12.2. A Lesson for the Disciples**

The disciples benefited from this test. They saw before them an example of this great Shepherd's sheep who are not of this fold (John 10:16). Some of the Gentiles who joined Christ's fold surpassed the Jewish sheep in spiritual gifts. The disciples were accustomed to hearing Jesus correct them by telling them how little their faith was. When Peter was about to go under the water, Jesus said to him, "You of little faith ... why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31). How ashamed the disciples must have felt when they heard their master say, with joy, to this pagan woman who had no religious background: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."

### **12.3. An Answer to Prayer**

This incident shows us that the answer to prayer does not depend upon the status of the one who is asking, as many believe, but on the spirit with which one asks. This was shown clearly when Jesus two foremost disciples, James and John, came to him with their mother, a good woman. She used to accompany Jesus and his disciples, and contributed to the financial support of the ministry. On one occasion, she asked him for a special favour for her two sons, but Jesus did not grant her request. But he answered the request of this ordinary Phoenician woman who had no special standing. We saw, in the past, how many disciples had turned away and left Jesus. But this loss of many followers, though it seemed great, could never compare to the gain of the soul of the Phoenician woman.

### **12.4. Carrying the Good News to the Ten Cities**

**"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis." (Mark 7:31)**

Jesus travelled from Tyre and Sidon to the east, toward the Golan Heights. These towns were famous for their Greek culture and lively trade. They were away from Herod's unjust rule and

dominion as well as the more dangerous influence of the elders of the Jews. Jesus had spent only a few hours in this province before, when he drove out the demons from the demoniac. It seems that this incident had a great effect on the whole area, for when Jesus went up the hill, large crowds came to him with the lame, blind, and paralysed. They laid them at Jesus' feet to be healed.

### 12.5. Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

**"There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means, 'Be opened!'). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well', they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'" (Mark 7:32-37)**

Another incident, which took place in Phoenicia, is described in detail. A man who was deaf and mute was brought to Jesus. Some people had to carry him because they could not explain to him what they wanted Jesus to do for him; he was either mentally ill or very feeble. This deaf and mute man, unlike others, had no chance to hear from or about Jesus. Christ meant to stir up faith within him, as he did with all the others whom he cured. Jesus put his finger in his ears, as if he were opening a gateway for hearing. Then, he spat and touched his tongue, creating in him a new faith. The man's handicap was cured and he began to speak.

It yet remained to direct this poor man's thoughts to the God who is the source of all blessing, so that he would know from where his help had come. Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and groaned -- maybe on behalf of all suffering creation. He pleaded for mercy for all those with bodily afflictions. Of him it was said:

***"In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." (Isaiah 63:9)***

Then, he ordered the sick man in his Aramaic dialect: *Ephphatha!*; that is, "Be opened!" The man's tongue was loosened and he started speaking correctly. Thus were the words of the prophet Isaiah fulfilled: "...the ears of the deaf [will be] unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5).

These scenes of miraculous recovery were new to most of this crowd. They knew that Jesus was a Jew, not a Gentile like them. They also knew that their gods, of whom they were proud and on whom they relied, could not perform miracles such as Jesus was doing. This is why, when they were amazed and astonished, they began to glorify Christ, saying, "He has done all things well." Words like these have also been uttered by millions of people through the centuries who have come to him, receiving him as their Saviour, knowing that he is the one

who gives them eternal salvation and joy on earth.

## 12.6. The Feeding of the Four Thousand

**"During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.' His disciples answered, 'But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?' 'How many loaves do you have?' Jesus asked. 'Seven', they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present." (Mark 8:1-9)**

Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding five thousand men in Galilee, and now he fed four thousand men in the area of the ten cities, a heathen area.

People gathered around Jesus in the wilderness from faraway places. Their meeting with him continued for three days until all food gave out. Christ was moved with compassion to repeat the miracle of feeding the crowd. Jesus is concerned with the welfare of all, from the time they are born until they die. With feeling, he said to his disciples, "If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way." How strange it is that his disciples repeated the same mistake they had made earlier; they apologised that they could not feed such a big crowd. It was spring when Jesus fed the five thousand. It was now the summer of the same year when he performed this miracle. A little later, Jesus rebuked his disciples because they had forgotten both miracles and did not benefit from them. The immediate doubts of the present caused them to forget the mercies from heaven which they had witnessed in the past.

## 12.7. Healing a Blind Man

**"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.' Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Don't go into the village.'" (Mark 8:22-26)**

This miracle caused Christ's reputation to spread all over this new territory to such an extent that he had to leave in order to escape the multitudes. He boarded a boat with his disciples, and came to the district of Magdel and Delmanotha which was nearby. When Jesus reached Bethsaida, on the eastern shore of the lake where he had fed the five thousand, the people brought him a blind man to heal, wanting to have Jesus touch him. Jesus did not go along

with their method of healing, but healed the man in his own way. Christ took the blind man outside the village. While the man waited eagerly to find out what Jesus was going to do or ask of him, Jesus spat on his eyes and put one hand on each eye, and the man began to see clearly. He first saw people that looked like trees walking. This meant that his sight was partially restored, according to his faith. When his faith increased after the little sight he had received, Jesus put his hand again on the man's eyes and he started to see clearly. This blind man is an example of those who acquire spiritual sight gradually. If they use the little vision they have, it will increase, "Whoever has will be given more..." (Matthew 13:12).

### 13. Quiz

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

1. What was Jesus' reply to the questions of John the Baptist?
2. Why did Jesus accept the invitation of Simon, the Pharisee?
3. Why did the sinful woman love Jesus more?
4. Why do undedicated people consider religious zeal to be insanity?
5. Who are the real brothers and sisters of Jesus?
6. Give a proof to back up Jesus' claim that he did not cast demons by the power of the devil.
7. What is the difference between the power of Jesus and the power of the Devil?
8. Complete this verse, "Come now, let us reason together..." (Isaiah 1:18).
9. Why does God refuse to forgive the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?
10. In the sign of Jonah, there is a symbol of Christ. What is it?
11. Give the four kinds of soil in the parable of "the Sower".
12. Give two characteristics of the mustard seed that we find in the Kingdom of God.
13. Give a similarity between the work of leaven (yeast) and the work of the kingdom of heaven.
14. What do we learn about the parable of the fine pearl mentioned in Matthew 13:45,46?
15. Give a verse from the Psalms that describes Christ's authority over nature.
16. What are the two kinds of storms which buffeted Christ's disciples on the lake?
17. Why did the owners of the pigs ask Jesus to leave their country?
18. Why did the woman who suffered from bleeding not ask Jesus publicly to heal her? Why did she touch the hem of his garment?

19. What are the four conditions for receiving blessings from Christ?
20. What does it mean that Christ came not to bring peace, but a sword?
21. Why did Jesus ask his disciples to give the crowd something to eat while knowing that they had nothing to offer them?
22. What do we learn from Christ's giving thanks for the loaves and fish?
23. Why was Peter able to walk on the water?
24. Give three similarities between Christ and bread.
25. Why did Christ say to the Phoenician woman, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."?

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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