

July to September 2025

“The Life of Christ”

(Part II)

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About the Author



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TUESDAY, JULY 1

JOHN 7:1-10

MATTHEW 19:1-2

“...my time is not yet full come.”

THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME

The Jews were getting ready to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (Lev 23:33-44; Num 29:12-38). At this point, the still unbelieving half-brothers of Jesus, acting for Satan, tempted Him to present Himself publicly as their all-conquering Messiah. They were probably hoping that Jesus would now make His move to captain Israel to victory against her Roman masters. But Jesus could not be tempted. He simply replied, *“My time is not yet come.”*

By this time a great conspiracy against Jesus was already underway. The Jewish leaders had hatched a plot to kill Him. Knowing this, the Lord was in no hurry to go up to Jerusalem. The predestined time for His death had not yet come. It was still about six months away, at the next Passover (April AD 30). Hence, Jesus was going to delay His trip (*“I go not up yet...”*) to Jerusalem until the proper time arrived. He was thus exercising human responsibility by not risking a premature arrest and death at the hands of His enemies before the divinely appointed time. At any rate, Jesus knew He had to keep the Feast in order to fulfil the ceremonial law. His perfect obedience required Him to go to Jerusalem. Indeed, He went: *“then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.”* Jesus certainly did not fail to save us by keeping the Mosaic law meticulously.

Jesus travelled to the Transjordan region, and engaged in a healing and teaching ministry. He was already very well known throughout Palestine. Great multitudes came to see Him. Knowing that the end of His ministry was near, He sought every opportunity to heal the sick and teach them about His kingdom.

THOUGHT: Never run ahead of God. Wait for His timing.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to do the right thing at the right time.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 2

LUKE 9:51-62

MATTHEW 16:24-25

“...I will follow thee
whithersoever thou goest.”

JESUS THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLESHIP

This juncture marks a turning point in Jesus' redemptive mission on earth. He was now all set to face the cross in Jerusalem. There was no fickleness or wavering on His part. He was sure and steadfast. Note that Jesus spoke no words here. His facial expression of holy determination did all the talking. The Lamb of God would soon lay down His life for His sheep (Isa 53:7).

Jesus had planned a brief stay in Samaria enroute to Jerusalem, but the Samaritans would not receive Him. They rudely turned Him away. After all the good He had done for them during His Samaritan ministry just about three years back, this was the cold reception He got (John 4). His disciples were so angry that they wanted to command fire to come down from heaven to consume those ingrates. But this was exactly what Jesus would not do. He rebuked His disciples for their vindictiveness. They did not share the same spirit as their Master. *“For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.”*

Jesus suffered much in His life (Matt 8:20). He made Himself lower than His creatures. Since His birth, He suffered the rejection of the people He had come to save. He was rejected by the Samaritans when He entered into their city for some food and rest (Luke 9:52-53). Truly *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:11). When He was about to be born, *“there was no room for them in the inn”* (Luke 2:7). In Judea, *“did the Jews persecute Jesus”* (John 5:16). Many of the Galileans *“went back, and walked no more with him”* (John 6:66). The city of Gadara *“besought him that he would depart out of their coasts”* (Matt 8:34). Indeed, *“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain...”* (Luke 9:22).

Jesus set the supreme example of discipleship. He was ready to lay down His life in total obedience to God in order to save such sinners who had so ill-treated Him. A true disciple of Jesus must also be willing to lay down his life for his Lord, to follow Him till the end. Read Matthew 16:24-25.

THOUGHT: The cost of discipleship is life itself.

PRAYER: Father, I will follow Thee to the very end.

THURSDAY, JULY 3

JOHN 7:11-18

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16

“...*My doctrine is not mine,
but his that sent me.*”

THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS

Jesus was wise to delay His visit to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-10) for indeed the religious leaders were on the lookout for Him asking, “*Where is he?*” But there was no sign of Jesus until the feast was already half over. So, by the time Jesus showed up, the plot had been spoiled.

