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“The Gospel of Mark”

by
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About the Author



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SATURDAY, JANUARY 1

MARK 1:1

ACTS 12:11-17

*“The beginning of the
gospel of Jesus Christ...”*

WRITER OF THE GOSPEL

St Mark was the writer of this Gospel. Who was he? His full name was John Mark (Acts 12:12; 15:37). He was a disciple of the Lord Jesus, but was not among the twelve Apostles. Although not an Apostle, he was closely associated with them, especially Peter and Paul (Acts 12:11,12,25). Believers met in his home for prayer meetings. He was with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip but quit halfway. This led to Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways later on because Paul no longer wanted to take Mark for any more missionary trips (Acts 15:36,37).

Mark was a sincere believer and servant of the Lord. Although he made a mistake in that first missionary trip, he repented and later proved his worth. It is heartening to see Paul commending Mark later on in 2 Timothy 4:11, *“Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”* As Christians, we may make mistakes and sin against God. However, if we are humble and teachable, willing to correct ourselves and change our ways, the Lord can restore us and still use us.

King David, for example, sinned against God when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. But when he confessed his sin and prayed for forgiveness, the Lord forgave him, restored him and continued to use him as king of Israel (Ps 51). *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”* (1 John 1:9,10).

The Lord was gracious to use Mark to write this Gospel. Although Mark was the writer, it must be said that his Gospel was actually Peter’s. The Apostolic Fathers – Justin Martyr and Irenaeus – said that the Apostle Peter was behind Mark’s Gospel.

THOUGHT: Have I sinned against the Lord?

PRAYER: (Confess your sins now and pray for forgiveness.)

AUTHOR OF SALVATION

Know that the Gospel of Mark is history, not myth. The events recorded therein all happened at a point in time, in history. It is not a “once-upon-a-time” fairy tale. The Gospel mentions real people, real events, real time. It is an infallible and inerrant account of the life of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark is really the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mark was the writer of the Gospel, not the author—the author was none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Without Jesus Christ, there would be no Gospel of Mark, or of Matthew, Luke, and John.

The opening verse of Mark reminds us of the first verse and also the first chapter of John’s Gospel which tells us that Jesus Christ is none other than God Himself—God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and the eternally and uniquely begotten Son of God Himself (John 1:1,14,18).

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? It is the life and cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ—our Prophet, Priest, and King—who came to live for us, to die for us and to live again for us. The Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4). The Lord Jesus had to do all this to save sinners so that they might become saints. As Calvin said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become the sons of God.”

In the Gospel of Mark, the servanthood of Jesus is highlighted. This is told to us in Mark 10:45 which says, “*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*” Jesus worked very hard for our salvation. He did His saving work with diligence and haste (seen in the word “*straightway*” or “*immediately*” found so often in the Gospel of Mark). The Lord was always up and about fulfilling the prophecies of Scripture, keeping the law of God, enduring the suffering and shame, and finally dying on the cross to save us from our sins. Jesus is the Author of our salvation. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

THOUGHT: Jesus has done so much for me; what have I done for Him?

PRAYER: Make me a servant like Thee, O Lord!

MONDAY, JANUARY 3

MARK 1:2-8

ACTS 8:29-35

“...I send my messenger
before thy face...”

SCRIPTURE AND SPEAKER

Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). It is necessary to have the Scriptures, but there must also be preachers. Since the Fall, God has not failed to send His servants to preach repentance and faith in the Saviour to come (2 Kings 17:13; Jer 7:25). That was why God sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch to preach to him the Lord Jesus from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:29-35). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Before Jesus started His public ministry, we find John the Baptist who was the Lord’s forerunner and herald. “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:2-4). Someone and something very important are about to come; if you want to be ready for this great person and this great event to come, you had better get ready!

People need to know, they need to be told beforehand. God has never failed to do this through the Scriptures—“as it is written.” There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ (Luke 24:27), and all of them came through “as it is written.” For instance, this prophecy concerning John the Baptist was prophesied 400 years before it happened (Mal 3:1). The advent of Christ was not by chance or accident. It was pre-planned by God, and fulfilled precisely.

God gave the Scriptures and sent a “messenger.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Mark 1:2,3). Why? “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:14,15).

THOUGHT: Want beautiful feet? Be an evangelist!

PRAYER: Here am I, Lord, send me!

TUESDAY, JANUARY 4

MARK 1:9-11

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

*“...Thou art my beloved Son,
in whom I am well pleased.”*

OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST (I)

John’s baptism was a baptism unto repentance (Mark 1:4). But Jesus was sinless and had no need of repentance. Why then did Jesus have to go through water baptism? Jesus had to be baptised because it was part of His saving work for us. He had to fulfil all righteousness (Matt 3:15) in order to earn the righteousness we need to be accepted by God. *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor 5:21).

By going through the waters of baptism, Jesus identified Himself with sinners and acted as their Representative to obey fully and perfectly the Law of God. The Lord Jesus was *“made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”* (Gal 4:4,5). In His baptism, Jesus obeyed the ceremonial law of ritual cleansing. He showed His humility by submitting Himself to the commands of the Father. It was God the Father who required Jesus to fulfil all aspects of the Law—ceremonial, judicial, moral. That was why after Jesus was baptised, the Father in heaven said, *“Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:11). God the Father was so pleased with God the Son because He was such an obedient Son for our sake.

The Lord Jesus is not only our Representative and Substitute, He is also our perfect Example. He shows us what it means to be a good child of God. If we want to be good sons and daughters of God, we must be in total submission and obedience to His will. It also means that men as leaders must show a godly example by being obedient to the Lord Jesus and His commandments for He is their Head (1 Cor 11:3). Wives are to be submissive to their own husbands (Eph 5:22; Titus 2:5), and children are to obey their parents in the Lord (Eph 6:1).

THOUGHT: How can I have a happy family?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me humility, submissiveness, and obedience.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5

MARK 1:12,13

ROMANS 5:12-21

“...the Spirit driveth him
into the wilderness.”

OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST (II)

Why must Jesus be tempted by the devil? Again, it was part of His active obedience to gain the righteousness we need to be accepted by God. Adam—the first man—was tempted and he failed. Having failed to obey God, he fell into sin and all mankind fell in him. “*For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners*” (Rom 5:19a).

On the other hand, Jesus—the greater Adam—was tempted likewise, and he passed the test with a perfect score. “[S]o by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19b). In the Lord Jesus Christ, believers have a perfect High Priest: “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:14,15).

Note that the temptation of Christ was more severe than that of Adam, for (1) Adam was in the garden but Jesus was in the desert, (2) Adam was tempted for a day but Jesus was tempted for 40 days and nights, (3) Adam was tempted once but Jesus was tempted repeatedly by the devil with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Luke 4:1-13).

Jesus defeated the devil with Scripture. When tempted with the lust of the flesh—turn stone into bread, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, “*man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.*” When tempted with the lust of the eyes—the glitters of this world, he quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, “*Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.*” When tempted with the pride of life—if you are God’s Son, then throw yourself down for God will bear you up, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, “*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God.*”

Do you face temptations? Read James 4:7.

THOUGHT: “Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin.”

PRAYER: (Use Matthew 6:13.)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6

MARK 1:14-20

ACTS 16:31

“...repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

REPENT, BELIEVE, FOLLOW

The Lord Jesus Christ preached: “...*believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15). What does it mean to believe? Note that the word “*believe*” in this passage is sandwiched in between two other words, namely, “*repent*” and “*followed*” (1:15,18). These two words really define what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ or what true faith is all about.

So, what is true faith? What is it characterised by? First, we see that true faith is characterised by repentance. The word “repentance” is from the Greek *metanoeo* which literally means a change of mind. It is making a 180-degree U-turn. It is to move away from sin and Satan in order to follow Christ and His truth. It is a conscious rejection of the things of the world to receive the things of God. The Bible says, “*the friendship of the world is enmity with God*” (James 4:4). The Lord says, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matt 6:24). It is either money or Christ, you cannot have both. As the Bible says, “*the love of money is the root of all evil*” (1 Tim 6:10). But the converse is true as well, “the love of Christ is the root of all goodness.”

Second, true faith is characterised by obedience. When a person believes in Christ, he will desire greatly to obey God’s call and commands. While repentance is a negative—a turning away, to follow is positive—a moving towards. The two actions go hand in hand—one comes after the other. You make a U-turn to head in the right direction. This is well captured by the hymn, “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” which expresses this sentiment, “The world behind me, the cross before me... No turning back, no turning back.” This is also exemplified by the disciples who followed Jesus when He gave the call, “*Come ye after me... And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him*” (Mark 1:17,18).

THOUGHT: Will you follow Jesus?

PRAYER: “I have decided to follow Jesus... No turning back, no turning back.”

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7

MARK 1:21-28

PSALM 119:9-16

*“...they were astonished
at his doctrine.”*

TRUE DOCTRINE

Jesus preached the Gospel, but He also taught the Scriptures. The people *“were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes”* (Mark 1:22). Jesus’ doctrine was not from man—not from the academy (i.e. the scribes), but from God—from heaven itself. Doctrine is vital to the Christian Faith, and it is important for Christians to know doctrine. The problem is that there is a whole lot of false doctrine out there (like there is fake news). So, how can we tell whether a doctrine is true or false?

First, true doctrine is based on the Book. Jesus taught according to the Book—the Holy Bible. He did not teach like the scribes who cooked up their own doctrines by misinterpreting and misapplying the Bible. Today we see them in the liberal and modernistic professors of theology who deny the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, His miracles, the substitutionary atonement, and the resurrection. They write commentary after commentary undermining the truth of the Gospel and of the Bible.

The Bible is self-authenticating and supremely authoritative because it is the very Word of God—*“thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). The power and authority of God’s Word is demonstrated by Jesus’ divine fiat (Mark 1:23-26). By just speaking the word, the demons were cast out. *“And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him”* (Mark 1:27). God’s Word has power over all creatures, be they angels, demons, or humans. *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb 4:12). Therefore, *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tim 2:15).

THOUGHT: How has God’s Word changed my life?

PRAYER: (Pray using Psalm 119:9-16.)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8

MARK 1:29-38

ACTS 2:22-32

“...that I may preach there also:
for therefore came I forth.”

WHY DID JESUS HEAL?

Jesus had a ministry of preaching and healing, but which was His primary or essential ministry? It was preaching, not healing. When all came to Him for healing, he told his disciples, “*Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth*” (Mark 1:38).

There is no question Jesus healed many people and they got healed miraculously. He healed because He had compassion on the people (Mark 1:41). Another reason is because He wanted to prove His person and ministry as the Messiah—the Christ, the Son of the living God (Acts 2:22).

The healing miracles of Jesus also had a teaching purpose. They visibly demonstrated the fact that Jesus is Saviour, and as Saviour He came to save not only our souls but also our bodies. His healing points to the resurrection body which all His people will have one day—a perfect and powerful body without any sin, sickness, disease, suffering, pain etc. The most stupendous healing miracle that Jesus performed must surely be the raising of the dead (eg. Lazarus in John 11). That miracle was to teach powerfully the doctrine of the resurrection. Jesus used that event to declare, “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?*” (John 11:25,26).

The healing ministry of Jesus did not overshadow His preaching ministry. In fact, when He said, “*Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also,*” it tells us that the focus of His ministry was on the preaching or teaching of the Word—for that is the means by which God has ordained that we should be saved—“*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the [preached] word [rhema] of God*” (Rom 10:17). That was why the Apostle Paul himself said, “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*” (1 Cor 1:17,18).

THOUGHT: The spectacle of miracles does not save; it is faith in the Gospel that saves!

PRAYER: Lord, I believe in Thy Gospel. Raise me up on the last day.

MOVED WITH COMPASSION

“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (Mark 1:41).

We have a good and compassionate God (Ps 78:38; 86:15; 111:4; 145:8). The words here, *“moved with compassion,”* is an excellent translation of the Greek *splagchnizomai* which speaks of the deep stirrings of our innermost parts—the bowels/intestines, our gut. It is not just a strong emotive word, it is a very active word—it speaks of being moved to action.

Jesus was moved to help this man who besought Him with meekness and humility. Look at his humble faith—(1) He did not speak arrogantly or demandingly to the Lord, but pleadingly—he begged the Lord. (2) He was quick to take a worshipful and prayerful posture by kneeling before the Lord for he knew he was sinful and Jesus was holy. (3) He was not presumptuous but surrendered himself totally to the mercy of God—*“If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”* The Lord Jesus graciously said to him, *“I will; be thou clean.”* *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”* (Ps 34:18).

Now, know that not all Bibles have the same Jesus. The New International Version (NIV) for instance has a different Jesus here—a Jesus who is indignant, not compassionate. Instead of “compassionate,” the NIV in Mark 1:41 reads, “Jesus was *indignant*”—Jesus was angry when He healed this man. Is the NIV Jesus your Jesus? It is certainly not mine. For I know my Jesus and He is not like this. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me”* (John 10:27). The voice in the NIV is not my Saviour’s voice, I will not follow. Beware the modern versions. Stick to the good old version.

THOUGHT: Read Jeffrey Khoo’s *Kept Pure in All Ages: Recapturing the Authorised Version and the Doctrine of Providential Preservation* (https://www.febc.edu.sg/v15/assets/pdfs/febc_press/Kept%20Pure%20In%20All%20Ages.pdf).

PRAYER: Lord, *“If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”*

MONDAY, JANUARY 10

MARK 2:1-7

MATTHEW 11:12

“...*Thy sins be forgiven thee...*”

WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

As Christians we are told to forgive those who trespass against us. If that is the case, then why is it said here that it is only God who can forgive sins (Mark 2:7)? Yes, we can and ought to forgive those who have wronged us, but our forgiveness has no saving value; only God’s forgiveness can save us from sin and eternal damnation.

How can our sins be forgiven by God? They can be forgiven only if we approach God by faith. We find such a faith in the paralysed man here, which is seen in his zeal (Mark 2:4,5). Despite the crowdedness and the inconveniences, he persisted in getting to Jesus. Matthew Poole rightly observed that there must be “a great ardour and heat, in hearing and receiving the gospel, which is the gospel of the kingdom, [that] bringeth men into the kingdom of Christ... The hearts of men and women [must be] inflamed with a desire after the knowledge and obtaining of heaven, and heavenly things.” (See Matthew 11:12.)

Although this man came to Jesus for healing, Jesus did not say to him, “Rise up, be healed.” Instead, He said, “*Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*” By addressing him as “*Son,*” Jesus made him a child of God. He was given salvation, which was infinitely better than physical healing.

The scribes were sceptical. They found fault with Jesus. They murmured within themselves that Jesus had blasphemed for “*who can forgive sins but God only?*” (Mark 2:7). Although they did not speak out loud, Jesus already knew what they were saying about Him in their minds and hearts. This shows the omniscience of Jesus—He is all-knowing. This is one proof that Jesus though fully man was also fully God. Jesus did not only prove His deity by His omniscience, He was going to prove His deity by His omnipotence—that He has the power as God has to forgive sins (Mark 2:8-12).

THOUGHT: Forgiveness is “the fragrance of a flower when it is trampled upon.”

PRAYER: (Are you doubting and questioning God? Pray for strong faith and for forgiveness.)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11

MARK 2:8-12

ROMANS 1:16

“...the Son of man hath
power on earth to forgive sins...”

POWER TO FORGIVE

“But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion” (Mark 2:10-12).

Jesus proved He had the authority to forgive sins because He was truly God Himself. This was in response to the scribes’ scepticism of Him when they said within themselves, *“Who can forgive sins but God only?”* (Mark 2:7). Jesus already proved His deity by revealing His omniscience. Now, He is going to prove His deity by revealing His omnipotence.

Jesus challenged the scribes, *“Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?”* (Mark 2:9). Of course, to just say *“Thy sins be forgiven thee”* is a much easier thing to do—it is just speech or words—who can tell whether the man’s sins are truly forgiven or not? But to say to a paralysed man *“Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk”* is to do the impossible. Who would dare say this if he did not have the power or ability to ensure the results, which takes a miracle? To prove that He had all power being God Himself, Jesus healed the paralysed man, and by so doing also showed that the man’s sins had truly been forgiven.

All who saw the miracle were amazed, but did this amazing miracle lead them to repentance and belief? No, it did not. We know this because in the very next chapter (Mark 3:2,6), they kept criticising Jesus and finding fault with Him. This shows us that people are converted not by miracles but by the Gospel alone. Unless they believe the Gospel of Christ, even the Holy Scriptures, they will not believe even if they see such an amazing miracle. Again, *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17).

THOUGHT: We do not see in order to believe. We believe in order to see.

PRAYER: (Pray for faith to trust in God and His Word.)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12

MARK 2:13-17

LUKE 19:1-10

*“I came not to call the righteous,
but sinners to repentance.”*

CALLING SINNERS

Jesus was criticised by the scribes and Pharisees for eating with publicans and sinners (Mark 2:16). Did they have a case against Him? Absolutely not! For Jesus came to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15), and how can He do so unless He reaches out to them? That was why Jesus said, *“They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Mark 2:17).

Who were the publicans and sinners? The publicans were tax collectors. They were running dogs of the Roman government. The Jews considered them traitors. They sat at the gates of the cities collecting taxes. More often than not, they overtaxed the people to line their own pockets. Sinners were all who transgressed God’s Law—the murderers, harlots, robbers—the dregs of society.

The scribes and Pharisees on the other hand were the religious leaders of the Jews—pastors and teachers of the Law. As such, they were highly respected by the people. However, they were a self-righteous, conceited bunch. They considered themselves as holy ones and all others as sinners. In fact, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, they were no better than the publicans and sinners, and might be even worse than them because they were so full of themselves, so full of pride, so blind to their own sins and yet claimed to be spiritual guides. They thought they were well when they were actually very sick. As such they could find no help from Jesus. Those who know they are sick will see the doctor for help, and if they go to Jesus, they will find help for sure.

Matthew (Levi), a publican, saw his sinfulness, and was only too ready to follow the Lord Jesus when He called (Mark 2:14). Another publican who repented was Zacchaeus and he showed his faith at work by giving half of his goods to the poor and to those he cheated, he paid back four times (Luke 19:8).

THOUGHT: Do you see yourself as a sinner?

PRAYER: (Pray the Lord to forgive you of your sins.)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13

MARK 2:15,16

JOHN 17:11-17

“...he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”

REACHING OUT TO SINNERS

Jesus was keeping bad company here—eating with publicans and sinners (Mark 2:16). Was He contradicting 1 Corinthians 15:33 which says, “*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*”? 1 Corinthians 5:11 likewise states, “*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*” No, Jesus did not contravene the law of separation and purity for separation is not isolation. Jesus Himself prayed for the Father’s keeping of His people for though they are in the world, they are not to be of the world (John 17:14,15).

Yes, it is true, bad company has a corrupting influence. Yet, in the case of Jesus here, Jesus was reaching out to corrupt men to make them honest people—He was curing the sick (Mark 2:17). Neither did Jesus condone or encourage the sinful deeds of the publicans and sinners. He commanded them to repent (Mark 1:15).

So, can we go to a wedding dinner of an unbelieving friend where there may be a lot of drinking? The answer is yes, but abstain from the liquor that is served and when asked why you do not drink, share your testimony of faith and share the gospel. Although we find here Jesus “eating and drinking” with publicans and sinners, it does not mean He drank alcohol and got drunk for Scriptures prohibit drunkenness and warned against wine, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*” (Prov 20:1). Wine in the days of Jesus was not necessarily alcoholic; there was non-alcoholic wine like sweet wine or honey wine. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:9,10, “*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.*” While we are in the world, let us not be like the world, but a holy people of God reaching out with the gospel.

THOUGHT: Read David Brumbelow’s *Ancient Wine & the Bible* (Georgia: Free Church Press, 2011).

PRAYER: Lord, may I bear a good testimony for Thee.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14

MARK 2:18-22

ROMANS 3:24-28

“...no man putteth new wine
into old bottles...”

THE OLD AND THE NEW

“*And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles*” (Mark 2:22). What Jesus is saying here is this: Old wineskins are not suitable for new wine. New, fermenting wine would burst the wineskins, resulting in the loss of both skins and wine. Understand that in those days, bottles for storing wine were made of leather, not glass like today. New wine must be put into new wineskins.

So, what do the wine and wineskins represent? The new wine is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the old wineskin is the legalism of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus came with the gospel—the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and not by works (Rom 3:24-28). The gospel does not fit the old, man-made system of salvation by works as taught by the scribes and Pharisees.

Further, the truths of the New Covenant must be received by faith and faith alone, by those who are born again by the Spirit for “*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor 2:14). “*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other*” (Gal 5:17). To receive the new, the good, and the spiritual, one must cast out the old sinful and worldly self. “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Cor 5:17).

THOUGHT: The new that Jesus brings is really the good old stuff.

PRAYER: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*” (Ps 51:10)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15

MARK 2:23-28

EXODUS 20:8-11

*“...the Son of man is Lord
also of the Sabbath.”*

LORD OF THE SABBATH

The Pharisees charged Jesus and His disciples for breaking the sabbath. According to the Pharisees, the sabbath law was broken when the disciples plucked (reaped) and rubbed (threshed) the wheat grains in their hands—they broke two of the 39 works forbidden on the Sabbath as found in the Mishnah—the laws of their rabbis. Jesus was culpable because He did not stop His disciples from “breaking the sabbath.” His disciples were hungry, and plucked some wheat grains to eat; was the Master wrong to allow them to do it?

Jesus and His disciples clearly did not violate the sabbath law. What they went against were those extra-biblical, man-made, and foolish laws of the Pharisees (cf. Luke 11:46). Jesus rebutted the accusations of the Pharisees by citing the example of David who ate of the shewbread that only the priests were allowed to eat. David was hungry, and Abiathar the priest, knowing the law for sure, did not forbid David and his men to fill their stomachs with forbidden bread (1 Sam 21:1-6 cf. Lev 24:9). Abiathar “broke” the ceremonial law of Leviticus 24:9, but was blameless. David likewise “broke” that law by eating of the ceremonial bread, and was guiltless as well. If Abiathar and David were innocent, how could Jesus—the great High Priest, the greater David—be guilty? Moreover, Jesus Himself is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28)!

THOUGHT: The higher law of necessity overrides the lower law of ceremony.

PRAYER: Lord, let me worship Thee and do good on the Sabbath.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 16

MARK 2:23-28

COLOSSIANS 2:16

*"...the sabbath was made for man,
and not man for the sabbath."*

THE SABBATH FOR WHOM?

Jesus in this particular instance did not depart from a God-given ceremonial law, but a man-made rabbinical tradition. The charges of the Pharisees were totally baseless and without merit. Jesus being Author of the law did not break the law but kept it perfectly.

Jesus laid down a wonderful principle for sabbath-keeping when He said, *"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"* (Mark 2:27). In other words, the sabbath was made for man's advantage and not disadvantage. The sabbath was instituted not as a burden but as a benefit to man. Thus, any legalistic application of the sabbath law contradicts its God-given role for man. There are neo-Pharisees today who say that eating out on the Lord's day violates the sabbath law. Christians should eat at home, and not eat at the restaurant. The sabbath is violated when Christians make unbelievers cook for them. Is there any logic to this? Whether Christians eat or not, unbelievers would still operate their business. Is it then wrong for husbands to relieve their wives from cooking on the Lord's Day, and bring them out for a nice dinner?

Calvin has rightly commented, "The point of it is that it is wrong to turn the sabbath to man's destruction, since God instituted it for his sake. The Pharisees saw Christ's disciples busy in a holy work, they saw them exhausted and famished by their journey, yet they are angry that these hungry men should refresh their weary bodies with a few grains of corn. Is it not an ignorant perversion of God's will to demand the observance of the sabbath to man's hurt when God intended it to help him?" What insight and wisdom!

THOUGHT: We do not condemn those who do not eat out on the Lord's Day, but neither should they condemn those who do.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me wisdom to apply the Sabbath law for man's good and for Thy glory.

MONDAY, JANUARY 17

MARK 3:1-6

COLOSSIANS 2:16

“...is it lawful to do good

...or to do evil?”

DOING GOOD, YET RECEIVING EVIL

There is a Chinese saying, “*hao xin mei you hao bao*,” “you’ve helped others with a good heart, yet there are no good returns.” This was experienced by the Lord Jesus. He had done a lot of good, but received only evil from the people.

Jesus once again did a good deed on the Sabbath day. He healed a man with a withered hand. The scribes and Pharisees continued to watch Jesus in order to accuse Him. To them, saving a life on a Sabbath was sinful. They wanted to destroy Jesus for doing good. That was how wicked they were.

What made their sin even more grievous was the fact that Jesus had by now proven beyond doubt that (1) He was God Himself (who has the power to forgive sins), (2) He was their Messiah (whose shoe latches John was not worthy to untie), (3) He was their Saviour (who preached the gospel, calling men to repentance), (4) He was none other than Jehovah (the Author of the Law and Lord of the Sabbath). Despite these indisputable facts, they still did not repent and believe on Him. Not believing in Jesus was bad enough, now they wanted to do all they could to stop others from believing.

Despite all the opposition, Jesus did not hide the truth. Truth does not hide—it is light, and light overcomes darkness. When Jesus asked them, “*Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?*”, they could not answer. For if they said yes, Jesus would have won; if they said no, they would look stupid. It is always best to agree with Jesus—it is the wisest thing to do.

THOUGHT: “*To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts...*” (Heb 3:15)

PRAYER: Lord, I believe in Thee with all my heart.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 18

MARK 3:7-12

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

“Thou art the Son of God.”

IS JESUS GOD?

Of course He is, but not everyone believes this. By this time of His public ministry, Jesus was quite well known within Israel and outside of Israel. It is significant to note that the demons knew Him as the Son of God—the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. They declared publicly, *“Thou art the Son of God”* (Mark 3:11). But Jesus silenced them and *“straitly charged them that they should not make him known”* (Mark 3:12). Why?

First, it must be stated that Jesus did not *become* God—He is God, period! He was God, He is God, and He will forever be God (John 1:1,14; 1 Tim 3:16). The liberals and the modernists through their proud scholarship deny this. In this regard, the demons are better than them. These *“unclean spirits”* or *“fallen angels”* know better for they knew Him from the beginning—from the time of Creation.

So, the demons were not wrong to declare that Jesus was God Himself. But Jesus did not allow them to continue doing so because the privilege to testify for Jesus belongs not to unclean spirits but to the saints who have been cleansed by His blood.

The Apostle Paul himself had to shut the mouth of a demon-possessed girl though she spoke truth, *“These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation”* (Acts 16:17). Paul had to cast the demon out of the girl to prevent any more confusion. Evangelism by demons will only hinder the gospel, not help it. It will undermine the gospel truth by confusing light with darkness, good with evil. People might think that God and Satan are partners. God forbid!

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Ps 24:3-5).

THOUGHT: What a privilege to be ambassadors for Christ.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the privilege I have to be Thy witness.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19

MARK 3:13-19

ISAIAH 6:8

“...that he might send them
forth to preach.”

ORDAINED TO PREACH

Demons are forbidden to speak because they are unclean. Who then will speak and preach Christ? Mark 3:13-15 tells us who—not unclean spirits but cleansed men whom God Himself will call and ordain to preach.

There is a general call to all Christians to preach the gospel of Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). However, there is also a special call to some to engage in a full-time ministry of the Word. This is what we see here in the calling of the 12. How can one tell if he has received a special call to full-time ministry?

We know we are called to full-time service if we find ourselves unable to resist the divine call and conviction to do so (Mark 3:13). We don't call ourselves to ministry, the call must come from God. When God calls, you cannot but follow—*“and they came unto him.”* This is the case in the call to salvation and this is also true in the call to service. *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain”* (John 15:16). It can be likened to a second Born Again experience. You cannot help but answer the call. You will come under an immense conviction and you will have an intense desire to enter the ministry. You cannot help it.

The call to full-time ministry will cause one to embark on full-time biblical-theological-pastoral training—*“that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach”* (Mark 3:14). Availability is important, but ability is equally if not more important. When the Lord calls, He will also give to you the spiritual gifts necessary for the ministry, and during your training in a Bible college or seminary, the gifts given to you will be nurtured and cultivated.

The harvest is still plenteous, but the labourers are still few. *“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”* (Matt 9:38).

THOUGHT: *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* (Isa 6:8a)

PRAYER: *“Then said I, Here am I; send me.”* (Isa 6:8b)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20

MARK 3:20-30

HEBREWS 6:4-6

“...he that shall blaspheme against the

Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness...”

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

What did Jesus mean when He warned, “*Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation*” (Mark 3:28,29).

The sin of blasphemy against the Spirit is unpardonable. How is this sin against the Spirit committed, and who are the people who commit this sin? Jesus from the beginning of His public ministry had preached the good news of salvation, done good, and performed many miracles which in no uncertain terms proved His deity and Messiahship (John 10:37,38). Yet the Jewish religious leaders wilfully chose not to believe in Him. When they could find no fault in His message, or His works, they attacked His person, accusing Him of doing all His miracles by the power of the devil when it was clearly the work of the Spirit. This sin is unforgivable because the only avenue of forgiveness through the convicting work of the Spirit has been rejected. The greatest sin that anyone can commit that leads to eternal damnation is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (John 3:18). The constant, persistent, voluntary, wilful, decisive rejection of the gospel is tantamount to the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Spirit.

What happens when a person commits the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Spirit? The consequences are as follows: (1) God abandons the man totally to his own destruction (Jer 7:13-16; Heb 10:26,27). (2) God judicially hardens or blinds the person to the truth (Matt 13:15; John 12:37-40; eg. Pharaoh, Exod 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 14:8, cf. Rom 1:24). (3) The sinner finds it impossible to repent (Heb 6:6; eg. Judas Iscariot, Matt 27:3-5 cf. 2 Cor 7:10).

Can a Christian commit the unpardonable sin? Calvin answered, “he who has been truly regenerated by the Spirit cannot possibly fall into so horrid a crime.”

THOUGHT: “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” (Heb 10:31)

PRAYER: I will always praise and bless Thy name, O Lord!

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21

MARK 3:31-35

LUKE 8:19-21

“... *Who is my mother,
or my brethren?*”

WHO IS MY MOTHER?

Mary and her sons wanted to see Jesus while He was teaching the people. Since they could not get in because of the crowd, they requested someone to convey the message to Him making themselves known as His mother and brothers. What they did was quite rude. Instead of interrupting Him, they could have waited till He was done. Perhaps, they thought that they would get special attention because of their physical relationship to Him.

Jesus used this interruption to teach a spiritual truth. Special attention from Him comes from a spiritual and not physical relationship. Pointing to His disciples He said, “*Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother*” (Mark 3:34,35).

Jesus clearly did not run immediately to Mary when she called Him. He put Mary and her sons in their proper places. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus must listen to and do the bidding of Mary all the time since she is His mother. But here we find Jesus doing just the very opposite. Jesus put Mary on hold. She had to wait until He had accomplished doing His Father’s will in teaching the people. Jesus would allow no one to distract Him from His all-important mission—to do His Father’s will. Jesus had already told Mary at the temple that He had to be about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49). Apparently, Mary did not take heed of His words. So, in telling the people that they ought to hear God’s Word and do His will, Jesus showed it by example. By continuing in His teaching, and refusing to see Mary right away, He practised what He preached. This is another example of His perfect obedience. Even in such tiny matters, Jesus was faultless in His behaviour.

THOUGHT: Is Christ our brother? Yes, He is. (Rom 8:29)

PRAYER: (Pray to God the Father in the name of Christ our Brother and be comforted by the Holy Spirit.)

WHAT KIND OF FAITH?

The parable of the sower/seed/soil is one of the most preached parables of Jesus. It is also one of the few parables where Jesus explained its meaning.

This parable seeks to teach what true faith is. The wayside refers to those who are totally void of faith. Stony and thorny places describe those who have false faith. The good soil describes those who possess true faith. True faith is manifested by perseverance and fruitfulness: *“he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth [i.e. receives, keeps] it; which also beareth fruit...”* (Matt 13:23). The Apostle James who heard Jesus rightly taught in his epistle that *“faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20). True faith is a persevering faith that overcomes trials and temptations (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), and will produce the fruit of the Spirit—*“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”* etc. (Gal 5:22,23).

Why did Jesus speak to the people in parables? He spoke to them in parables not only to reveal but also to conceal truths. To true believers and disciples of Christ, the parables were given for their edification. The Holy Spirit will help them to understand the *“mysteries of the kingdom.”* These *“mysteries”* are truths hidden in the past but now revealed in Christ (Matt 13:35). Such spiritual truths are spiritually discerned by Spirit-indwelt men; the Spirit teaching them by *“comparing spiritual things with spiritual”* (1 Cor 2:12-14).

To unbelievers and false believers, the parables were given for their destruction. The reprobate who stubbornly reject Christ and His Word are punitively dealt with by God. The Pharisees, scribes, and their followers had been rejecting wilfully and repeatedly the Lord Jesus and His Word, and even attributed all the good that He had done to Satan. So, God in judgment blinded them to the truth so that they would never receive it and be saved. God’s judgment had already fallen on them.

THOUGHT: Be ready to receive, not criticise God’s Word.

PRAYER: Lord, make me to understand Thy Word.

SURE OF SALVATION

There are those who think they are saved but are not. If that is the case, how can we know for sure if we are saved? We are able to know in these ways:

First, we know we are saved when we live a Christlike life (Mark 4:21,22). If there is the gospel or salvation light within us, we will surely shine out—the light will be seen. *“Ye are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:14,16). Good works do not save, but they reveal salvation, whether we are saved or not, for as James said, *“that faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20). That is why we are told to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phil 2:12,13). *“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them”* (Matt 7:20). Do we bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22,23)? The real test comes when bad things happen to us; will we continue to believe in Jesus? Will we praise Him or curse Him? Job had true faith for sure because he praised God despite the trials and temptations he had to go through: *“the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”* (Job 1:21). Read also Job 13:15.

Second, we know we are saved if we are able to appreciate the truth of God's Word (Mark 4:23-25). We will have spiritually sensitive ears to hear and understand God's Word. *“[T]he things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”* (1 Cor 2:11,12). If we are able to do this, it must mean that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within us, helping us to understand and apply God's Word in our lives. Do you see yourself growing in the faith, knowing God and His Word more and more, not only drinking the milk but also eating the meat of God's Word? That was what Jesus meant when He said *“and unto you that hear shall more be given”* (Mark 4:24)—you will have more and more of the Word when you are able to partake of it profitably.

THOUGHT: Am I able to discern truth from error, good from evil?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to bear a good witness and testimony for Thee.

MONDAY, JANUARY 24

MARK 4:26-34

LUKE 17:21

“...So is the kingdom of God...
like a grain of mustard seed...”

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It is in the interest of God that His kingdom should grow (the word “grow” is used in Mark 4:27,32). What and where is the kingdom of God and how should it grow? Understand that a kingdom consists of a prince (ruler), a people (citizens), and a place (domain). In the kingdom of God, Christ (the Prince) rules over His people (the church) and He rules them in their hearts (His domain).