By this time, it was safe for Jesus to go to the temple to teach. His enemies spared no effort to ridicule what Jesus had taught by attacking His educational background. “*How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*” They were in effect saying that Jesus must be teaching nonsense since He was not theologically trained in an accredited seminary. Jesus had to rebut the false logic of this malicious accusation. It is foolish to conclude that just because someone has not graduated from a seminary approved by the world, he is spouting nonsense, and is unworthy to be heard. Jesus pointed out that the education He received was far superior to what the rabbinical schools could offer, for it came directly from God. Jesus said, “*My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*”

Jesus went on to say, “*If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.*” What is God’s will? God’s will is for man to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Only those who are saved, who hear and do God’s will, are able to see the Truth. The unregenerate man, without the Holy Spirit, can never understand God’s Truth (1 Cor 2:1-16).

THOUGHT: “Unbelief is always proud. It will never understand anything in the words of Christ, which it despises and disdains.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: “Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me.”

FRIDAY, JULY 4

JOHN 7:19-31

EXODUS 20:1-17

*“Did not Moses give you the law,
and yet none of you keepeth the law?...”*

JESUS THE AUTHOR OF THE LAW

Jesus then went on to argue that He is true and righteous on the basis of His conduct. He did not seek to glorify Himself but His Father who had sent Him. Jesus obeyed His Father in every way. He humbled Himself totally by giving up His divine glory to take on human form. And now on earth, He who is Author of the law, became Keeper of the law. The Law was given by a holy God for sinful man to obey. There was no need for God to obey the law, He is law Himself. Yet, He made Himself subject to the law for our sakes, and in the keeping of it was faultless. His accusers, on the other hand, were blatant breakers of the law. For wanting to kill Jesus, they broke the Sixth Commandment (*“Thou shalt not kill”*) for sure. When their murderous intent was exposed, they retorted, *“Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?”* By so replying, they broke the law even more. For calling Jesus demonic, they broke the first three commandments, having blasphemed against God. They lied when they denied that they wanted to kill Jesus, hence breaking the Ninth Commandment. They were beyond doubt criminals, guilty to the core!

Jesus demonstrated how He was a true keeper of the law by proving that He was its true interpreter. The law of Moses not only forbade anyone to work on the sabbath, it also required every baby boy to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. The question is, could circumcision be performed if it fell on the sabbath? The answer of course is yes. The Jews had to circumcise a child even on the sabbath. Doing God’s work, in this case circumcision, on the sabbath in no way violated the sabbath. In the same way, when Jesus healed on the sabbath, He was doing God’s work. The sabbath is meant to be a blessing for man. *“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath”* (Mark 2:27). By making someone whole on the sabbath, was not Jesus doing something good for man? Jesus told them, *“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (cf. 1 Sam 16:7). Then they tried to arrest Him, but no one could do so because it was not God’s will for Him to die at this time. Man may fight God, but he fights a losing battle for sure.

THOUGHT: “The Law proceeded from God, and Moses was not its author, but its minister.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: *“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”* (Ps 119:97)

SATURDAY, JULY 5
JOHN 7:32-52
1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-4

*“He that believeth on me...
out of his belly shall
flow rivers of living water.”*

JESUS THE LIVING WATER

In a show of love for His enemies, Jesus offered to them living water, *“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”* This living water is the water of the Spirit that Jesus gives. We must believe on Him in order to receive this water. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5).

The living water that Jesus gives will quench our sin-parched soul. Just as the desert springs to life once rain comes, so our soul when the Spirit comes. Once born again by the Spirit, we no longer grope in the darkness of sin, but walk in the light of truth. We know the meaning of life. We know where we come from, why we are here, and where we shall go. This is life indeed, and this life can only be had by drinking of the Water of Life which is Christ Himself.

After hearing these gracious words of salvation, many of the people concluded, *“Of a truth this is the Prophet.”* Surely Jesus is the Messianic Prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15) who came not only to teach the law like Moses did, but much more than Moses, He came also to fulfil the law through His perfect obedience. The Jewish priests and lawyers had been shut up and defeated by Jesus. None of them could gainsay against Him.

THOUGHT: Jesus is the Origin and Fountain of Life.

PRAYER: Father, give me this living water ever more.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 6

JOHN 7:53-8:11

PSALM 51

*"...He that is without sin among you,
let him first cast a stone at her."*

JESUS THE JUDGE OF JUDGES

The scribes and Pharisees had caught this woman in the act of adultery. They brought her to Jesus and asked Him how He would judge this case: "*Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?*" They did this to trap and destroy Jesus. It was almost a foolproof case. If Jesus were to let her go, He would be accused of going against the Seventh Commandment, but if He were to let her be stoned to death, He would be maligned for having exercised justice without mercy.