The kingdom of God begins when the gospel seed is sown in the heart of a person (Mark 4:26). The Spirit will do His mysterious work of convicting and converting the heart causing regeneration (to be born again), justification (to be declared righteous on account of Christ), and sanctification (to become more and more like Christ) (Mark 4:27). With Christ enthroned as Lord and Saviour in his heart, the believer will grow spiritually (Mark 4:28)—first as a baby feeding on the milk of the Word (1 Pet 2:2), and then as an adult able to discern truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil, and not easily tossed to and fro (Eph 4:14).

The kingdom of God also points to the church. The believers form a community of saints, and this community, when it does the work of missions and evangelism, will grow slowly but steadily. The kingdom is described as a “mustard seed”—the smallest of all seeds (Mark 4:31,32). It will take time to grow and become strong for the good of others. The church does not start with a boom or a bang—it is not a mushroom that sprouts overnight and then fades away, but a mustard seed that grows into a tree and remains. The church will grow as Christ has said, but note that the growth is not vertical but horizontal—it “shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.” As Rev Dr Timothy Tow says, “Church growth must be measured horizontally, not vertically, in depth, not in height.” The church must not be like a proud and boastful “tower of Babel,” but like an umbrella tree providing shade and shelter for all in spiritual need.

THOUGHT: “The Church is not a mushroom but a mustard seed.” (T Tow)

PRAYER: (Pray for your church.)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 25

MARK 4:35-41

PHILIPPIANS 4:6,7

“...the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

PEACE BE STILL!

We are living in a world full of toil and turmoil, stress and distress. How do we find peace? One can find peace only from the Prince of peace—the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27).

Jesus was crossing the Sea of Galilee with His disciples on a ship. There were also other *“little ships”* (Mark 4:36). How little were they? There is on display an ancient boat called the *“Jesus Boat”* in Kibbutz Nof Ginosar by the Sea of Galilee. It is 9 metres long, 2.5 metres wide, and 1.25 metres high. It is typical of boats used in the days of Jesus. While crossing the sea, they encountered a great storm. The waves beat against the boat, and soon the boat was full of water and began to sink.

While all this was happening, Jesus was sleeping soundly at the back. All the turbulence and disturbance did not trouble Him at all. The disciples, on the other hand, panicked and quickly woke Him up, *“Master, carest thou not that we perish?”* (Mark 4:38). They had no reason to question Jesus like this. They should have had full trust in their Master for had they not seen Him in action? How He had power over diseases and demons? If Jesus could deliver people miraculously from sickness and evil spirits, what is this storm to Him? But alas, they did not think like this.

Are not we like this betimes? When we are going through a bad patch in life, and our faith is being sorely tried, do we not question Jesus like this?—*“Where are you, Lord?” “Don’t you care?”* We should know that He is always there and He cares very much for us.

Jesus showed His power and commanded the wind and the sea, *“Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm”* (Mark 4:39). Jesus then admonished His disciples, *“Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?”* (Mark 4:40). Our faith is sometimes so small that it is hardly visible. Let us have strong faith in our God, for as a children’s hymn goes, *“With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm.”*

THOUGHT: *“Be not dismayed whatever betide, God will take care of you!”*

PRAYER: (Pray for faith in bad times and all the time.)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26

MARK 5:1-20

DEUTERONOMY 18:9-12

“...Come out of the man,
thou unclean spirit.”

POWER OVER DEMONS

The “unclean spirits” are demons. They can take possession of human bodies and dwell within them. We find here such a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit and had great physical strength (Mark 5:2-4).

How did he become this way? Likely through pagan and occultic activities, for Gadara where he came from was in Gentile territory full of witchcraft and idolatry. 1 Corinthians 10:20 tells us that “*the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils.*” If you invite the devil into your life, he will gladly come in. That was why God commanded the Israelites to cast out all the idolatries and dark practices from the land of Canaan (Deut 18:9-12).

When demons possess a man, they take control of him and make him their tool. The possessed man becomes a tool for deception and destruction. Remember how the devil possessed the serpent and used it to deceive Eve (2 Cor 11:3)? Satan deceives in order to destroy. “...*He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*” (John 8:44). The Gadarene demoniac was such a victim. Look at how violent and destructive he had become—cutting himself with stones and beating up people who tried to restrain him (Mark 5:3-5).

How can a person free himself from demonic possession? The only way is through Jesus, the Son of the most high God (Mark 5:7). The demons are afraid of no one but Christ. The Lord Jesus here cast out the demons from the man, and the demons could not but obey Him. They left the man and entered into the pigs, and true to form, the pigs went mad and jumped off the cliff into the sea (Mark 5:13).

The man, once healed, regained soundness of mind and became an evangelist, testifying “*how great things Jesus had done for him*” (Mark 5:20). If a man wants to be delivered from demons, he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once Jesus comes in, the demons will quickly come out.

THOUGHT: Don't play with the devil, or he will make you his playground.

PRAYER: (Thank God for how He has delivered you from Satan and from sin.)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27

MARK 5:25-34

HEBREWS 11:6

“...go in peace, and be
whole of thy plague.”

POWER OVER DISEASES

We live in a world full of diseases and death. All this is due to the fall when man sinned against God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q19 states, “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.”

Is there a way out of this miserable state we are in? The answer is yes. Jesus came to save us from disease and death. Here we find a woman with an incurable disease—she had been bleeding for 12 years. She spent all her money on doctors who subjected her to many painful treatments but her condition not only did not improve, it became worse (Mark 5:26). When doctors cannot do anything, there is Jesus—the Physician of physicians. This woman went to Jesus by faith. She merely touched Jesus’ clothes and was immediately healed.

What was this faith that saved her? It was a faith that came by hearing (Mark 5:27). She had heard of Jesus—His gospel and His power. Indeed, “*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom 10:17). Her hearing of Jesus led her to see Him. She had this zeal and eagerness to get to Jesus, and this is one characteristic of saving faith (Matt 11:12). She did not give up easily despite the crowd. She was determined to get to Jesus no matter what. Furthermore, she was very sure of Jesus that by just touching the clothes of Jesus, she would be healed. She was convinced that Jesus was that powerful. Not only was she healed, her sins were forgiven—she was made whole physically and spiritually (Mark 5:34).

The faith that was displayed by the woman is that kind of a faith that pleases God and gets His blessings. “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” (Heb 11:6).

THOUGHT: It is only when the resurrection takes place that we are delivered totally and finally from disease and death.

PRAYER: Lord, I look forward to the resurrection when I will be perfectly made whole.

POWER OVER DEATH

Jesus has power over demons, over diseases, and even over death. Here, we find Jairus going to Jesus for help for his daughter was sick and dying. He went to Jesus for help because he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. As a synagogues elder, he must have heard the gospel Jesus preached, and of His power to save. And he believed. When he came to Jesus, he humbled himself and knelt before Him, begging Him to heal his one and only daughter (Luke 8:42). But before Jesus could get to her, Jairus was told that his daughter had died and that there was no need to trouble Jesus anymore. What shocking news! His faith must have been hit hard. At one moment there was hope, but now all hope is gone.

Jesus our Saviour is a very good Saviour. In a hopeless situation, He gives hope. In the Lord Jesus, there is always hope. The Lord first strengthened the faith of Jairus by reaffirming his faith, “*Be not afraid, only believe*” (Mark 5:36). In other words, “Since you have believed on me, keep on believing, for in the midst of bad news, I am still Good News!”

When Jairus reached home, it was a most depressing scene for there was a whole lot of weeping and wailing. All the noise and din must have disturbed Jairus’ faith. But Jesus reassured him with these calming words, telling the crowd, “*Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth*” (Mark 5:39). The people laughed and scorned at Jesus, but Jairus kept faith. The people disqualified themselves; but Jairus and the mother of the child “*and them that were with him*” (Mark 5:40) were privileged to be in the house to see the miracle the Lord Jesus was about to perform: “*And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment*” (Mark 5:41,42). Just a simple word of Jesus was powerful enough to raise the dead. Surely this is the power of God Himself.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 56.)

PRAYER: “*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*” (Ps 56:3)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29

MARK 6:1-6

1 TIMOTHY 4:12

“...A prophet is not without honour,
but in his own country...”

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT

There is an old Cantonese proverb which says, “Local ginger is not hot.” In other words, a local talent is not appreciated. This is what we find here—Jesus now back in his hometown Nazareth received no honour but was rather despised and rejected. “*But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house*” (Mark 6:4).

Who loses out when this happens? Those who fail to appreciate their own will lose out big time. The Lord Jesus was all ready to bless his hometown greatly. He had so much to offer to them. But they mocked and scorned, “*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him*” (Mark 6:3). The word “offended” here is from the Greek *skandalizo* where we get the word “scandalise.” They saw him as a “scandal.” They found it unbelievable that a carpenter could be a prophet. Could a lowly person rise to such a high position? Jesus was so amazed by their unbelief (Mark 6:6), He could do no mighty work there—they wanted nothing to do with Him.

Since Nazareth rejected Him, Jesus went to Capernaum (Matt 4:13). Nazareth’s loss was Capernaum’s gain. Jesus set up house in Capernaum and became a permanent resident there. Capernaum became the headquarters of His ministry in Galilee. And from there, He did mighty things: “*The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.... And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people*” (Matt 4:16,23).

Honour your own and don’t despise the young (1 Tim 4:12), nor the old (Lev 19:32). Here is wisdom, “*The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head*” (Prov 20:29).

THOUGHT: Who gets more attention in your church—your own pastor or a visiting preacher?

PRAYER: (Pray for your pastor.)

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 30

MARK 6:7-13

MATTHEW 28:18-20

*“And he called unto him the twelve,
and began to send them forth...”*

MISSIONARY PRINCIPLES

Every church is a missionary society. What are the principles of missions and evangelism? There are three: (1) The Call, (2) The Charge, and (3) The Communication.

First, the call. Jesus *“called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two”* (Mark 6:7). Know that there is a general call and a special call. The general call is found in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19,20). Every Christian is called to share the gospel to family and friends, even strangers. Then there is a special call which is a call to full-time service. This was the call received by the 12. The Lord continues to call certain ones to full-time ministry—to be pastors, teachers, missionaries, church workers etc. Is the Lord calling you to full-time service? How to know if you have such a call? You know you have such a call when you have an inescapable desire or conviction to serve the Lord with all of your life. You will also have a desire to study in a Bible College and be trained for the ministry—just like military officers have to go through OCS (Officer Cadet School) before they become commissioned officers with the authority and skill to lead and serve.

Second, the charge. Those who do the work of missions and evangelism must be fully dependent on the Lord for what they need (Mark 6:8-11). The most important thing is the gospel that they have and must bring to the people, not money or material possessions. Servants of God are required to step out in faith to do God's will trusting only in Him to provide for all their physical and spiritual needs.

Third, the communication. All who preach the gospel must preach the gospel of repentance (Mark 6:12), and not the gospel of prosperity that is so popular and prevalent today. Mankind has to be told that they have sinned against God and that judgment is coming. The only way of salvation is for sinners to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom 6:23).

THOUGHT: Are you sharing the gospel with others?

PRAYER: (Pray the Lord to raise up more men and women for full-time ministry.)

MONDAY, JANUARY 31

MARK 6:14-29

MATTHEW 5:10-12

“...It is John, whom I beheaded...”

MARTYRDOM

Many Christians today are persecuted for their faith. Many have been beheaded by terrorists. Many are forced to worship secretly because Christianity is made illegal.

Here we find Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) playing the devil's advocate. Jesus called him *“that fox”* (Luke 13:32), for he was a cunning and crafty fellow. Jesus had become famous for His message and ministry, and Herod was wondering who He was. He mistakenly thought it was John the Baptist for he said, *“It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead”* (Mark 6:16). Perhaps, he thought John had returned to haunt him.

Why did Herod have John killed? It was because John rebuked him for his sin, *“It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife”* (Mark 6:18). John lived in the light but Herod lived in darkness. Those who believe in a lie, live in darkness, and they are afraid of those who live in the light. So, Herod had John arrested and imprisoned. The wicked will not punish liars who flatter and deceive, but preachers of the truth who rebuke sin and error.

Herodias, an adulteress herself, was partner in crime. Like Jezebel, she hated the Lord's prophet. She wanted John killed for exposing her sin. She wickedly schemed to trick Herod into sentencing John to death. Not only that, she wanted John executed in a certain way—to have his head chopped off and served on a platter (Mark 6:25).

Not only John, but many Christians have suffered most cruel deaths in the hands of very wicked unbelievers. But Christ will come one day to judge the wicked, and reward His martyrs, *“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years”* (Rev 20:4).

THOUGHT: The cross first, then the crown.

PRAYER: (Pray for grace to confess Christ and never deny Him in the face of death.)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1

MARK 6:30-32

MATTHEW 11:28-30

“...Come ye yourselves apart...
and rest a while...”

BIBLICAL LEISURE

Work is good and sacred, but rest is also necessary. “*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...*” (Exod 20:9,10).

Jesus Himself knew how to rest and to give His disciples rest, “*Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while*” (Mark 6:31). “*Desert place*” here does not necessarily mean a deserted or desolate place (eg. the Sahara); it can mean a quiet place where there is no crowd like a quiet spot by the sea or in the hills (cf. Mark 3:7; 9:2). The desert places of Judea for instance abound with oases and waterfalls. David and his men sought refuge in the desert where there was abundant food and water, and many caves for dwelling or shelter (eg. Engedi, 1 Sam 23:29).

The word “*rest*” in the Greek literally means “to rest up.” When Jesus told His disciples to rest, He meant that they should refresh themselves, to take a break, or take it easy. Since they had been so busy “*for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat,*” it was good that they should take some time off to sleep and to eat—to recharge and reenergise themselves.

There is no sin in taking time out for a vacation or a retreat. Church camps or Bible camps have a biblical basis. Many churches hold yearly retreats to help members get away from the hustle and bustle of life in a meaningful way by spending time together to meditate on God’s Word and have fellowship with one another. Such camps are good for both body and soul. Don’t miss out on church camps.

THOUGHT: Read Matthew 11:28-30.

PRAYER: (Thank God for strength to work each day, and for rest on the Sabbath day.)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2

MARK 6:33-44

PSALM 23

“...they were as sheep not
having a shepherd...”

JESUS OUR PROVIDER

One of the names of God is *Jehovah Jireh* meaning “The LORD will provide.” Jesus is Creator and Provider. What has He provided us with?

First, He has provided us with salvation. Mark 6:34 says, “*And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.*” It is Jesus who gives salvation and that is what His name means, i.e. “Saviour.” He had compassion on the people because they were like lost sheep heading towards destruction. “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*” (John 10:11). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who Himself is “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (Acts 16:31).

Second, He has provided us with Scripture. When Jesus saw the people so blind and lost, He “*began to teach them many things.*” He fed them with His Word. The Word of God is more important than bread and butter. Jesus Himself said, “*...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matt 4:4). Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life: “*And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.... I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*” (John 6:35,51). Jesus gave His flesh on the cross to suffer and die for our sins and the very same flesh that was crucified on the cross was laid in the tomb and raised the third day. And by so doing, He gave us the Gospel which “*is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*” (Rom 1:16).

Indeed, God has provided for us all that we need for eternal life—Jesus our Saviour and the Holy Scriptures. Both Saviour and Scripture are 100% perfect in every way. Our salvation is 100% guaranteed all the way.

THOUGHT: Read Psalm 23.

PRAYER: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*” (John 6:68)

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3

MARK 6:45-56

JOHN 14:1-27

“...*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*”

HAVE NO FEAR

After the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sent His disciples away while He retreated for prayer alone. The disciples departed by boat at “even” (6-9 pm, Mark 6:47), but could not reach the other side even after rowing for more than 6 hours (Mark 6:48, the 4th watch, i.e. 3-6 am) because the wind was blowing strongly against them. Then came Jesus to them walking on the water! When they saw Him, they were taken aback thinking it was a ghost. But Jesus assured them, “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid*” (Mark 6:50). What was Jesus telling His disciples when He said, “*It is I; be not afraid*”?

First, Jesus was telling His disciples that He is Jehovah Himself. “It is I” is literally “I, I am” in the Greek text. God said the same to Moses as well, “*I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*” (Exod 3:14 cf. Isa 46:10). As Jehovah, Jesus is saying He is Creator and has power over nature. Just like He parted the Red Sea for the Israelites, He can calm the sea and bring them safe to shore.

Second, Jesus was telling them that He is the Protector and Preserver of their lives. Since He is Jehovah, they ought to take courage and have no fear, for He is near and they are dear to Him. As soon as He boarded the boat, the wind ceased—there was a wonderful calm, and miraculously they found themselves immediately on shore (John 6:21).

Are there storms in your life? Are you troubled in mind and heart? There is deliverance if you will have God, even the Lord Jesus, in your life. Jesus says, “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:1,27).

THOUGHT: Have no fear, He is near.

PRAYER: “*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*” (1 Pet 5:7)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4

MARK 7:1-23

JEREMIAH 6:16

“Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition...”

SCRIPTURE OR TRADITION?

“Tradition, tradition!” so sings the fiddler on the roof. The Jews run their lives according to tradition—how to sleep, eat, work and wear their clothes. How did all these traditions start? The father of the house replies, “I don’t know but without tradition our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on a roof.”

Tradition is not necessarily bad. It can be quite good if the tradition is based on God’s Word. However, it is bad if it is based on the whims and fancies of men. Jesus here was against the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. Why? It was because their traditions were not according to God, but according to them—*“the tradition of the elders,” “the commandments of men,” “the tradition of men,” “your own tradition”* (Mark 7:3,7-9). God has given many commands in the Hebrew Scriptures which are good for them, but the scribes and Pharisees added to those commands unnecessary and arbitrary rules. These many extra-biblical rules and regulations made the commands of God overly burdensome and practically impossible to keep: *“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers”* (Matt 23:4). Jesus called them hypocrites: *“This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.... Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye”* (Mark 7:6,9,13). It must be said that spirituality is not measured by tradition, but by Scripture. Let us seek to pass down good, biblical traditions, *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim 2:2).

THOUGHT: Holiness comes not by carrying the Bible but by obeying the Bible.

PRAYER: [Thank God for good, biblical traditions (Jer 6:16).]

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5

MARK 7:24-37

MATTHEW 15:21-28

*“The woman was a Greek,
a Syrophenician by nation...”*

HUMBLE FAITH

Jesus at this time was in Tyre and Sidon (modern Syria) which is Gentile territory. There, a Syrophenician woman met Him and begged Him to save her daughter from demon possession. Look at how this woman addressed Jesus; it was with utmost respect, even worship: *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David”* (Matt 15:22). What is truly remarkable is that she as a Gentile knew how to address Jesus as “the Son of David,” a specifically Jewish title. She was able to see that Jesus was the Messianic Son of David, something the Jews should have seen but did not.

It is interesting that Jesus ignored her pleas initially. Why? He did so for the sake of His disciples who had to learn what true faith was all about. Jesus was going to use this woman as an example of what great faith is. Great faith is characterised by humility. To test her faith, Jesus said to her, *“Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs”* (Mark 7:27). Jesus likened her to a dog. Most, if not all, of us would resent this. Not this woman. She humbled herself to the dust, and agreed with Jesus that she was but a dog, *“Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs”* (Mark 7:28).

In those days, the people dined with their hands, and after they had eaten, they would use the leftover bread to wipe their fingers, and this dirty bread was cast to the ground for their pet dogs to eat. This woman considered herself worthy only of the dirtied pieces of bread that fell from the Lord’s table. What faith! *“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt 5:3). Jesus highly commended her, *“O woman, great is thy faith”* (Matt 15:28). And her daughter was healed that very moment. It is only when we strip ourselves of all our pride, and exalt Jesus in every way, that we receive His blessings. If we want Jesus to do great things in our lives, He must be everything, and we absolutely nothing.

THOUGHT: *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”* (Ps 34:18)

PRAYER: (Bow your knees to the Lord in prayer.)

WHY SO STUPID?

As Christians, we should not be stupid, but clever and wise. There is no reason not to be, for we have the best and wisest of all teachers—the Holy Spirit Himself, and a most perfect and wise Book—the Holy Bible itself. Psalm 119:99 says, “*I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.*” 1 John 2:27 says, “*But the anointing [i.e. the Holy Spirit] which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*”

But why are we at times so stupid? We see here the Lord chiding His disciples, “*How is it that ye do not understand?*” (Mark 8:21). Jesus expected them to understand, but they still did not.

There are a couple of reasons for our stupidity. First, we are stupid when we fail to know God and what He can do. Jesus had already performed two stupendous feeding miracles—the 5000 (with 5 loaves and 2 fishes) and the 4000 (with 7 loaves and a few fishes), and with the miracles, taught many things about Himself and His Kingdom. His teachings and miracles show that He is our Provider. He knows our needs and cares for us (Mark 8:2,3). We are stupid to doubt God. We are stupid when we live like we have no Father in heaven.

Second, we are stupid when we fail to see the spiritual dangers around us. And he charged them, saying, “*Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?*” (Mark 8:15-17). Leaven is yeast put in bread to make it rise. Here it is used to refer to the pervasive doctrines of false religion and false philosophy. The disciples should be more concerned for their minds—that they be not poisoned by dangerous doctrines than worry about their stomachs and where their next meal would come from. Don't be stupid!

THOUGHT: Read the warning in Hosea 4:6.

PRAYER: (Pray for wisdom and understanding.)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7

MARK 8:22-26

HEBREWS 4:14-16

“...and when he had spit
on his eyes...”

THE SPIT OF JESUS

Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind man here is similar to His healing of the deaf and dumb man earlier on where He used also His spittle in His healing ministry. This time, Jesus applied His spittle to the eyes of the blind man. Once the spittle was applied, the man began to see. The darkness had been lifted and He was able to see the shadowy figures (“*like trees*”) of men walking. When Jesus put His hand upon his eyes a second time, his sight was completely restored, and he “*saw every man clearly*”—a 20/20 vision.

Why did Jesus heal in two steps when He could have healed this blind man instantly? Why did He use His spittle and His hands when He could have simply said the word? No reasons are given. Nonetheless, it is clear that Jesus' actions here reveal not just His deity, but also His humanity. Jesus was not aloof, but had made Himself very close to the people. He was not distant and clinical in His treatment of man, but had that personal touch which displays His genuine sympathy and compassion for those who had come to Him for help. “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:15,16).

Charismatic healers today often cite this text to prove that healing miracles are not always instantaneous. But such a citation is a misapplication of the text. This text does not at all support the kind of so-called healing miracles performed by so-called faith healers of today. The healing Jesus accomplished here was truly immediate. Although He healed in two steps, there was no long interval between them. The man was healed completely within minutes. Do we find this to be the case in modern-day charismatic healings? Often we see the same sickly ones visiting the so-called healer again and again, and even after many sessions, they are still not healed. Beware of charlatan healers!

THOUGHT: Man's spit may be dirty, but Jesus' spit is pure and good.

PRAYER: (Approach the throne of grace confidently with your needs.)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8

MARK 8:27-31

MATTHEW 16:13-18

“...whom say ye that I am?”

WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?

“*Whom do men say that I am?*” (Mark 8:27). Jesus asked this question after two years of ministry. By now the people should have known who He truly was. But sad to say, the people saw Him only as “*one of the prophets*” (Mark 8:28). They could not see that He was infinitely more than that. How blind they were!

There is no doubt that Jesus is a great prophet, greater even than John the Baptist (cf. Luke 7:28). The Muslims themselves recognise Jesus as a prophet. But know that Jesus was not just a prophet, He was *the* Prophet—the Messianic Prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15). He was not one among many, but the one and only who alone has the power to save.

When Jesus asked His disciples, “*But whom say ye that I am?*” (Mark 8:29), Peter gave a most excellent answer, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt 16:16). The title “Christ” means “the Anointed.” Jesus is the Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King.

As the Anointed Prophet, Jesus preached the good news of salvation and taught the Scriptures with absolute authority. If we see Him as the Anointed Prophet, then we had better believe and obey all that He says in His Word.

As the Anointed Priest, Jesus became our Substitute and Sacrifice. He came to take our place and to die for us on the cross, “*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God*” (Rom 3:25).

As the Anointed King, Jesus came to be Ruler of our lives. When we believe in the Christ, we must accept Him not only as Saviour but also as Lord. Romans 10:9 says, “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*” The Lordship and Saviourhood of Christ cannot be separated. Jesus says, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14:15).

THOUGHT: Is Jesus all this to you?

PRAYER: (Pray that you will see the Lord Jesus in all His fullness.)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 9

MARK 8:32-38

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

“...let him deny himself, and take up
his cross, and follow me.”

CROSS FIRST, THEN CROWN

This divine principle of cross before crown applies not only to Jesus, but also to all His disciples. Jesus said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:34-36).

When Jesus said that He “*the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again,*” He was rebuked by Peter (Mark 8:31,32). Peter did not want Jesus to go to the cross—to suffer and die, but to wear the crown—to conquer and reign. Peter wanted this because he was thinking of great and grand things for himself, “When Jesus becomes King, I will be His right-hand man.” Jesus could see Peter’s proud and selfish ambition and rebuked him sternly, “*Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men*” (Mark 8:33).

Peter did not see Jesus with eyes of faith. He ought to have understood that humiliation must come before exaltation. Jesus had to fulfil His mission as a Saviour, before He could fulfil His role as a King. Jesus predicted His death and resurrection for the first time here, but He also predicted His return in power and glory (Mark 8:38). Indeed, Jesus will be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords, and rule over all. His second coming will be a glorious and powerful one. He will come into His kingdom (cf. Acts 1:3,6,7,11; 2 Tim 4:1) with His mighty angels (2 Thess 1:7-9), and with rewards (cf. 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Tim 4:8). His first coming was to suffer as a Lamb of God, but His second will be to reign as the Lion from the tribe of Judah. Cross before crown—that is the way of the Lord for us as well.

THOUGHT: “*And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not...*”
(Jer 45:5)

PRAYER: Make me a servant like Thee, O Lord.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10

MARK 9:1-13

PSALM 75

“...till they have seen the kingdom
of God come with power.”

A GLIMPSE OF THE CROWN (I)

No cross, no crown! Here, Jesus gives a glimpse of His crown—the kingdom of God to come. The transfiguration of Christ is one of the highlights of His life on earth. It is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke immediately after the Lord’s prediction that “*there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*” (Mark 9:1). By “*some of them*” Jesus must have been thinking of His inner circle of disciples—Peter, James and John—for they were the only ones who had the privilege of previewing Jesus in His glory during the transfiguration. For a brief moment, on a high mountain (possibly Hermon), Jesus was re clothed with the shekinah glory which He as God Himself possessed, and had removed when He became man (Phil 2:6,7). The glory that emanated from Him is described as intense brightness, shining like the sun, extremely white as white can ever be, with sparkling brilliance.

Moses and Elijah visited Jesus at this time to prepare Him to face with courage His coming death on the cross. Why Moses and Elijah? Obviously the reason is because Moses represents the law, and Elijah the prophets. The Old Testament comprising the law and the prophets was what Jesus had come to fulfil (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:27,44). That Jesus had by this time perfectly kept the Old Testament law and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies is indicated by the Father’s commendation of the Son—“*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*” (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7). This same commendation, one would recall, was also given at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry—at His baptism. Now that His ministry was about to end, the Father again commended Him for a work well done. Jesus had obeyed the instructions of His Father in every detail without fail and without error. Jesus was a perfectly obedient Son. Just as the Son has obeyed the Father, so also should all Christians obey the Son—“*hear ye him.*” “*Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it*” (John 2:5).

THOUGHT: “*The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.*” (Prov 3:35)

PRAYER: “*I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.*” (Ps 86:12)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11

MARK 9:1-13

REVELATION 2:8-11

“...till they have seen the kingdom
of God come with power.”

A GLIMPSE OF THE CROWN (II)

For sure, this mountain top experience of seeing Jesus transfigured was deeply etched on the minds of Peter, James, and John. But they were commanded by Jesus to keep it a secret until after His resurrection. All three did not fail to mention in their writings that wondrous “glory” they were privileged to behold (see 2 Pet 1:16-18; James 2:1; John 1:14). With this incident in mind, Peter wrote that Jesus would surely come again with great majesty and authority: *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Pet 1:16-21).

The Lord Jesus Christ will return one day to set up His theocratic kingdom. He will sit on the throne of David to reign over the whole earth for a millennium with a restored Jerusalem as His capital city, and the glorified saints as His assistant rulers. There is no doubt that Elijah and John the Baptist will be among them for they had suffered much in their life and ministry, and the Lord will promote them to positions of power and authority in the millennium when He comes (Mark 9:12,13). Jesus said, *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev 2:10).

THOUGHT: Read Revelation 19:1-16.

PRAYER: (Pray for grace to endure the sufferings of life as a Christian, and hope for the glory of God to come.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12

MARK 9:14-29

PSALM 34

“...If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

ANTIDOTE TO FAITHLESSNESS

While Peter, James, and John had a mountain-top experience with the Lord Jesus, the rest of the disciples had a valley-bottom experience with the multitude (Mark 9:17,18). This brought about Jesus' lament, “*O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me*” (Mark 9:19). So what is faithlessness? Faithlessness is the failure to believe in the Lord Jesus for who He is and what He can do. The Lord Jesus is God and Saviour and He can deliver all who trust in Him from Satan and from sin. The faithlessness of the people here is seen in their doubts and questionings, and in their prayerlessness (Mark 9:16,29).

What is the antidote to faithlessness? It is, without saying, faith itself. Jesus told the father of the boy who was tormented by an evil spirit, “*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*” (Mark 9:23). “*If thou canst believe,*” not “*If thou canst pay.*” Faith has nothing to do with money; it has everything to do with the heart and the mind—to repent of sin and turn to the Lord Jesus for salvation. This faith is not superstitious trusting in idols or images, amulets or lucky charms, but in the living and true God who alone has power over Satan and sin, disease and death.

“*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*” This kind of a faith in Jesus and in His Word pleases God. “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.... But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” (Heb 11:3,6). “*All things are possible*” with God, not man, and if man would believe in this God who is powerful to save, then “*all things are possible*” because God makes the impossible possible according to His good will and pleasure—if He would “*have compassion on us, and help us*” (Mark 9:22).

This poor man cried out, and said with tears, “*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*” (Mark 9:24). The Lord had compassion on him, and delivered his son from the demon and from death (Mark 9:25-27).

THOUGHT: Read Psalms 34:18 and 51:17.

PRAYER: “*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*”

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 13

MARK 9:30-37

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11

"...If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all..."

FIRST SHALL BE LAST

Here is the divine principle of greatness, *"If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all"* (Mark 9:35). In this world, nobody wants to be last; everyone wants to be first. Jesus says, if you want to be first, then you must first be last—start from the bottom. Jesus is the perfect example of how this is the case.

Jesus is our Perfect Example. He showed His greatness by willingly giving His life to save us wretched human beings from our sins. *"For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day"* (Mark 9:31). This great sacrificial act of His on the cross was preceded by His great attitude, i.e. His utter humility. Philippians 2:5-11 captures this very well, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

We ought to display the same attitude and action if we want to be exalted by the Lord. The Apostle Paul says, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil 2:3,4).

THOUGHT: The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

PRAYER: Make me a servant like Thee, O Lord.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14

MARK 9:38-41

REVELATION 3:14-22

*“For he that is not against
us is on our part.”*

FOR OR AGAINST? (I)

Jesus said, *“For he that is not against us is on our part”* (Mark 9:40). However, the opposite is also true, *“He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth”* (Luke 11:23).

There are times in life when we have to take sides—between truth and error, good and evil. We had better be found on the right side, on the side of truth and good, and not falsehood and evil. God hates neutrality—the Mr Nice Guy who wants to please everyone, who says yes to both good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. He is a good for nothing. Jesus warned against neutrality: *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth”* (Rev 3:15,16). Jesus also said, *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt 6:24).

Bishop Ryle rightly observed, “We all naturally love an easy Christianity. We dislike collisions and separation. We like, if possible, to keep in with both sides. We fear extremes. We dread being righteous overmuch. We are anxious not to go too far. Such thoughts as these are full of peril to the soul. Once allowed to get the upper hand, they may do us immense harm. Nothing is so offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion. To be utterly dead and ignorant, is to be an object of pity as well as blame. But to know the truth and yet ‘halt between two opinions,’ is one of the chief of sins.

“Let it be the settled determination of our minds that we will serve Christ with all our hearts, if we serve Him at all. Let there be no reserve, no compromise, no half-heartedness.... Without decision there is no happiness in religion. He that follows Jesus most fully, will always follow Him most comfortably. Without decision in religion, there is no usefulness to others. The half-hearted Christian attracts none by the beauty of his life, and wins no respect from the world.”

THOUGHT: Neutrality is the sin of compromise.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the wisdom and courage to stand on the side of what is true and right according to Thy Word.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

MARK 9:38-41

JUDE 3

*“He that is not with me
is against me...”*

FOR OR AGAINST? (II)

Nobody likes controversy especially in religion. It is already hard to fight against Satan, his world and all its temptations, without having to deal with differences within the church or among brethren. Nevertheless, as Bishop Ryle had rightly observed, “[T]here is one thing which is even worse than controversy, and that is false doctrine tolerated, allowed, and permitted without protest or molestation. It was controversy that won the battle of Protestant Reformation.... There are times when controversy is not only a duty but a benefit. Give me the mighty thunderstorm rather than the pestilential malaria. The one walks in darkness and poisons us in silence, and we are never safe. The other frightens and alarms for a little season. But it is soon over, and it clears the air. It is a plain Scriptural duty to ‘contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.’ (Jude 3)

“I am quite aware that the things I have said are exceedingly distasteful to many minds. I believe many are content with teaching which is not the whole truth, and fancy it will be ‘all the same’ in the end. I am sorry for them. I am convinced that nothing but the whole truth is likely, as a general rule, to do good to souls. I am satisfied that those who willfully put up with anything short of the whole truth, will find at last that their souls have received much damage. Three things there are which men never ought to trifle with, – a little poison, a little false doctrine, and a little sin.

“Does anyone ask me, What is the best safeguard against false doctrine? – I answer in one word, ‘The Bible: the Bible regularly read, regularly prayed over, regularly studied.’ We must go back to the old prescription of our Master: ‘Search the Scriptures.’ (John 5:39) If we want a weapon to wield against the devices of Satan, there is nothing like ‘the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.’ But to wield it successfully, we must read it habitually, diligently, intelligently, and prayerfully.”

THOUGHT: “A Bible-reading laity is the strength of a Church.” (Ryle)

PRAYER: “Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”
(Luther)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16

MARK 9:42-48

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18

“...if thy hand offend thee,
cut it off...”

SPIRITUAL SURGERY

Drastic measures must be taken to keep ourselves out of sin and out of hell. Jesus said, *“And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off... And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off.... And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:43-48).

Is Jesus literally saying we ought to amputate and maim ourselves? If so, the church would be full of handicapped people. What Jesus was driving at was separation and sanctification. Know that the word “offend” is the Greek *skandalizo* (English “scandalise”)—to cause to sin, to trip up, to stumble, to entrap or entice. Jesus was calling for separation from that which scandalises so as to save ourselves from a destructive end. The only way cancer can be dealt with is to get it out of our system as quickly as possible. This applies to sin in our lives as well. Get rid of it immediately, or else it will grow and spread and kill.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 explains what “cut if off” means, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”* Carl McIntire rightly warned, “When unbelief is yoked with belief, it always destroys the testimony of the people of God. Evil corrupts and destroys the truth.”