He seemed to have been cornered! He ignored them by doodling on the ground, giving them a chance to retreat. Jesus finally stood up and told them, "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*" After this, He went back to His doodling, giving them another opportunity to retreat. If they had persisted, Jesus would surely have exposed them publicly for their lustful liaisons and secret affairs. They were not clean! If the woman was guilty, so were they. If she had to be stoned, so must they. They knew this well, and were convicted by their conscience. One by one, they slunk away. We see here the Lord's "transcendent wisdom [as] the Judge of judges. See how at a word from the lips of the Master-Lawyer the trap that the Jews had sprung on Him boomeranged. The accusers became the accused. They became the more guilty, being pricked by their awakened conscience. The executioners became the executed" (Timothy Tow).

Jesus came to save not condemn (John 3:17). He dealt with the woman gently and mercifully. As much as He could see the hearts of her accusers, He could see hers as well. She must have been remorseful for the sin she had committed, and so did not receive the condemnation she so deserved. There is really nothing to stop us from concluding that she had placed her trust in Jesus her Saviour. The Lord then let her go, but not without a warning, "*sin no more.*" If you are in the same plight as this woman, you know you can go to Jesus. He will forgive and save you if you confess and repent of your sins.

THOUGHT: To judge righteously, we need to judge ourselves first.

PRAYER: (Confess your sins to the Saviour.)

MONDAY, JULY 7

JOHN 8:12-32

1 JOHN 1:5-7

“...I am the light of the world...”

JESUS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus is the light of the world. Light represents Truth. He is Light in that He is Truth. He is the Answer to life's questions and problems. In this dark and sinful world, full of confusion and death, Jesus is the Light that gives meaning and life. As the Apostle John said earlier, *“In him was life; and the life was the light of men”* (John 1:4). All the answers pertaining to our origin, existence and destiny are found in the Holy Scriptures which is His Truth. That is why Jesus said to those who believed on Him, *“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* He is *“the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”* (John 1:9).

Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* Did the world embrace this light? John said, *“And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not...He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not”* (John 1:5, 10). Man loves darkness rather than light. We see this in the Pharisees who maliciously called Jesus a liar. Yet they could not make their accusations stick. They could not produce one shred of evidence against Him. Jesus challenged and rebuked them, *“Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”* The Truth was so clear, yet they could not see because they had for their father the devil who from the outset was a liar and a murderer. They were behaving just like him. Indeed, obedient sons of the devil they were, a chip off the old block.

THOUGHT: “Contempt of the light is followed by darkness.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, let me walk in the light of Thy truth.

TUESDAY, JULY 8

JOHN 8:33-59

EXODUS 3:13-14

“...Before Abraham was, I am.”

JESUS THE GREAT I AM

Jesus told the Jews that they would know for sure that He is truly the great “I AM” once they have nailed Him to the cross (John 8:28). They would see that He is Jehovah, that He is greater than even Abraham their father because He existed before him, “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58, cf. Exod 3:13-14). On the cross, Jesus would authenticate His great “*I am*” statements: (1) I am the bread of life (John 6:35), (2) I am the light of the world (John 9:5), (3) I am the door of the sheep (John 10:7, 9), (4) I am the good shepherd (John 10: 11, 14), (5) I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), (6) I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and (7) I am the true vine (John 15:1, 5). All the promises He had made in His “*I am*” declarations would be sealed on the cross. The words “*lifted up*” do not only point to His death, but also His resurrection and ascension. He would be lifted up on the cross, raised up from death, and taken up to glory.

Jesus is ever the obedient Son of His Father in heaven. He would “*do always those things that please him*.” Since coming to earth, He had kept every command that the Father had given Him. Now that the cross was near, He declared that He would not shun the pain and the suffering that came with it. In life and in death, He would please His Father without fail. As He said, “*I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things*.” For this reason, the Father who had sent Him would always be with Him, and would not leave Him alone. Here we see the perfect cooperation between God the Father and God the Son in executing their redemptive plan.

THOUGHT: Jesus is Jehovah, the Ever-existent One.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for sending Jesus, my Lord and my God.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 9

JOHN 9

2 KINGS 5:1-14

*“...he that followeth me
...shall have the light of life.”*

JESUS THE LIGHT OF LIFE

There is always a truth or lesson behind a miracle performed by Jesus. Jesus is the One who opens our eyes to see the spiritual wonders of His Truth. How do we know for sure He has this power? Jesus proved it by His miracle. He healed a man who was born blind. Jesus opened his eyes, and he saw light for the first time. If Jesus could give sight to the physically blind, surely He could give light to the spiritually blind. To this blind man, Jesus not only gave sight, He also gave the light of life. When Jesus asked whether he believed on Him, the Son of God, he was quick to reply, “I believe,” and worshipped Him.

In contrast, the Pharisees were spiritually blind to Jesus. The blind man did not know the Law of Moses as well as those Pharisees, and yet could identify Jesus as a prophet. Perhaps, the similarity between his own healing to that of leprous Naaman, who was healed by Elisha when told to wash at the River Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14), prompted him to think of Jesus as a prophet, who like Elisha was bestowed with divine power.

Another possibility is that he saw Jesus not just simply as any prophet, but the Moses-like Prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15, for the miracle He performed was truly unheard of; it was indeed stupendous. Read what the blind man said in John 9:32-33. Many of the miracles Moses performed in the time of the Exodus were never repeated in the history of Israel. Moses was a class above all the prophets of Israel that followed (Deut 34:10-12). Now the blind man encountered a man who had performed a healing that was as great as Moses'. Could He be the Moses-like Prophet that Moses himself prophesied would come? Later, when Jesus disclosed to him that He was the Son of God, he believed without hesitation. Moses was prophet-servant, but Jesus is the Prophet-Son, the Messianic Prophet who is greater than Moses. By so believing, the blind man proved to be a true disciple of Moses unlike the Pharisees who claimed to be Moses' disciples (John 9:28), and yet could not see that Jesus was the One of whom Moses had spoken. What blindness!

THOUGHT: Do I have the Light of Life?

PRAYER: Father, may I never be blind to Thy truth.

THURSDAY, JULY 10

JOHN 10:1-21

PSALM 23

“...I am the door of the sheep.”

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus is not only a Lamb (John 1:29), He is also a Shepherd. The two metaphors are related. As the Lamb of God, Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. As the good Shepherd, He laid down His life for us. Both point to His perfect obedience in His redemptive ministry. Jesus obeyed His Father's commands to the jot and tittle. God the Father had commanded God the Son to give His life for the sheep. The Son had the power and authority to lay down His own life, and He willingly and voluntarily did so. He was in no way forced to die for our sins. He Himself desired to do so, and was in perfect harmony with the will of His Father. The Cross was not only an act of love for His sheep, it was also an act of love for His Father.

As the good Shepherd, Jesus serves as the supreme model for all His undershepherds. What makes a good pastor? He is one who is willing to die for God's sheep. That is the ultimate test of a true pastor. A true shepherd will not desert his flock when danger comes. He will protect them from wolves, thieves, and robbers (false Christs, false prophets, and false teachers). He will feed them with sound doctrine from every part of God's Word. The Apostle Paul is one example of a good pastor. As pastor of the church in Ephesus, he did not fail to declare to them all the counsel of God. He also charged the elders, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock”* (Acts 20:28-29). How the church needs true and faithful pastors today! But we have too many hirelings. False pastors have filled the pulpits, and are leading God's sheep back to the wolves' den. Many Protestant pastors today are leading their flock back to the Roman Catholic fold. If your pastor does this, he could be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Be warned! Beware!

THOUGHT: Jesus is both the Shepherd and the Lamb.

PRAYER: “Jesus, Saviour, pilot me, Over life's tempestuous sea.”

FRIDAY, JULY 11

LUKE 10:1-20

ROMANS 8:28-39

“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions...”

MORE THAN CONQUERORS IN CHRIST

Jesus had previously sent out the twelve (Matt 10:1-42; Luke 9:1-6). Then He sent out seventy in pairs to preach the Gospel of peace and heal the sick for the *“harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few.”* Like the twelve, they were told also to travel light—no money bag, knapsack, extra footwear—so that they could accomplish their task with haste, and be totally dependent on the kindness of those who would receive them, *“for the labourer is worthy of his hire.”* Any town that did not welcome them, they should leave alone. By a symbolic action of wiping off the dust from their feet, they were to testify against the city that had rejected them. Judgment would surely come upon that city that had despised the Lord.