THOUGHT: “Only the separatists have the witness that the Bible requires.” (McIntire)

PRAYER: O Lord, keep me pure and holy, separated and sanctified for Thy use.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17

MARK 9:49,50

LEVITICUS 2:13

“...salted with fire...
salted with salt.”

FIRE AND SALT

This is one of the most difficult verses in the Bible. Key to interpreting or understanding this text is the context. The difficulty here has to do with the use of salt and its connection with fire and with itself. A person salted with fire will be destroyed, but if he is salted with salt, it is a sacrifice unto God, and is good. As such, we see two concepts here involving fire and salt; the former speaks of destruction and the latter of salvation.

To be salted with fire is to be salted unto condemnation and destruction. Fire symbolises judgment—it points to hell *“where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:43-48). Unbelievers who are dead in sin and living in sin, who have *“their conscience seared with a hot iron”* (1 Tim 4:2) are salting or seasoning themselves for the roasting they will get in the fires of hell. Beware your hands, your feet, your eyes—be careful what you do, where you go, what you see. *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:16,17).

It is much better to be salted with salt. *“Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another”* (Mark 9:50). Jesus said to all His disciples, *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men”* (Matt 5:13). In the Old Testament, the meat offering is seasoned with salt (Lev 2:13). It seeks to remind all believers to live a sanctified life. The Lord requires us to be holy as He is (Lev 11:44). *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom 12:1,2).

THOUGHT: Be salted with salt not only within but also without.

PRAYER: (Pray the Lord to sanctify you by His Truth and by His Spirit.)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18

MARK 10:1-12

MATTHEW 19:1-9

“...Is it lawful for a man
to put away his wife?”

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (I)

“Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?” (Mark 10:2). In the days of Jesus, the Pharisees taught that a man could divorce his wife for the slightest reason, for instance if she burnt dinner or was no longer pretty. The women in those days were bullied, and Jesus here defended their rights. Jesus emphasised that marriage as a divine institution involves a covenant relationship that is meant to be permanent: “*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Matt 19:4-6). In other words, no divorce!

If that be the case, why then did Moses allow for divorce, and that it should be put in writing (Mark 10:4)? “*And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept*” (Mark 10:5). Jesus reminded them that marriage as a divine institution was meant to be permanent and a blessing to the married couple right from the start. “*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Mark 10:7-9).

This original intention was spoiled by sin. Divorce is thus not a divine but a human institution. Divorce is not what God wanted, but what man wanted—“*the hardness of your hearts*”! The people in those days insisted on the bill of divorcement. Divorce is therefore a product of sin. It is shameful to divorce even though God has granted permission for it.

THOUGHT: Remember your marriage vow!

PRAYER: (Pray that your relationship with your spouse will be bound by the love of Christ in obedience to His Word.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19
MARK 10:1-12
DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

*“What therefore
God hath joined together,
let not man put asunder.”*

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (II)

Although divorce is allowed by God, certain regulations apply. Marriage must be taken seriously, and divorce should not be made easy. Note that Deuteronomy 24 does not provide a convenient escape from marriage. Consider the Mosaic regulations. Moses instructed that for a divorce to take effect: (1) It must go to the courts in the presence of witnesses where a legal bill for divorce must be drawn up and signed. This of course requires time. There should be no such thing as getting married today, and then divorced tomorrow. Neither can a person divorce his spouse verbally by simply saying “I divorce you” (*Talak*) three times. Quick divorces are forbidden. (2) A certificate of divorce must be served. The one who filed for divorce is required to put the document into the other party’s hand. (3) The person divorced must move out of the house; they are no longer to live together. There is a rupture in the family unit. (4) Once divorced and remarried, they can never be married to each other again. All these rules were imposed to discourage divorce, to encourage reconciliation, and to allow for time to heal relationships.

The Pharisees taught that a man can put away his wife for every cause. Against this Jesus said, *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery”* (Mark 10:11,12). Anyone who marries an adulterer or adulteress commits adultery as well. The marriage covenant is binding throughout life—“till death us do part.” Once married there should be no divorce. God hates divorce. As the Lord Jesus will never break His redemptive covenant to save us till the very end, so must we not break our marital covenant; we need to be faithful to our respective spouses till the very end. Remember the marriage vow, “as long as you both shall live!”

THOUGHT: What does “till death us do part” mean?

PRAYER: (Pray for faithfulness to your spouse.)

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 20

MARK 10:13-16

MATTHEW 11:25

“...Suffer the little children
to come unto me...”

MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

Children are VIPs, they are very important to God and to us. The word “*children*” occurs over 1500 times in the Bible. Psalm 127:3 says, “*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*” Children are God’s gifts to us and for children to be a blessing to parents, church, society, and country, there must be strong marriages, strong families with a daddy and a mommy, not a daddy and a daddy, or a mommy and a mommy; gay marriages destroy family, and eventually country.

Jesus said, “*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:14). The term “*little children*” here (Greek: *paideia*) refers to infants and toddlers (children from day one to five years old). The kingdom of heaven is full of people who have childlike faith and trust in Jesus. Jesus said, “*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt 18:3,4). Read also Mark 10:15. Children are so teachable. They listen and learn—A is A, B is B, C is C, white is white, black is black (cf. Matt 11:25). Unless we believe in Jesus and His Word like a little child, we cannot be saved.

Jesus blessed the little children and prayed for them. Children need good and godly parents, parents who are Christlike who will teach them the Bible and pray for them. That was why Moses said to Israel, “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up*” (Deut 6:4-7). Are we doing that?

Let us love our children, teach them God’s Word from day one, and pray for them and for their salvation.

THOUGHT: Be willing to give your son to full-time Christian service.

PRAYER: (Pray for your children.)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21

MARK 10:17-31

MATTHEW 6:19-21

“...How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”

CURSE OF WEALTH

Is wealth a blessing? Most people think so, even those who profess to be Christians—just look at the popularity of the prosperity or health and wealth gospel. Wealth or money in and of itself is not bad, it is the love of it that is bad, “*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*” (1 Tim 6:10).

Wealth can be a curse. We see this in the case of the rich young ruler who coveted his wealth and would not give it up to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:21,22). Jesus had a comment on this rich man, and said to his disciples, “*How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!*” Why is it so difficult for the rich to believe and follow Jesus? It is because they are so self-confident, self-assured and self-satisfied. Money brings power, and power brings control. The rich man considers himself to be “in control” of his life. With his wealth, he can buy anything he wants. It is difficult to give up all the worldly comforts that money brings. It has to do with selfish pride and worldliness.

Jesus went on to say, “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:25). What is this “*eye of a needle*”? It is not some low gate where camels have to kneel in order to get through. The eye of a needle means precisely that—the actual eye of a sewing needle where the thread goes through. Jesus was saying that it is truly easier to thread a huge camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. A man that is bloated with riches and pride will find it impossible to enter heaven. That is why the disciples were “*astonished out of measure.*” They logically and correctly responded, “*Who then can be saved?*” “None” is the expected answer. Are all rich people therefore destined to eternal damnation? Jesus gave a hopeful reply, “*With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible*” (Mark 10:27). Salvation is impossible with men; it is only possible with God.

THOUGHT: (Read Mark 8:36.)

PRAYER: (Pray for heavenly, not earthly, treasures.)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

MARK 10:32-45

LUKE 22:27

“...whosoever of you
will be the chiefest,
shall be servant of all.”

POSITION AND POWER

Here we find James and John—the sons of Zebedee—requesting from Jesus the two highest positions in His kingdom. They pictured Jesus sitting on the throne of His glory, and desired for the left and right seats of power. In other words, when Jesus becomes Prime Minister, they would like to be first and second deputy prime ministers respectively. In response Jesus said, “*Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?*” (Mark 10:38). The “*cup*” and the “*baptism*” point to His suffering and death (cf. Matt 26:39,42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Rom 6:3,4). The two answered that they were able to suffer and die with the Lord.

Jesus foretold that they would indeed drink the cup of suffering and experience the baptism of death. James would eventually be martyred (Acts 12:2), and John banished to the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9). The rest of the Apostles (save the traitor—Judas Iscariot—who committed suicide) each also died a martyr’s death. Tradition has it that the other pair of brothers— Peter and Andrew—died by crucifixion. Peter was crucified upside down, and Andrew on an X-shaped cross. Jesus promised that those who suffer for Him will one day reign with Him. Jesus had already promised them, “*Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matt 19:28). However, whether James and John would get to sit on the highest positions they asked for was not for Him to appoint, but the Father.

Then Jesus gave them a lesson on true greatness. “*[W]hosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all*” (Mark 10:43,44). Jesus Himself is the supreme example of true servanthood and greatness, “*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). Greatness is not measured by how much people are serving you, but how much you are serving others.

THOUGHT: If we want to be great, we must be like Jesus.

PRAYER: (Pray for a servant’s heart.)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

MARK 10:46-52

MATTHEW 20:29-34

“...Lord, that I might
receive my sight.”

HOW CAN THE BLIND SEE?

Jericho is the oldest city in the world. It is also the lowest city on earth (258 metres or 846 feet below sea level). In this city, we find the very rich like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the very poor like Bartimaeus. In this city, we find Jesus saving the very rich and also the very poor.

When Jesus arrived at Jericho, two blind men pleaded with Him for healing. One of them was named Bartimaeus who was not only blind, but also a beggar. He addressed Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of David. He believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah—a title the religious leaders of Israel refused to use on Jesus due to their unbelief. The Lord took pity on Bartimaeus and his companion. When Jesus asked what they wanted Him to do for them, they replied that they wanted their sight. By the power of His word, Jesus opened their eyes. Their spiritual sight resulted in their physical sight. Jesus said, “*thy faith hath made thee whole [and saved thee].*” And they followed Jesus as He walked on, and glorified God.

Bartimaeus though physically blind, had spiritual sight. And how did he see spiritually especially the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David? It must be through his ears for he must have heard of Jesus and His teachings, and understood and believed that He was truly the promised Saviour. “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom 10:17). He believed Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of 2 Samuel 7:12,13, that He is the greater Son of David.

Bartimaeus showed his faith by his humility, for he cried out saying, “*Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me*” (Mark 10:47). He did not think himself to be worthy of anything, but begged the Lord for mercy, for if the Lord be willing, He can certainly save and heal. Jesus was willing, for He, as God, “*giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*” (1 Pet 5:5-7).

THOUGHT: Better to be physically blind than to be spiritually blind.

PRAYER: (Pray for spiritual eyes to see the glory of God and understand the Holy Scriptures.)

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24

MARK 11:1-11

MATTHEW 21:1-9

“...Blessed is he that cometh
in the name of the Lord...”

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (I)

Jesus now presented Himself openly and officially as Israel’s promised Messiah. In lowliness, the King of Israel rode into His city on a young male donkey (on which no one rode before) in fulfilment of the royal Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Many went out to greet Him paving His way with their garments and palm branches, and shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he—the King of Israel—that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” The Hebrew word—*Hosanna*—means “Save now” or “Please save” (cf. 2 Sam 14:4; Ps 118:25). All this happened on Sunday. That is why this event is commemorated in the church today as Palm Sunday—the first day of the passion week (cf. John 12:1).

The Pharisees became very disturbed by all the open and loud cries of the people calling Jesus “King.” They were probably afraid that the Romans would interpret all this as a sign of revolt. As Jewish leaders, their necks were on the line. If Jesus were arrested, they risked being arrested too. So they quickly told Jesus to rebuke His disciples. Jesus answered them, “*I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out*” (Luke 19:40). No one can stop the proclamation of the truth that Jesus saves. Hosanna reminds us of Matt 1:21, “*thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*” The triumphal message of Palm Sunday is “Jesus, Hosanna,” “O Saviour, save now!”

“*Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts...*” (Heb 3:7,8). Do not delay, believe on Jesus today!

THOUGHT: “*And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*” (Mark 4:9)

PRAYER: (Pray for spiritual ears to hear the Gospel and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25

MARK 11:1-11

LUKE 19:29-40

“... To day if ye will hear his voice,
Harden not your hearts...”

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (II)

Zechariah 9:9 describes the Messianic King as being “just” and “lowly,” and bringing “salvation.” Salvation will come by means of His righteousness (active obedience), and humiliation (passive obedience). His triumphal entry marks His triumph in life in obtaining righteousness for His people, and His subsequent triumph in death in redeeming them from the penalty of sin. The Jews failed to understand this. When they cried “Hosanna,” they were calling on Jesus to save them from Roman bondage. They had expected Him to lead an armed revolt against Rome. This, Jesus would do in due season according to God’s timetable. His entrance into Jerusalem this time was to obtain spiritual salvation for His people, and not physical deliverance. It is thus no wonder that the Jews, seeing Jesus their King doing nothing in terms of leading them to battle, turned their Hosannas to “Crucify him, crucify him.” Jesus would save Israel from her enemies, though it would not be done this time, but the next time.

Therefore, Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is prophetically significant not only in terms of fulfilment, but also prediction. His triumphal entry points to His triumphal return. Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem the first time on a young male donkey as the Lamb of God to face His Cross. But when He comes the second time, He will ride into Jerusalem on a white horse, as the Lion from the tribe of Judah to take His Crown: “*And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS*” (Rev 19:11-16).

THOUGHT: God’s love is manifested in His blessings.

PRAYER: Father, may nothing hinder Thy blessings to me.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26

MARK 11:12-14, 20-26

MATTHEW 21:18,19

“...No man eat fruit of thee
hereafter for ever.”

FRUITLESSNESS IS CURSED

Jesus made His way to the temple. Along the way, He became hungry. Chancing upon a healthy fig tree full of leaves along the way, he hoped for some figs for breakfast, but found none. Then the Lord cursed the fig tree that it should no longer bear fruit.

Jesus used the fig tree as an object lesson. The fig tree symbolised the nation of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7). Israel, like this fig tree, had a lot of foliage but was fruitless. Israel had all that she needed (the Scriptures, the miracles, Christ Himself, etc.) to get right with God and bear fruit for Him. Instead she produced nothing. Israel is cursed like the fig tree. God intends to uproot Israel and make her unfruitful. Nevertheless, this curse will be lifted in the last days. The Lord will replant Israel back into the Promised Land, and make her fruitful when Christ returns (Matt 24:32; cf. Amos 9:14,15; Rom 11:26).

A question may be raised: Was not Jesus unfair to curse the fig tree for bearing no fruit since “*the time of the figs was not yet*”? The answer is No. Jesus was not unreasonable to curse the fig tree. The fig trees in Jerusalem bore fruit twice a year, once between March and May, and another time between August and October. One could expect smaller figs during the March-May season since they came from the old shoots of the year before. The larger figs came in August-October and were produced by fresh shoots of the new year (i.e. “*the time of the figs*”). It was in April that Jesus went to the fig tree for food. There ought to have been some early figs, but He found none, only leaves. Like this fruitless fig tree, Israel greatly disappointed the Lord.

THOUGHT: The fruitless fig tree was like the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees—just an outward show but no inward life.

PRAYER: (Pray that you may bear fruit for Jesus all the time, and all your life.)

THIEVES IN CHURCH

The temple was meant to be a “house of prayer,” but the chief priests and scribes had made it a “den of thieves” (Mark 11:17). Evidently, these temple officials had made themselves CEOs of Temple Pte Ltd, and turned God’s house into big-business racketeering. It became such because the chief priests had leased out spaces in the temple area (probably the Court of the Gentiles) to animal traders who sold their sacrificial sheep and oxen at high prices, and to moneychangers who exchanged Roman currency for temple coins at hiked-up rates. Not only were the people ripped off by those thievish merchants, the whole temple area had become a filthy and noisy market place most unsuitable for worship.

Jesus threw out all the sellers and buyers in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stalls of the animal traders. He forbade anyone to bring any merchandise into the temple. After ridding the temple of all that unholy activity, He began to teach the people therein, and all of them heard Him attentively, hanging on to His every word. For this reason, the temple authorities who desired to kill Him became afraid of Him, and could do nothing.

Today, we find such pastors in the church who preach for filthy lucre’s sake. The Apostle Paul said, “*For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake*” (Titus 1:10,11). The Apostle Peter likewise warned, “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not*” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

THOUGHT: Beware the Benny Hinns and all Charismatic charlatans!

PRAYER: (Don’t be gullible; pray for discernment.)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28

MARK 11:27-33

MATTHEW 21:23-27

“...who gave thee this authority
to do these things?”

QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Jesus went into the temple to teach the people, and preach the gospel. The temple officials took this opportunity to question Him publicly over the source of His authority to preach and teach. This no doubt was an attempt to discredit Him. In those days, a licence had to be obtained from the Sanhedrin or some eminent rabbi before a person could preach or teach. The chief priests, scribes, and elders were clearly offended by His previous acts of cleansing the temple, and healing in it. Jesus evidently showed no regard whatsoever for these temple bigwigs. He did as He pleased. As the Lord of the temple, who was to say that He had no right to do what He wanted? They wanted to get even with Jesus.

Jesus in response countered their question with a question. Here we find one wiser than Solomon. He asked them concerning the source of John's baptism: from heaven, or of men? John's baptismal ministry was to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming of the Messiah (Matt 3:1-3). When the Messiah eventually arrived, John duly identified Him and pointed his disciples to Him—the Lamb of God, and the Son of God who baptises with the Holy Spirit and with fire (John 1:29-34). The chief priests and scribes were stumped. They knew they had been cornered. If they had answered “from heaven,” Jesus would have replied, “that is my answer to your question.” They obviously did not want to give the correct answer, but if they should say “of men,” all the people would stone them, for everyone was convinced that John was God's prophet indeed. So they decided to cop out with an evasive, “No comment!” *“And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things”* (Mark 11:33).

THOUGHT: Jesus is the Author of life, and has authority over all.

PRAYER: (Pray for submissiveness to the authority of Christ.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 1
MARK 12:1-12
MATTHEW 21:33-46

*“What shall therefore
the lord of the vineyard do?”*

DIVINE LONGSUFFERING

The parable of the wicked farmer was specifically addressed to the nation of Israel. Israel was a nation ruled by God. God appointed kings in Israel to rule on His behalf as shepherds. When the kings departed from God and His ways, the Lord sent His servants, the prophets, to call the people to repent and return to God. But they killed His prophets each time they were sent. In the divided kingdom, Ephraim had 20 kings—all of them bad, and Judah had 19 with a handful of good ones, the majority being bad. Those wicked kings were known for persecuting and killing God’s prophets (see Jer 20:1,2; 37:15; 38:6; 1 Kings 19:10; 22:24; 2 Chron 24:21).

Finally, God sent His only beloved Son, and they slew Him too, in order to seize His inheritance (cf. John 11:47-53). History led to prophecy. Not only did Jesus speak on how wickedly Israel had dealt with God’s prophets in the past, He also told them how they would shortly treat the Prophet of prophets in an even worse manner. They would arrest Him, take Him outside the walls of Jerusalem, and crucify Him. What would happen soon to Jesus does not spell defeat but victory. Quoting Psalm 118:22,23, Jesus said that their rejection of Him would bring about His people’s salvation. As Peter himself wrote, *“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded”* (1 Pet 2:6).

Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness and disobedience, God did not forsake Israel nor withdraw His promises—*“for he is faithful that promised”* (Heb 10:23). Neither did He destroy them after repeated offences against Him. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9).

THOUGHT: The longsuffering of God should lead us to repentance (Rom 2:4).

PRAYER: Lord, let me never put Thee to the test, but to repent quickly when Thou chastenest me.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

MARK 12:13-17

LUKE 20:19-26

“...Render to Caesar the things
that are Caesar’s...”

PAY YOUR TAXES

Here we find the Pharisees sending out their students with the Herodians to see if they were able to catch Jesus in His words. These rabbinical students perhaps thought they could do better than their teachers. Those professors were only too glad to dispatch their young upstarts, to see how they could tackle Jesus. Either way, they had nothing to lose. Those rabbinical undergraduates and Herodians asked Jesus whether it was lawful for the Jew to pay taxes to Caesar.

Should the Jew pay or not pay tax to Caesar? If Jesus were to say Yes, He would have compromised His Messiahship as King of the Jews. If He were to say No, He would be accused of revolt against Rome. It seemed to them like a fool-proof trap. But Jesus saw through their hypocrisy, wickedness, and craftiness. With divine wisdom, He asked for a Roman tax coin, and asked them whose image and inscription were on it. They had to say it was Caesar’s. Their acknowledgement that the coin bore Caesar’s face and name effectively provided the answer to their question. That the tribute money had Caesar’s face and name all over it surely meant that it belonged to him. So Jesus said, “*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s*” (Matt 22:21). His detractors were all spellbound by the wisdom of His answer and remained speechless. There was nothing they could take hold of to accuse Him before the people.

It needs to be said that Jesus did not simply answer in such a way to extricate Himself from a trick question. He answered sincerely. Jesus meant what He said. He required the Jews to pay their taxes to Caesar. In keeping the law of man, He also fulfilled the law of God. Romans 13:1-2, the classic text on submission to civil authorities, commands, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*”

THOUGHT: Our citizenship is in heaven, not earth.

PRAYER: (Pray for the government, and pay your taxes.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

MARK 12:18-27

1 THESSALONIANS 4:14-16

*“In the resurrection therefore...
whose wife will she be of them?”*

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN HEAVEN

The Sadducees here questioned Jesus about life hereafter—something they themselves did not believe in. Obviously they had asked the question with a sinister motive, and not because they honestly wanted to know what life after death entails. Citing the law of levirate marriage (*levir* is Latin for “brother-in-law”) found in Deuteronomy 25:5ff, they cooked up a story of a woman whose husband had died before they had a child. According to custom, the woman’s brother-in-law is to take her to wife in order to preserve her husband’s line. But he also died without children, and so the second brother had to marry her. This continued until she married all seven brothers. Everyone who married her died without leaving a seed. Finally, she also died. So, here comes the fault-finding question: *“In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife”* (Mark 12:23). Jesus rebuked them for their theological ignorance, *“Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”* The Sadducees erred in assuming that life in heaven was going to be like life on earth. Scripture nowhere affirms that earthly familial relationships will continue to exist in heaven. Moreover, their question denied God’s power to raise believers up to a level of existence that would be far more blessed than that of the earthly on the day of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:40-50). Like the angels, resurrected saints neither marry, nor die. This should not be taken to mean that resurrected humans would become angels, or that they would have no more memory of family and friends. In the resurrected state, believers would still be human beings though living at the metaphysical level, and able to remember their past relationships and activities.

Having answered their question, Jesus went on to refute the Sadducees—how wrong they were for not believing in life after death! Jesus would have them know that the God of Israel is not the God of the dead but of the living. The God of Israel is also the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (citing Exodus 3:6), who though already departed, are still alive and awaiting the day of the resurrection (1 Thess 4:14-16).

THOUGHT: Be sure that when death comes, you are going to heaven.

PRAYER: (Pray for the salvation of your loved ones.)

FRIDAY, MARCH 4
MARK 12:28-34
MATTHEW 22:34-40

“... Which is the first
commandment of all?”

COMMANDMENT NUMBER ONE

Now a scribe or a lawyer (a PhD in Hebrew Law) asked Jesus which commandment is foremost in the law. It is possible that this particular scribe was attempting to draw Jesus into a debate on which of the 613 laws of the Torah was the greatest. Of course Jesus would not be so foolish as to waste His time arguing over this. He drew this doctor of the law back to the Scriptures. Citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, He answered, “*The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these*” (Mark 12:29-31). Jesus effectively summarised all the commands of Scripture by these two overarching, twin-commands of loving God and loving man. As a matter of fact, the Ten Commandments can be divided into these two parts: (1) the first five speaks of our duty to God, and (2) the next five speaks of our duty to man.

The scribe honestly admitted that Jesus had answered most excellently and truthfully. He not only affirmed Jesus’ words, but also added that loving God and our fellow man “*is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*” (Mark 12:33). Jesus commended him for replying wisely, and said that he was not far from being saved. Although he was “*not far from*” the kingdom of God, he was not yet “inside.” If only this scribe would trust in the Saviour—the Lord Jesus Christ—who had kept the law perfectly for him, he would have been ushered into the kingdom.

THOUGHT: No one can outwit Jesus.

PRAYER: (Pray for more love for God and for your neighbours.)

SATURDAY, MARCH 5

MARK 12:35-44

MATTHEW 23:1-39

“...How say the scribes that
Christ is the Son of David?”

WHOSE SON?

Jesus asked a simple and yet profound question, “How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?” (Mark 12:35). The scribes themselves knew full well that the Messiah was from David’s line (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-14). It must be said that the Messiah was not only the Son of David, but also Son of God. This is clearly seen in the book of Psalms, where David called Jesus “Lord,” saying, “The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son?” (Mark 12:36,37 cf. Ps 110). David, who wrote this psalm under divine inspiration, presented the LORD (YHWH, i.e. Jehovah) as telling David’s Lord (Adonai, i.e. the Messiah) to sit at His right hand of kingship and authority. If the Messiah was David’s son, why did David address Him as Lord? Why and how was David inferior to his son? The Pharisees were stumped. They could not answer for they were spiritually blind. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:13,14).

Jesus not only taught the truth, but also warned against error. Here, He publicly denounced the hypocrisy of Israel’s religious teachers, pronouncing eight woes on them (Matt 23:13-33). Teachers indeed shall receive the greater judgment (James 3:1).

In the temple, there were receptacles for people to put their monetary offerings to God. Jesus saw the rich throwing in a lot of money. Then there came a poor widow, and she dropped in two cents. Jesus told His disciples that this poor widow had given much more than all the rest. The rest gave out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty. Jesus revealed that she gave all that she had—her very last cent. She did not care that she would end up having nothing at all. She loved God and trusted in Him. She believed that the Lord would provide for her, and even if He did not, she would still give up all, even her life. Do we have such faith?

THOUGHT: Have you been rendering to God your tithe and offerings?

PRAYER: (Praise the Lord our God with your lips, and worship Him with your substance.)

SIGNS OF THE END

Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. Not one stone will be left standing. The greater question of course is when will the world end? What are the signs that tell us it is near? When will the Lord Jesus return?

The Lord began by describing the world just before He comes back. These are the signs to look out for: (1) Religious Signs: false Christs and false prophets (Matt 24:4,11,24); (2) Military Signs: “*wars and rumours of wars, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*” (Mark 13:7,8); (3) Cosmic Signs: “*great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven*” (Luke 21:11). According to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, the vision of the first four seals tallies with the signs of Matthew 24:6-8—“The galloping of the four horsemen of peace, war, pestilence and death would be as seen in a circus, going and bobbing round and round (children love to ride these ‘playhorses’). So, until the Second Coming of Christ there will be cycles of the same throughout the world. This is not narrowly confined to the last seven years of the so-called Tribulation Week. To be exact, these cycles of peace, war, pestilence and death occur during the time period from Christ’s Ascension to Christ’s Second Advent” (*Coming World Events Unveiled*, 32).

Other signs of the end times are (4) Social Signs: persecution of God’s people, and destruction of the family unit, moral corruption (Mark 13:9). Then there is the (5) National Sign: Israel will be back in the Promised Land (the sign of the fig tree in Matt 24:32 cf. Jer 24; Joel 1:6,7; Hosea 9:10; see Isa 11:11,12; note, Israel became a nation again on May 14, 1948), and attacked by the nations. Finally, the (6) Evangelistic Sign: “*this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*” (Matt 24:14). Jesus said, “*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21:28).

THOUGHT: Are you ready for the Lord’s return? It is nearer than you think!

PRAYER: (Pray you will always be alert and ready for the Lord’s return.)

MONDAY, MARCH 7

MARK 13:14-27

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-8

*“But when ye shall see the
abomination of desolation...”*

REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST

What is *“the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet”* (Mark 13:14)? It is the desecration of the Jewish temple by the Antichrist at the mid-point of the Great Tribulation. After *“42 months”* (Rev 11:2; 13:5) or *“1,260 days”* (Rev 12:6), or *“time, and times, and half a time”* (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14) into the Seven-year Tribulation Week, the Antichrist will demand worship for himself from the whole world (Rev 13:5-8; 2 Thess 2:1-4). God regards this as most hateful (an abomination).

Will the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem for the Antichrist to desecrate? The Rev Dr Timothy Tow opined, “Bible students generally conclude that since there would be the O.T. sacrifices revived, the Temple by this time would be rebuilt.... In my opinion the temple would not be rebuilt because there is no mandate to do so, as in the previous building of both Moses’ Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, yea, even in the rebuilding of the Temple by decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1,2). Not even David could build the Temple because of his bloody hands through war (1 Chronicles 28:3). Nor can any ascend the holy hill of God except his hands are cleansed and his heart purified (Psalm 24:4). The rebuilt Temple is rather the Millennial Temple in Ezekiel 40-48.”

If that is the case, then how do we reconcile the fact that the Antichrist will be sitting *“in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”* (2 Thess 2:3,4)? The Rev Dr Tow said that it can be “his intrusion into the Jerusalem Great Synagogue in West Jerusalem. This is the Jews’ holiest place, a half-way house to the Temple to come.”

Will you escape the Great Tribulation? Christians will escape the wrath of God to come (1 Thess 5:9). Have you believed in Christ? Do not delay, believe on Him today! *“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”* (Rom 10:9). Christ can return at any moment. When He comes, it will be too late! Therefore, be ready now! Be like the faithful and fruitful servant (Matt 24:44-51; 25:14-30), and the wise and watchful virgins (Matt 25:1-13).

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9.)

PRAYER: (Pray for your salvation.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

MARK 13:28-30

ROMANS 11:25-27

*“Now learn a parable
of the fig tree...”*

GOD’S CHOSEN NATION

Although Israel is one of the smallest countries in the world, it commands worldwide attention. Israel is at the heart of the world, being situated at the crossroads of three continents—Europe, Asia, Africa. What happens in Israel affects the whole world.

Why is Israel such a prominent nation? The only answer is God! God chose Israel to be a nation of global importance. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.”* The very fact that Israel still exists, and is now back in the Promised Land despite all the attempts at her extermination throughout the centuries tells us that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures is truly the living and true God and He is going to fulfil His plan and promises not only to Israel, but also to His Church, and to the whole world. And He is going to do all this in and through the Lord Jesus Christ—the Saviour of the world. The same Jesus who was crucified and resurrected 2000 years ago, will one day return to restore the nation of Israel to greatness (Rom 11:26), to promote His Church (Rev 20:6), and to bring peace to the whole world (Isa 2:4).

When will that happen? We cannot know exactly when, but we can know how near it is. One of the signs that tells us how near it is is the sign of the fig tree (Mark 13:28). The fig tree symbolises Israel. The fruitless fig tree which the Lord had cursed (Mark 11:13,14) will one day become fruitful again (Jer 31:33). When you see Israel back in the Promised Land, and growing as a nation, then know that the second coming of Christ is near, *“even at the doors”* (Mark 13:29).

THOUGHT: Read “Israel a Great Nation” in Timothy Tow, *The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1999), 25-34. Download freely from www.febc.edu.sg, see under Publications→FEBC Press→Christian Theology.

PRAYER: *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.”* (Ps 122:6)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

MARK 13:31

MATTHEW 5:18

“...my words shall
not pass away.”

EVERY WORD PRESERVED

The doctrine of preservation is a most reassuring doctrine because it tells us that God is in control and in charge of the world, of history, of people and events—nothing happens by chance. Despite the many things that have gone wrong because of the carelessness or maliciousness of men, God has providentially protected and preserved (1) His chosen nation—Israel (Ps 89:3,4, 31-36), (2) His elect children—Christians (John 10:27-30), and (3) His inspired words—the Holy Scriptures (Mark 13:31; Matt 5:18). Without question, Jesus promised that His words shall never disappear but continue to exist forever. Even if the whole universe should cease to exist (and it certainly will one day), His words will remain and will always be there for a perpetual witness of His sovereignty and faithfulness.

God has already promised to preserve His words in Psalm 12:6,7. *“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”* This truth is affirmed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.8) which states, “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic.” What a comforting promise this is that God preserves His words. This is important to all believers because our faith is based solely and purely on God’s infallible and inerrant words. Without the words of God, we will have no faith or no basis for faith. Our faith would be pure imagination or speculation, for it would be based on our own thinking and feelings, and not on the truth that is sourced in God alone. *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17).

No Bible, no faith. No Bible, no gospel. No Bible, no doctrines. No Bible, no Truth—we would not be able to know what Truth is. What is Truth? Jesus said, “[T]hy word is truth” (John 17:17).

THOUGHT: Biblical inspiration without preservation is illogical.

PRAYER: (Pray for faith to believe what the Bible says about itself.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

MARK 13:32-37

LUKE 12:32-38

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man...”

PREPARE, NOT PREDICT

When will the world end? Jesus says, *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father”* (Mark 13:32). God in His wisdom chooses not to tell us exactly when. He wants to keep us on our toes. It can happen at any time or any moment, and we just have to be always ready, all the time. Many have foolishly predicted the day and hour, or the year. They have shown themselves to be fake preachers and had to retreat in shame for prophesying falsely. Dr Chan Kai Lok of Singapore for example had predicted it would happen in 1988. Not too long ago, Dr Harold Camping from the United States predicted it would happen on May 21, 2011 and when it did not happen, changed it to October 21, 2011, but that too failed. The Lord had already said, *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man.”* Which part of Jesus’ words did they not understand?

There are so many false Christs and false prophets today. Jesus spared no effort to warn, *“Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.... For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect”* (Mark 13:5,6,22). The antidote against deception is this, *“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee”* (1 Tim 4:16). Knowing *“the doctrine,”* i.e. the Truth, the Holy Scriptures, the whole counsel of God, the fundamentals of the faith, systematic theology, is so important and vital for our own spiritual safekeeping.

Another antidote is to watch and pray. *“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.... Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh... Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping”* (Mark 13:33,35,36). Our duty is not to make predictions, but to stay alert and prayerful—alert to the dangers so that we will not be deceived, and be prayerful so that we will remain faithful to the Lord till the end.

THOUGHT: Join your church prayer meeting.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful and true to Thee till the end.

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

MARK 14:1-11

JOHN 12:5-8

“...she is come aforehand to anoint
my body to the burying.”

ANOINTED UNTO DEATH

Simon the leper, who was healed by Jesus, was full of gratitude and had Jesus over to his house for dinner. This took place in Bethany, the town of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, whose home Jesus resided in whenever He was in Jerusalem. Evidently Simon knew them, and had them over for dinner as well. Martha as usual was busy serving, and Lazarus was with Jesus at the table. But Mary did something most significant. She anointed Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on His head, and then used her hair to wipe His feet. There was enough perfume (a Roman pound = 12 ounces or 0.373 kg) to cover the Lord's entire body from head to toe. The whole house was filled with sweet fragrance.

The disciples however were unhappy over this. They felt that it was a terrible waste, and murmured against her. Judas Iscariot spoke up and complained that what Mary did was wasteful. The perfume could have been sold at a high price (300 pence or *denarii* = one year's salary), and the money given to the poor. John was quick to comment that Judas said it not because he was altruistic, but because he was a thief (John 12:6). He had been made treasurer, but pilfered from the money bag. He was greedy for money. It is no surprise that he betrayed Jesus for only 30 silver shekels (a month's salary).