The seventy returned rejoicing over the victory due to the power the Lord had given them over Satan and his demons. The spiritual forces of darkness have no power over Christians *“because greater is he (Holy Spirit) that is in you, than he (Satan) that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Darkness can never overcome Light.

Although Satan is a fallen creature, and we have power over demons, we are told not to rejoice because of this, but rather because our names are recorded in heaven’s Book of Life (Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1; Rev 3:5, 20:12, 15). There is a danger that we may be rejoicing over the wrong thing. Jesus told the seventy that they ought to be joyful not because they were able to cast out demons but because they were saved. This is because a person can cast out demons and yet not be saved. For example, Judas was among the twelve who cast out demons, yet was a reprobate from the beginning. Jesus also warned that there are those who cast out demons in His name but are never known by Him and are workers of iniquity (Matt 7:22-23). Moreover, the gift of demon-casting lasted only for a while until the Bible was completed (cf. 1 Cor 13:10), but the gift of eternal life lasts forever. We ought to focus on that which is permanent and not that which is only temporary. It is the power of the Gospel of Christ alone that breaks the stranglehold of Satan and sin in our lives.

THOUGHT: “Jesus breaks every fetter.”

PRAYER: Father, set me free from Satan’s grip, and from the bondage of sin.

SATURDAY, JULY 12

LUKE 10:17-24

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

*“...Blessed are the eyes which
see the things that ye see.”*

JESUS GIVES SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Jesus thanked His Father for concealing the mysteries of His kingdom from the proud, and revealing them to the humble. Why does the Lord open the eyes of the humble, but not the proud? Here is the Apostle Paul's inspired answer: *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:18-31). As Author of salvation, God alone deserves all glory, honour and praise.

Jesus' disciples were truly privileged to see and hear the Messiah Himself. The Old Testament patriarchs, kings, prophets and priests longed to see Christ personally, but were only able to see His shadow. How blessed those disciples were to see Him and hear Him speak face to face.

THOUGHT: “All are blind, until they are illuminated by the Spirit of God.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: “Open my eyes illumine me, Spirit divine.”

LORD'S DAY, JULY 13

LUKE 10:25-28

ROMANS 7:7-13

“...*this do, and thou shalt live.*”

JESUS THE MASTER-LAWYER

“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” was a question posed by an expert in the Mosaic law who tried to catch Jesus in His words. Jesus the Author of the law wisely answered with a question, *“What is written in the law? how readest thou?”* In other words, “You are a law expert, aren’t you? You tell me!” The lawyer answered quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”* Jesus gave him an A+ for his answer, *“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”*

When Jesus said, *“this do, and thou shalt live,”* was He teaching that salvation is by works? It must be said that living with God forever is something that must be earned. This is seen in the way God dealt with man in the Garden of Eden. God put man to the test. In Eden, the Lord commanded the man, *“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen 2:16-17). The commandment was ordained to life (Rom 7:10). Man had to work for the reward of eternal life by obeying God’s commandment. Obedience begets life, disobedience brings death. It was a covenant of works. But man failed the test, and sinned against God by partaking of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:1-7). Man and his posterity became totally depraved (Rom 3:23). There is nothing spiritually good within man (Rom 2:10-17). He is born in sin, given over completely to sin, and bent on sinning all the time (Ps 51:5; Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9). Indeed for such a heinous crime against God, the punishment is death and eternal judgment in hell (Rom 6:23). Now man can be saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works (Eph 2:8-9).

THOUGHT: “The life of the Law is man’s death.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: *“Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”* (Ps 119:34)

MONDAY, JULY 14

LUKE 10:29-37

MATTHEW 5:43-48

“...And who is my neighbour?”

JESUS THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Salvation is no longer by works but by grace alone. But does that mean that God no longer requires obedience to the law for entrance into heaven? Not at all. The requirement still holds. The Edenic covenant of works is still in force. If man wants eternal life, he must work for it by obeying the law perfectly. Only the pure in heart can see God (Matt 5:8). That is why Jesus said, *“this do, and thou shalt live.”* But the problem with man is sin. He is already guilty under the law. As such, he can never obtain righteousness by keeping the law (Rom 7:10-13). That is why Jesus had to keep the law perfectly for us. He was *“made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law”* (Gal 4:4-5).