Jesus vindicated Mary. He knew her heart and mind. She did it not only because she loved the Lord, but also to prepare Him for burial. Mary had been an attentive student of Jesus. She paid attention and meditated on His every word. By faith, with the Spirit's illumination, she believed in His prediction about His death for the salvation of His people (Matt 26:2 cf. 16:22).

THOUGHT: Do we follow Jesus for the money or for salvation?

PRAYER: Lord, I don't care for riches but for Thy salvation which is so rich and free.

SATURDAY, MARCH 12

MARK 14:12-21

REVELATION 19:1-9

*“...One of you which eateth
with me shall betray me.”*

HYPOCRISY AND TREACHERY

In the early morning of Thursday, Nisan 14, Jesus instructed Peter and John to prepare for the Passover. A furnished upper room had already been booked, and they were to get it ready. The lamb had to be slain in the temple forecourt in the evening (Exod 12:6), and unleavened bread, bitter herbs, wine, etc., had to be purchased before the day ended.

In the evening, Jesus sat with His disciples for the Passover meal. He told them that He desired very much to eat the Passover with them before His suffering and death. This tells us how much He valued the companionship and fellowship of His disciples. This was going to be His final meal with them, and He was overwhelmed by emotion; another attestation of His true humanity. He also announced that He would not eat and drink of the fruit of the vine until the time of His return when He celebrates the consummation of His kingdom at the wedding supper of the Lamb (Mark 14:25; Rev 19:9).

At the Passover table, Jesus told the 12 that one of them was about to betray Him. The disciples looked at one another, and wondered to whom Jesus was referring. They were extremely saddened by this—that one of them should betray the Lord. One by one they asked Him with a self-critical, *“Is it I?”*, save Judas who asked with a hypocritical *“Surely, not I!”* Evidently, none of them had suspected Judas. It is not unreasonable to say that Judas was a crafty two-timer. He had two faces. Outwardly, he appeared loyal, but inwardly, he was full of treachery.

Jesus said concerning Judas, *“...but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born”* (Mark 14:21). God had predestined that Judas should betray the Lord Jesus, and yet at the same time it is not God who is blameable but Judas. How do we reconcile this? Hear the banana skin story of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow: *“Suppose I invite you to dinner and you break your knee cap on the way by tripping on a banana skin. Who is liable? Not the remote (i.e. God) but the immediate cause (i.e. Judas) is liable.”*

THOUGHT: “Treachery is an unpardonable sin.”

PRAYER: Lord, never let me betray Thee in thought, word, or deed.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 13

MARK 14:22-25

HEBREWS 9:22-28

“...*this is my body...*”

This is my blood...”

MY BODY, MY BLOOD

The Passover *pointed towards* the cross-work of Christ. The Lamb of God Himself was about to be slain, and shed His blood for the remission of sins. By the once-for-all shedding of blood by the True Lamb, the old bloody types and symbols of the Old Testament must cease to give way to the new bloodless ones. The Lord's Supper which is the sacrament of a better covenant points back to the cross-work of Christ.

Two elements are involved in the Lord's Supper: the bread and the cup. They symbolise the body and blood of Christ respectively (cf. John 6:26-63). The bread is still bread, and the wine is still wine. They do not magically become the actual flesh and blood of Christ as taught by the Roman Catholic Church which is idolatrous. Neither are the actual flesh and blood present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine as supposed by Lutherans. The elements are also not to be adored or worshipped. The bread and the cup merely represent the body and the blood of the Lord, and the partaking of them is for the purpose of commemoration (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-25). Jesus said, “*this do ye... in remembrance of me.*” We are called to remember what Jesus did in His flesh which points to His life as well as His death. In the flesh, He fulfilled the Law perfectly and flawlessly so that by the time of His sacrifice, He was truly the Lamb of God that was without spot and blemish (1 Pet 1:18,19). For His death to be effective, He must bleed for “*without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Heb 9:22). The blood is important. His blood is powerful to deliver a man from sin (Acts 20:28).

The whole ceremony is not only a memorial service but also a spiritual exercise. Christ is not present physically but spiritually in the bread and wine. And our souls are spiritually nourished when we partake of the bread and cup by faith.

THOUGHT: A regular spiritual and faithful partaking of the Lord's Supper is good for the soul.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for saving my soul.

MONDAY, MARCH 14

MARK 14:26-31

ZECHARIAH 13:7

“...before the cock crow twice,
thou shalt deny me thrice.”

DON'T BE COCKSURE

Jesus told His disciples that He their Shepherd would be struck down that very night and that they His sheep will all desert Him (Mark 14:27). Peter assured the Lord that he would never do that, and said that he would be willing even to go to prison and to die for Him (Luke 22:33). But Jesus knew the frailties of man and his flesh.

The desertion of Jesus by His disciples would surely come to pass. It was already predicted in Zechariah 13:7. All His disciples would flee when the time of His arrest came. Although Peter said that he would not, he would soon eat his words. The Lord told Peter that before the cockcrow (cf. Mark 13:35; i.e. by the time of the 3rd watch of the night—the cockcrowing at 3 am), he would have denied Him thrice.

Peter, cocksure that he was, insisted that he would never deny the Lord. The Lord knew Peter through and through. Outwardly he appeared solid, but inwardly, he was like jelly. Jesus was very concerned for Peter. Satan had targeted him for destruction. But the Lord comforted Peter by telling him that He had already prayed for him so that his faith might not fail (cf. Heb 4:15,16). Satan would sorely test him. Peter would fall but not fail. He would come out of this trial matured to strengthen his fellow disciples (cf. James 1:2-4).

Jesus' words of departure disheartened His disciples. He comforted them with these words, “*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*” (John 14:1). Jesus was telling His disciples to focus on who He is—God Himself. They ought not to feel downcast. His death meant victory and not defeat. His death would lead to His resurrection, subsequent ascension, and eventual return (Mark 14:28). The separation between Him and His people is only temporary. When He comes back, He will take us to His Father's house which is in heaven itself.

THOUGHT: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*” (1 Cor 10:12)

PRAYER: (Pray using Psalm 56.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 15

MARK 14:32-42

HEBREWS 4:14-16

“...take away this cup from me...”

THE PASSION CUP

Gethsemane (meaning “oil press”) was an olive tree garden beyond the Kidron Valley, East of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives. The “oil press” garden filled with the twisted branches typical of olive trees vividly portrays the intense agony that Jesus went through as He thought of “*this cup*” which is the cup of His passion (i.e. the pain, suffering, and death Jesus had to go through on the cross). The agony Jesus went through was so great that He perspired drops of blood. Despite the agony, Jesus was determined to obey His Father’s will to go to the cross. Hebrews 5:7-9 makes it clear, “*Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*”

Some think it contradictory that Jesus should pray that the cup of the cross would pass from Him since He had already made up His mind to drink it (John 18:11). How could the Son of God be so scared of death? Here is Calvin’s answer, “Those who pretend the Son of God was immune from human passions do not truly and seriously acknowledge Him as a man. When the divine power of Christ is said to have reposed as it were in concealment for a time ... to allow Him to fulfil the Redeemer’s role of suffering, this is so far from being an absurdity, that the mystery of our salvation could not have been fulfilled otherwise.”

Did the Father answer the Son’s prayer? Indeed He did. His Son’s prayer was answered because He prayed obediently, “*nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt*” (Mark 14:36), “*not my will, but thine, be done*” (Luke 22:42). “[T]he cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Jesus subjected His human will to the divine will which was His will as well, being God Himself. His prayer that the Father’s will be done was answered (Heb 5:7).

THOUGHT: Our Father in heaven knows best. Do as He says and wills.

PRAYER: “*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*” (Matt 6:9,10)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16

MARK 14:43-52

MATTHEW 26:47-56

“... Whomsoever I shall kiss,
that same is he...”

BETRAYED WITH A KISS

Judas Iscariot led a group of Jewish priests and elders together with the temple police armed with lanterns and torches, swords and rods to arrest Jesus. He betrayed his Master with a kiss. A kiss was a special expression of love. It was customary for a disciple to honour his Master with a kiss. Judas kissed the Lord not out of love but hatred. By kissing Jesus, Judas added insult to injury. It reveals how wicked Judas really was.

Having received strength from His Father after His prayer at Gethsemane, Jesus was full of courage when His enemies came to seize Him. He readily identified Himself as the One whom they sought. Peter tried to defend the Lord and managed to cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, with his sword. Jesus rebuked Peter and healed Malchus. The Lord, if He had wanted to defend Himself, could have called down more than 12 legions (i.e. 72,000) of His fighting angels (Matt 26:53). But Jesus, as the Lamb of God, willingly allowed Himself to be taken for the sake of His people whom He had come to redeem in fulfilment of Scripture.

At the arrest of Jesus, a certain young man fled naked from the scene together with Jesus' disciples (Mark 14:51,52). This incident is found only in Mark. It is likely that the young man was John Mark himself who wrote this very Gospel, sharing his own personal experience in such great detail.

Jesus was left all alone, forsaken by all His friends. They were all cowards. Not only were His disciples cowardly, but also His enemies. They came to arrest Him under the cover of night, armed with weapons as if He were a dangerous criminal. They knew very well that Jesus was a harmless and peaceful person who had done only good for the people. He had always been transparent and above board in His actions. He carried no weapon. He never incited the people to revolt or riot. Jesus walked openly and taught publicly in the temple. Why did they not arrest Jesus publicly in broad daylight but in the shadow of darkness? Their hideous operation bespeaks their very own wicked intention. They wanted to nail a righteous man. They were the criminals not Jesus.

THOUGHT: “[T]he kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” (Prov 27:6)

PRAYER: (Pray after Psalm 2.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 17

MARK 14:53-72

ACTS 2:22,23

“...I know not this man
of whom ye speak.”

COWARDICE AND INJUSTICE

We have seen how when Jesus was arrested, all His disciples fled. However, Peter returned and followed the crowd from a distance. He managed to gain entrance into the palace of the high priest where the trial took place. It was a chilly night, and Peter joined the servants and officers around the fire. Here we find Peter denying the Lord three times. In his third denial, Peter even cursed and swore that he knew not Jesus (Mark 14:71). When the cock crew, the Lord turned His face to look at Peter. Peter then remembered the Lord's prediction of his denials. I believe the Lord's look upon Peter was one of love and not anger. It was the love of Jesus, I believe, that moved Peter to tears—Peter “*wept bitterly*” (Luke 22:62). Peter realised how greatly he had failed and wronged his Master. This once proud and boastful disciple was humbled to the dust. Peter from henceforth was cured of his cockiness, and ready for moulding and use by God.

Jesus was tried in a kangaroo court. There is no question that Israel's crooked leaders had already decided before the trial that Jesus was guilty and had to be put to death. The sentence was already passed before any inquiry began or evidence produced. They had absolutely no case against Jesus. They had to trump up charges against Him in order to accomplish their evil plan. They brought in false witnesses whose testimonies did not even agree.

Finally, the high priest sought to make Jesus incriminate Himself. He questioned Jesus, “*Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*” (Mark 14:61). The high priest and those with him knew full well that Jesus was Who He claimed to be—the promised Messiah. For 3½ years, the words and works of Jesus had proven without a shadow of doubt that He was the Christ the Son of the living God, and they would not believe (cf. Acts 2:22,23). Despite their unbelief, Jesus graciously revealed His identity to them, affirming that He was indeed Jehovah—the “*I am*” (Mark 14:62).

THOUGHT: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” (1 John 1:9)

PRAYER: (Have you denied the Lord in any way? Confess your sins now.)

FRIDAY, MARCH 18

MARK 15:1-5

JOHN 18:28-38

*“And the chief priests accused
him of many things...”*

NO ANSWER IS THE BEST ANSWER

The Jews sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate (appointed by Tiberius Caesar as governor of Judea from AD 26-36) for trial in the hope of getting Jesus crucified in fulfillment of prophecy (John 18:32).

Before Pilate, the Jews laid three false charges against Jesus: (1) *He perverted the nation.* This was an utter lie. The Jewish leaders were the ones who had misled their own people. The scribes and Pharisees had twisted the Mosaic Law. The Sadducees and chief priests had defiled the temple. Jesus set things right, and taught the people faithfully and truthfully from out of the Scriptures with great power and authority. (2) *He forbade the people to pay taxes to Caesar.* This was another outright lie. Only three days ago, Jesus, when asked about paying taxes to Caesar, had told the people, *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s”* (Luke 20:25). (3) *He called Himself a King.* Jesus was indeed a King, but His mission on earth at this point in time was a spiritual and not political one. This was quite clear in Jesus’ answer to Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence”* (John 18:36). When further questioned whether He was a king, Jesus answered, *“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”* (John 18:37). It was clear to Pilate that Jesus was not a political revolutionary, but a teacher of Scripture. Jesus posed no threat to the Roman government. That was why Pilate said, *“I find in him no fault at all”* (John 18:38).

The chief priests and elders would not let Jesus go. They began accusing him of *“many things.”* Jesus suffered silently, not answering any of their charges even at the behest of Pilate. Pilate again said, *“I find no fault in this man.”*

THOUGHT: Sometimes, no answer is the best answer.

PRAYER: (Pray for wisdom to respond to those who falsely accuse you.)

SATURDAY, MARCH 19

MARK 15:6-14

LUKE 23:13-25

“... *Why, what evil hath he done?*”

INNOCENT TO THE CORE

Pilate declared Jesus to be innocent, “*I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him*” (Luke 23:14,15). To appease the Jews, Pilate was willing to have Jesus flogged, and then release Him. Pilate even offered to release a Jewish prisoner to them. It was a custom for the Romans to pardon a Jewish prisoner as a gesture of goodwill during the time of the Passover. He gave them a choice. Would they have Barabbas a robber and murderer or Jesus their Messiah and King? To Pilate, the choice seemed obvious. Surely, any right-thinking man would choose the latter. But alas, these people were not thinking aright nor behaving righteously. Their hearts were filled with hatred. By hook or by crook, they wanted Jesus’ blood. So they all cried out in unison, “*Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas*” (Luke 23:18). In the eyes of the Jews, Jesus, who had healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead, preached good news to them, was worse than a thief and a killer. What injustice!

Pilate apparently did not expect such a response from the Jews. He was also warned by his wife not to have anything to do with this “*just man*” (Matt 27:19). Desiring to release Jesus, Pilate again told the murderous crowd, “*Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him!*” But they screamed all the more, “*Crucify him, crucify him.*” Seeing that a riot was about to break out, and that the Jews were intent on having their way, Pilate took water, and washed his hands before them, saying, “*I am innocent of the blood of this just person.*” Although Pilate pronounced himself innocent, he was as guilty as the Jews for he had the power to exercise justice, but did not. The Jews told Pilate, “*His blood be on us, and on our children*” (Matt 27:25). Indeed, Jesus’ blood was on them and their children. God punished the Jews for crucifying their Christ. Since AD 70 (destruction of Jerusalem and dispersal of the Jews) till today, the Jews have had no peace. Peace will come to Jerusalem only when Christ—the Prince of peace—returns.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Peter 3:18.)

PRAYER: (Pray for grace to live for Christ when you are unjustly treated.)

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 20

MARK 15:15-21

JOHN 19:1-3

“...when he had scourged him,
to be crucified.”

SCOURGED AND PIERCED

Pilate had Jesus scourged. The Roman scourge was much worse than the Singapore “rotan” or cane. No one dies from the Singapore cane, but the Roman scourge often leaves a person half-dead. That was why the Romans never flogged their own citizens (cf. Acts 16:37). It was too cruel. The instrument used for scourging was the flagellum: a whip of leathery thongs with sharp pieces of metal or bone attached to their tips. Each strike would tear out the victim’s skin and flesh. The scourging would systematically rip open the victim’s back, eventually exposing the spine and rib cage. It is no wonder that Jesus was unable to carry His cross on His back. After bearing the wooden beam for a short distance, stumbling as He went, the Roman guard had to force Simon of Cyrene to bear the cross for Him (Matt 27:32). This scourging was prophesied by Isaiah: “*he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*” (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24).

After they scourged Jesus, they beat Him some more and mocked Him. The soldiers made fun of Him by dressing Him up like a king with a purple robe, and a crown of thorns. The crown was made from twigs with protruding thorns of an inch or two long. These thorns were very stiff and hard. They come from Acacia trees and their thorns are often the cause of punctured tyres. The crown of thorns was placed on Jesus’ head and pressed into His scalp. Heavy drops of blood ran down His face and neck. He shed His blood, for “*without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Heb 9:22). Jesus did not resist, but suffered silently. By the time Jesus took His first steps towards Calvary, His body was already broken and bloody, and His face bruised black and blue.

THOUGHT: “*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*” (1 Pet 2:24)

PRAYER: (Pray that we do not have to resist unto blood.)

MONDAY, MARCH 21

MARK 15:22,23

LUKE 23:26-33

“...they bring him unto
the place Golgotha...”

SACRED HEAD ON SKULL HILL

Jesus was crucified at *Golgotha* which is Hebrew for “skull” (Latin: Calvaria). No one knows exactly why the place of crucifixion was called “*the place of a skull*.” It is possible that the name was given because the place had features of a skull. There is a hill just outside of Jerusalem, about 200 metres north east of the Damascus gate that has a façade of a skull. General Charles Gordon who discovered it, suggested that this was Calvary. Pilgrims to Israel today are directed to this spot as the crucifixion site.