Jesus told the lawyer that if he wanted to inherit eternal life, he had to fulfil the law of love—to love God and neighbour perfectly. In order to clear himself from any guilt, the lawyer questioned, *“And who is my neighbour?”* In his mind, only the Jew was his neighbour, all others were enemies (cf. Matt 5:43). The Lord corrected his wrong thinking through a parable involving a Samaritan whom the Jews hated deeply. The Jew who was waylaid by thieves was not helped by the priest, nor the Levite (his fellow countrymen, and what more, his pastors!) who just passed him by, but by a Samaritan, an enemy, who spared no effort and expense to take care of him. Jesus then asked the lawyer, “Now answer, who is my neighbour?” *“He that shewed mercy on him,”* came the answer. This was a B+ answer. He would have scored an A+ if he had replied, “the Samaritan.” But this proud lawyer could not bring himself to utter that name. Jesus then charged the lawyer: *“Go, and do thou likewise.”* In other words, “Be like this Samaritan; love your enemies!”

This lawyer was thus indicted for his sin of hatred. Jesus in effect pronounced him guilty. Sinful man by himself can never fulfil the law. Only Jesus, the sinless Son of man, can. Indeed, in the good Samaritan, we see Jesus. He came to save His enemies that they might become His friends. (Read Romans 5:8.) Jesus truly kept the law of love to the fullest extent by His sufferings on the cross for sinners.

THOUGHT: Only Jesus, the Perfect Law-Keeper, saves!

PRAYER: Father, cover my sins by clothing me with Thy righteousness.

TUESDAY, JULY 15

LUKE 10:38-42

PSALM 27

*“But one thing is needful: and
Mary hath chosen that good part...”*

SITTING AT THE FEET OF JESUS

I would let Calvin comment on this passage, “This story teaches us that wherever Christ went He did not treat Himself as a private person or seek His own convenience or pleasure, but bent all His energies to the one aim of helping others and executing the office laid on Him by the Father. Luke relates that as soon as He had been welcomed hospitably by Martha and had gone indoors, He set to work teaching and exhorting them. ...

“Although Martha’s hospitality was praiseworthy and indeed is praised, yet Christ points out two faults in it. The first is that Martha goes too far and is extravagant. Christ preferred frugality and moderate meals, so that the godly housewife should not be put to a lot of work. The second fault was that Martha left Him and was busy with unnecessary tasks and so made Christ’s coming useless so far as she was concerned. For Luke indicates an excess when he mentions her much serving, whereas Christ was content with moderation. It was just as if someone received a prophet with honour and did no trouble to listen to him, but swamped his teaching by a great and superfluous preparation. The right way to receive prophets is to perceive the usefulness which God destines and offers to us through them. Now we see that Martha’s business was laudable, but was not faultless. An additional blemish was that Martha thought she was in the right in all this bustling activity and so despised her sister for her godly desire to learn. By this example we are warned to be careful when we are acting aright lest we should think we are better than others. ...

*“Mary hath chosen the good part. ...*Christ is only saying that Mary has occupied herself in a holy and useful study, from which she ought not to be dragged away. It was as if He said: ‘You would be right to reprove your sister if she had been lazy or busy with trifles or gadding after something inconsistent with her duty, and had left you with all the domestic affairs to worry about. But when she has given herself so rightly and usefully to listening to me, it is wicked to stop her. She does not get this opportunity every day.’”

THOUGHT: Treasure your Quiet Time with Jesus every day.

PRAYER: “Teach me to love Thy truth, For Thou art love.”

WEDNESDAY, JULY 16

LUKE 11:1-13

REVELATION 20:1-6

“... *Thy kingdom come...*”

JESUS' FUTURE KINGDOM ON EARTH

The Lord's teaching on prayer is similar to the one found in Matthew 6:9-13. There, the teaching is part of His sermon on the mount. Here, it is in response to a question by one of His disciples who asked Him concerning how to pray. Basically, prayers ought to be directed to our Father in heaven who is holy. This reminds us of our sinfulness and need to approach Him humbly by confessing our sins.

We need to pray for His kingdom to come. What did Jesus mean when He said, “*Thy kingdom come*”? Has not His kingdom already come? In a sense, yes. As Jesus said, His kingdom is within us (Luke 17:21, cf. Matt 12:28; Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20). It is His spiritual rule in our lives at the present time.