Crucifixion, unlike modern execution methods like lethal injection, was invented to make death as painful and as agonising as possible. It was extremely cruel and terrifying. Long, thick, rusty nails were hammered into the wrists and feet, piercing through the flesh and bones and into the wood. It was death by bleeding. Loss of blood would eventually lead to heart failure. Jesus had to die by bleeding. Death by asphyxiation or incineration would not count. Our sins have to be “*purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Heb 9:22). Jesus had to die a bloody death. His blood was the payment for our sins. The Apostle Peter said, “*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Pet 1:18,19). Only the blood of Jesus can wash away our sins.

There were three crosses on Calvary. Jesus was at the centre, and two criminals were hung beside Him. He was numbered with the criminals. This was gross injustice, but part of His sufferings as our Saviour. In His passive obedience, He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, “*he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*”

THOUGHT: To be our Saviour, He had to be our Sacrifice.

PRAYER: (Thank God for His love for you.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

MARK 15:24-32

PSALM 22:1-24

“...the superscription of his accusation
was... THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

THE FORGIVING KING

Jesus was crucified at the third hour (according to Jewish time, i.e. 9 am). His very first words on the cross were words of love and not hatred. Jesus prayed the Father to forgive those who have put Him on the cross. For the Jews who shouted, “*Crucify him, crucify him,*” and the Romans who tortured Him, He offered this prayer, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). By so praying, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, “*he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*” Amazing love!

Jesus was not a rich man. He had no house, no money. His only possession was literally the shirt on His back. On the cross, He was stripped of His clothing. The soldiers divided His clothing into four parts (sandals, belt, outer coat, headdress), and distributed among themselves. The seamless inner coat was the costliest item. It would have been sheer stupidity for them to cut it up into 4 useless pieces. The soldiers thus threw dice for it. This fulfilled a thousand-year-old prophecy of David: “*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*” (Ps 22:18).

Pilate ordered an inscription to be placed on the cross which read, “THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” It was written in three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. This Pilate did to insult not only the local but also foreign Jews that had gathered in Jerusalem. Despite his less than honourable intentions, Pilate unwittingly wrote the truth.

Satan had tempted Jesus in the wilderness, “*If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down*” (Matt 4:6). Now on the cross, Satan tempted Him again through the people, “*Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross*” (Matt 27:40). If Jesus had come down from the cross, Satan would have won, and we would still be in our sins. Jesus endured the cross, and all the temptations levelled against Him when He was physically most weak. Indeed, He “*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15).

THOUGHT: “To err is human, to forgive divine.” (Alexander Pope)

PRAYER: Father, forgive me of my sins as I forgive those who trespass against me.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23

MARK 15:33-37

PSALM 22:25-31

“...My God, my God, why hast
thou forsaken me?”

THE SON FORSAKEN

There was a supernatural darkness that covered the land from 12 pm to 3 pm. The noonday sun shone no light. Why did God send this darkness? Darkness is a symbol of judgment (see Isa 5:30; 60:2; Joel 2:30,31; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18; Acts 2:20; 2 Pet 2:17; Rev 6:12-17). W. Hendriksen commented, “The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins, his wrath as it were burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus, so that he, as our Substitute, suffered most intense agony, indescribable woe, terrible isolation or forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Saviour descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead.” At this time, Jesus (the sinless Lamb of God) was “*made ... sin*” for us (2 Cor 5:21), made “*a curse*” (Gal 3:13), laden with “*the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:6).

At three in the afternoon, Jesus gave out a most agonising cry, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” These words are taken from Psalm 22:1. When Jesus said those words, it not only indicated the fulfilment of that Messianic psalm, but also displayed the intense torment of the soul that He went through. To be sure, God the Father and God the Son are essentially inseparable. The “forsaking” here has nothing to do with Christ’s divine nature but His human nature. In other words, Christ was left totally on His own to bear the weight of the sin of the whole world. His Father could not help Him. He had to do it all alone, by Himself. Ben Price’s hymn, “Alone,” captures this thought well:

*Alone upon the cross He hung
That others He might save;
Forsaken then by God and man,
Alone, His life He gave.
Alone, alone,
He bore it all alone;
He gave Himself to save His own,
He suffered, bled and died alone, alone.*

THOUGHT: Jesus was forsaken so that we might never be forsaken.

PRAYER: (Pray that you will always follow the Lord and never forsake Him.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

MARK 15:38-41

EXODUS 26:31-33

*“...the veil of the temple
was rent in twain...”*

BARRIER BROKEN

After Jesus died, the veil of the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of holies was completely torn apart from top to bottom into two equal pieces. The veil was no small curtain. It was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and four inches thick. It was so heavy it required 300 priests to hang it up.

The multicoloured veil itself was beautiful to behold. It was indeed a powerful visual aid revealing Christ's redemptive mission on earth in both His life and death. The tearing of the veil was the Father's way of announcing that His Son's mission had been accomplished. The saints can now enter into God's very presence through Christ. This is our privilege in Christ: *“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb 10:19-22).

The Roman captain together with his soldiers who were in charge of Jesus' crucifixion and who witnessed those six hours of redemptive drama finally had to glorify God and conclude with certainty that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and a righteous man. These unregenerate soldiers had earlier mocked Jesus (Luke 23:36). Did they, like the thief (Luke 23:42), repent of their sins, and become Christians?

THOUGHT: *“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”*
(Heb 4:7)

PRAYER: (It is never too late to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sins. Confess your sins and confess the Lord Jesus right now.)

FRIDAY, MARCH 25
MARK 15:42-47
MATTHEW 27:57-61

*“...and laid him in a sepulchre
which was hewn out of a rock...”*

ANOINTED AND ENTOMBED

Since the Sabbath was about to begin (at sunset, 6 pm), the Jews wanted to bury the bodies as quickly as possible. To leave the bodies exposed on the Sabbath would desecrate the holy city. The bodies could be taken down only if they were dead. To hasten death, the soldiers would break the legs of those crucified. They broke the legs of the two thieves. When they came to Jesus, they saw that He was already dead, and so did not break His legs. However, to ensure that He was indeed dead, a spear was thrust into His side, and blood and water flowed out. This indicated that blood circulation had stopped. His heart had already stopped beating for some time. This fulfils Psalm 34:20, *“A bone of him shall not be broken,”* and Zechariah 12:10, *“They shall look on him whom they pierced.”* That Jesus’ bones were not broken fulfils the requirement of the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:46; Num 9:12). Indeed, Jesus kept the ceremonial law to the jot and tittle (cf. Matt 5:17,18). Not only in His life, but also in His death, Jesus kept the Law of God!

There were at least two believers (albeit secret ones until now) in the Sanhedrin—Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus of John 3. At no small risk to themselves, they claimed the body of Jesus. Joseph with great effort secured Pilate’s permission to take away the Lord’s body. Nicodemus prepared the aromatic spices weighing a hundred pounds. They applied the spices onto the body and wrapped it in linen cloths. Jesus was laid in Joseph’s very own, and brand new, tomb hewn out of solid rock. No one was yet laid therein.

So Jesus died at 3 pm, and by 6 pm, in less than 3 hours, He was buried. He was buried on a Friday, remained in the tomb on Saturday, and on Sunday, He rose from the dead.

THOUGHT: The Gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4).

PRAYER: (Pray for some lost soul to be saved today.)

SATURDAY, MARCH 26

MARK 16:1-8

LUKE 24:4-8

“...he is risen; he is not here...”

NOT HERE BUT RISEN

It has been about 39 hours since Jesus died and was buried. On Sunday morning, at sunrise, the women hurried to the tomb with their aromatic spices to anoint the Lord's body. But God would not allow His Holy One to see corruption (Ps 16:10). Christ would not remain dead for long. As predicted, on the third day, He rose from the dead.

God sent an angel to announce this great event. When the angel came down and stepped on the earth, the earth quaked, and the stone was rolled away. Now the stone was rolled away not for Jesus to walk out, but for His disciples to go in, and see for themselves that “*He is not here: for he is risen*” (Matt 28:6). The glistening angel confronted the Roman soldiers who guarded the tomb. One would have expected these battle-hardened soldiers to fight, but instead they were scared stiff. The ground was shaking greatly, but they were shaking themselves no less.

The women who went to the tomb were worried about moving the heavy stone that covered the entrance. The Lord already knew their need, and had sent the angel to move the stone for them. Mary Magdalene entered the tomb first, and found it empty. She panicked. Without waiting for the rest, she ran as quickly as she could to tell Peter and John about the missing body.

When the rest of the women reached the tomb, they found the entrance opened. While wondering what had happened, two angels in their shining robes appeared and announced to them that Jesus has risen from the dead. They should thus not be seeking for the living among the dead. When they entered the tomb, indeed it was empty. The resurrection should not have taken the women by surprise. Jesus, while He was yet alive, spoke often about His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection (Matt 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22,44; 18:31-34). The angels jolted their memory, and they remembered the Lord's predictions. They now understood.

THOUGHT: No resurrection, no Christianity.

PRAYER: (Praise the Lord Jesus who is the resurrection and the life.)

A SPECIAL APPEARANCE

Mary Magdalene, after she made her report to Peter and John, returned to the tomb to weep. Peter and John who preceded her had already left. She was by herself grieving over Jesus' death, and now, the disappearance of His body. Evidently, Mary loved the Lord very much. She was eternally grateful to the Lord for delivering her from demon possession (Luke 8:2).

Mary stood outside the tomb and wept. And as she stooped down to look into the tomb, she saw two angels sitting at the place where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head, the other at the feet. They were probably the same two angels who appeared to the women earlier. The angels asked her why she was weeping. She replied, *“Because they have taken away my Lord.”* It is significant to note that Mary addressed Jesus as *“my Lord,”* and not just *“the Lord.”* She had an intimate, personal relationship with her Saviour. Every Christian ought to have such a close relationship with Christ.

Then Jesus made a special appearance and spoke to Mary but she did not recognise Him. She thought He was the gardener, and enquired if he had taken the body of Jesus away, and put it somewhere else. Then Jesus called her name, *“Mary.”* Immediately she recognised the voice and tone of her Lord, and responded with *“Rabboni”* which means *“Teacher.”* Having found the Lord, she clung on to Him, not willing to let Him go. Jesus had to tell Mary, *“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.”* Why did Jesus tell Mary not to touch Him? Later on, did He not tell Thomas to touch Him (John 20:27)? There is no discrepancy here. When Jesus told Mary, *“Touch me not,”* He was saying, *“Do not continue clinging on to me.”* Mary would not let go of Jesus. She wanted Jesus to remain on earth. Jesus had to tell her that His redemptive mission on earth was over, and that He must ascend to heaven to assume His Messianic office of Prophet, Priest and King, sitting at the right hand of God as the Mediator of His people.

THOUGHT: Are you walking closely with the Lord?

PRAYER: (Pray for a close relationship with the Lord.)

MONDAY, MARCH 28

MARK 16:12,13

LUKE 24:13-32

“...he appeared in another form unto two of them...”

THE FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL

There were two disciples (Cleopas and another unnamed) who were making their way to Emmaus (about 11 kilometres or 7 miles from Jerusalem). As they walked, they talked about the events of the day. Then Jesus suddenly appeared and walked with them, but they were supernaturally prevented from recognising Him. The Lord asked them about the happenings in Jerusalem. They were surprised He did not know. Apparently Jesus was the talk of the town. So they shared with Him the news about Jesus—how He was crucified, buried, and then disappeared on the third day. They were puzzled over the happenings. This was because they still were blind to the fact that Jesus was God Himself. They only thought of Jesus as a mighty prophet whom they had hoped would deliver Israel out of Roman bondage. The Lord had to chide them for being dull to the Word of God, *“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”* (Luke 24:25,26). Then from the whole Old Testament—from Genesis to Malachi—Jesus explained to them the many promises and predictions concerning Himself. There are 70 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ’s first coming, Genesis 3:15 being the first and Malachi 3:1 the last. They should not have been surprised by the events that had taken place.

The two of them must have enjoyed the Bible study thoroughly. They testified how their hearts burned within them when the Lord expounded the Scriptures to them (Luke 24:32). It was so good and delightful to have the Scriptures taught to them so clearly and so powerfully. They strongly urged Jesus to stay on with them. At dinnertime, the Lord took a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke and gave to them. This sequence—took, blessed, broke, gave—was exactly what He did in the Upper Room (Matt 26:26). Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised the Lord.

THOUGHT: As students of God’s Word, we need to be sharp and careful, not dull and careless. Understanding the Scriptures requires much hard work (2 Tim 2:15).

PRAYER: (Pray that you will be a diligent student of God’s Word.)

TUESDAY, MARCH 29

MARK 16:14-16

MATTHEW 28:16-20

“...Go ye into all the world,
and preach the gospel...”

THE UNFINISHED COMMISSION

Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). This is further stated in full in Matthew 28:19,20, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Famously known as the Great Commission, the Rev Dr Timothy Tow called it the “Unfinished Commission.” He observed, “When Sun Yat-Sen, Father of the Chinese Republic, toppled the Manchu regime in 1911 and became its president, he called on his followers: ‘The Revolution is not yet finished. Let comrades struggle on.’ The Great Commission, which our Lord gave to the Church 2000 years ago, is an Unfinished Commission. There remains much land to be conquered, and untold millions have yet to hear the Gospel. With the Return of our Saviour looming nearer each day, this Unfinished Commission must be accelerated....”

“Now, the Unfinished Commission is a full-four Commission. Many works in the Name of the Lord by para-church organisations stress one or two points, but it is a full-four Commission: (1) Go! This is the Missions emphasis. (2) Teach (*matheteusate*), i.e., to make disciples. This is the Evangelistic emphasis. (3) Baptise. This is the Church Planting emphasis. (4) Teach (*didaskontes*). This is the Indoctrination emphasis. When we diligently carry out these four points of the Unfinished Commission, we will be attended with divine power and blessed with His holy presence. *‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’* How often the Great Commission is misquoted, leaving out the all-pervasive power of God in us, around us and behind us to thrust us forward. No wonder the little headway we make in our own strength.”

THOUGHT: The Gospel begins with “Go.”

PRAYER: (Pray for the zeal to share the Gospel with someone today.)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

MARK 16:17-20

MATTHEW 7:21-23

“...these signs shall follow
them that believe...”

THE APOSTOLIC SIGNS

Does what Jesus said in Mark 16:17,18 mean that every believer at every age will be able to perform miracles? The answer is no.

Jesus is not teaching here that every Christian will be a miracle worker—be able to cast out demons, speak with new tongues, heal the sick, take up snakes and drink poison without being harmed. It is vital to understand who these “believers” that Jesus was referring to were. The context clearly indicates that the “believers” were the Eleven—the Apostles (Mark 16:14). Jesus chided them for “*their unbelief and hardness of heart.*” He then challenged them to believe His words. They were commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). And as they did the work of evangelism, they would be given the power to do miracles (Mark 16:17,18). Verse 20 is the key to understanding verses 17 and 18: “*And they (i.e. the Apostles) went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*” The signs were given to confirm or authenticate the ministry of the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

This fact is corroborated by the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 2:43 reads, “*And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by **the apostles;***” Acts 4:33, “*And with great power gave **the apostles** witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus;*” and Acts 5:12, “*And by the hands of **the apostles** were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.*” The Apostle Paul himself in defence of his apostleship wrote, “*Truly **the signs of an apostle** were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*” (2 Cor 12:12 cf. Acts 14:3; 15:12; 19:11). These signs were specifically signs of an Apostle. And since there are no Apostles today, there are also no such signs today (1 Cor 13:8-10).

THOUGHT: To study more, read *Charismatism Q&A* by Jeffrey Khoo. Download freely from www.febe.edu.sg (see under Publications→FEBC Press→Christian Theology).

PRAYER: (Pray for a noble heart to search the Scriptures.)

THURSDAY, MARCH 31

MARK 16:9-20

PSALM 12

“...as it is written...”

ARE THE LAST 12 VERSES OF MARK REALLY MARK’S?

Most modern versions of the Bible like the NIV, ESV, NLT, NASB etc. deny the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20. They say that the last 12 verses of Mark should not be regarded as Scripture. We who believe in the verbal and plenary preservation of the Scriptures affirm the authenticity of the last 12 verses of Mark together with Dean Burgon of Oxford who wrote a scholarly 350-page defence of Mark 16:9-20. Burgon wrote, “Recent Editors of the New Testament insist that these ‘last Twelve Verses’ are not genuine.... I am as convinced as I am of my life, that the reverse is the truth.... I insist, on the contrary, that the Evidence relied on is untrustworthy,—untrustworthy in every particular.... I am able to prove that this portion of the Gospel has been declared to be spurious on wholly mistaken grounds.” Burgon affirmed that there can be no question that “these verses must needs be the work of S. Mark.”

There is also abundant evidence supporting the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20. Dr E F Hills of Harvard wrote, “They [Mark 16:9–20] are found in all the Greek manuscripts except *Aleph* [i.e. Sinaiticus], and *B* [i.e. Vaticanus]... And more important, they were quoted as Scripture by early Church Fathers who lived one hundred and fifty years before *B* and *Aleph* were written, namely, Justin Martyr (c. 150), Tatian (c. 175), Irenaeus (c. 180), Hippolytus (c. 200). Thus, the earliest extant testimony is on the side of these last twelve verses.”

In light of the above, we believe that the last 12 verses of Mark are the very inspired words of God which have been preserved in Scripture by God’s “singular care and providence” (WCF I:8), and have been kept pure and intact throughout the ages as He promised (Matt 5:18).

THOUGHT: For further study, see John William Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Oxford, London: James Parker, 1871). For a summary of Burgon, see D A Waite, *Dean John William Burgon’s Vindication of the Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Collingswood, NJ: The Bible For Today, 1994). Read also Edward F Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, IA: The Christian Research Press, 1984).

PRAYER: (Pray for faith to believe that the Bible is 100% perfect today.)

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