Nevertheless, there is an aspect in which the kingdom is still future. It has to do with His physical rule on earth. Jesus must sit on the throne of His father David and rule over the whole world for a thousand years (Isa 11:1-5; Rev 5:10-13, 20:6). Israel, His chosen nation, must become the number one nation in the world. Jerusalem will be the world's capital (Isa 2:2-3). The Apostles understood this, and were curious as to when this would happen, hence their question to Jesus before His ascension, “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6). Jesus simply answered that it was not for them to know the time the Father has decided to accomplish this (Acts 1:7). That is why till now we pray, “*Thy kingdom come.*” When we do this, we are in effect saying, “Lord Jesus, please return soon.”

THOUGHT: Israel is the key to understanding prophecy.

PRAYER: “*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*” (Ps 122:6)

THURSDAY, JULY 17

LUKE 11:1-13

JAMES 4:2-3

“...Thy will be done...”

GOD’S WILL IS BEST

We must pray for God’s will to be done. We must subject our will to His. Jesus for example submitted to His Father’s will when He prayed in Gethsemane, *“nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). Our Father in heaven knows best. We know His will through His Word. So we ought to pray according to what the Scriptures have revealed to us. When we do that, He will answer our prayers (John 14:13).

We are told to pray for our daily needs. This tells us that the Lord wants us to walk by faith and depend on Him each day. He is our Provider. He wants us to focus on our living for Him, and to let Him “worry” about our livelihood. Read what He said in Matthew 6:31-33.

We need to seek the Lord’s forgiveness for our sins. And we ought also to forgive others who have sinned against us. How many times ought we to forgive those who trespass against us? Not once or twice, but always (Matt 18:22, 35).

We are instructed to pray that the Lord will *“lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.”* Temptation does not come from God, but from the devil, the world and our sinful flesh (James 1:13). When we pray to the Lord not to lead us to temptation, we are simply asking for His help in keeping us from falling into temptation. Read what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Our Father in heaven is keen to answer our prayers and shower us with good gifts from above. He urges us to keep on asking, seeking, knocking. His treasury never runs dry. We need to persevere in prayer. If we know how to give that which is good and needful to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give even the Holy Spirit with all the accompanying spiritual gifts and graces to help us in time of need? *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17).

THOUGHT: The greatest faith is the faith that says, *“Not my will but thine be done.”*

PRAYER: Father, I wish only for things that Thou desire for me.

FRIDAY, JULY 18

LUKE 11:14-28

MATTHEW 12:43-45

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

THE SIN OF DENYING CHRIST’S DEITY

The Jews were guilty of blasphemy against the Spirit when they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan (cf. Mark 3:22). What a terrible thing it was for Jesus who is God Himself to be subjected to such an insult. He had done nothing but good for those people, and yet this was the treatment He received. He must have been deeply hurt and grieved by such mockery and scorn. He endured all these for us. What longsuffering!

Like the Jews who denied the deity of Christ by attributing His miracles to the devil, the Catholics deny the Lord’s deity by making Mary superior to Christ. The Catholic Church cites Luke 11:27 as proof that Mary is indeed above Jesus, *“Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.”* But they conveniently ignore Jesus’ swift rejoinder and correction of that remark, *“Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”* Yes, Mary was blessed, but not because she bore the Son of God, but because she was born again and became a child of God. This can only come by hearing the Word of God and obeying it. *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). If Mary is to be followed, it is in her faithful submission to and obedience of God’s Word. When told that she had conceived in her womb the Messiah, she humbly surrendered herself to do His will, and told the angel, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”* (Luke 1:38). This was what Jesus wanted the people to learn: blessed are those who hear and obey the Word of God. Mary is in no way superior to Jesus. If Mary could speak to Catholics today, she would no doubt cry out, “Stop your ‘Hail Mary’s.’ Hail Christ only!”

THOUGHT: Like Luther and Calvin, come out of the Roman Catholic Church (2 Cor 6:17)!

PRAYER: Father, grant me the courage to take a separatist stand for Thee.

SATURDAY, JULY 19

LUKE 11:29-36

1 KINGS 4:29-34

“...behold,

a greater than Solomon is here.”

JESUS THE GREATER SOLOMON

Jesus rebuked the sign-seekers of His time. They wanted a magic show. It is no wonder Jesus described them as “*an evil generation.*” He had already by this time performed countless signs and miracles. Yet they were still unbelieving. He would not demean Himself by giving them a sign. They would receive no more signs except the sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah is the sign of the resurrection (Matt 12:38-42). Jesus would die, but would live again on the third day. People from times past like the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10; 2 Chron 9), and the Ninevites (Jon 1-4), had heard and seen much less, yet they responded to the things of God worshipfully and repentantly. Surely a wiser than Solomon was here, and a greater than Jonah had come. How great the sin of the Israelites who had seen the fulness of the Godhead bodily in Christ Himself and yet refused to believe!

Jesus is the Light of the world, and has shed the light of His truth to the people of Israel (John 1:9). Yet they refused to be enlightened by His truth. They kept rejecting His works and His words. The Light is not at fault, but the eye. For their eye “*is evil.*” They had filled their minds and hearts with darkness, and were thus blinded to the truth. “*And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not*” (John 1:5).

THOUGHT: True wisdom stems from fearing God and knowing His Word.

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom to live a victorious Christian life on earth.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 20

LUKE 11:37-44

PROVERBS 21:2-3

"Woe unto you, Pharisees!..."

JESUS VERSUS HYPOCRITES (I)

Jesus graciously accepted the invitation of a certain Pharisee to dine in his home with his colleagues. No sooner had Jesus sat down than the Pharisees started criticising Him. They accused Jesus of not washing Himself before eating. This had nothing to do with personal hygiene. It had everything to do with ceremonial cleansing. The Pharisees had to wash their hands before they partook of food to prevent themselves from being ceremonially defiled. It was a way of showing how religious they were. So they looked askance at Jesus for not taking care of His ceremonial cleanliness.

Jesus rebuked them for their hypocrisy. As God, He is able to see the heart. These Pharisees might be outwardly clean, but inwardly they were full of dirt. They were so careful to keep their bylaws, tithing their mint and rue (small aromatic herbs) which the law of Moses did not even require (only grain, wine, and oil were required), yet the much weightier matters of the law, like justice and love of God they conveniently bypassed. The Lord pronounced a series of woes against them. They were cursed for their vainglory, their legalism, their hatred for the prophets, their heretical teachings, their two-facedness! Beware the leaven of hypocrisy. One may hide such a sin from man but not God who searches every heart. Jesus warned, *"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."*

THOUGHT: "Hypocrites shroud themselves under zeal." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I do not want to be a hypocrite.

MONDAY, JULY 21

LUKE 11:45-12:12

ACTS 4:8-21

“...Beware ye of the leaven of
the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

JESUS VERSUS HYPOCRITES (II)

Jesus rebuked the law-experts for their hypocrisy as well. They had applied double standards. They had made many burdensome extra-biblical laws for the people to bear, but they themselves did not keep them. Their fathers had killed God's prophets. Now they sought to honour the prophets by decorating their tombs. What they did was not true repentance but false pretension. They did it not because they were sorry for what their fathers had done; they did it to impress the people in an outward show of false piety. Jesus intimated they were simply putting the finishing touches to what their fathers had started. They were like their fathers who had killed the prophets. In due time, the Lord Jesus Himself would be killed by them. The apostles themselves would die in their hands, viz, James (Acts 12:2) and Peter (John 21:18-19). Jesus said that the blood of all the prophets, from the first to the last, would be required of them.

Jesus had enemies galore who were bent on killing Him. He told His disciples not to be afraid. They may kill the body, but they cannot touch the soul. The Lord also threatened those who intended to persecute or kill His people and servants. They ought to think twice before doing so for God has the power to cast both body and soul into hell. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

Jesus enjoined His disciples to be courageous. They ought not to be ashamed of confessing His name. When believers are hauled up by the authorities for questioning, they ought not to worry about how to answer their persecutors. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit *“shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”* The Spirit will grant believers the power of thought and speech at the critical moment (eg. Peter in Acts 4:8-14,19,20; and Paul in 21:39-22:21; 23:1,6; 24:10-21; 26:1-23).

THOUGHT: “Hypocrisy is always proud and cruel.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, help me to be humble and merciful.

TUESDAY, JULY 22

LUKE 12:13-34

PROVERBS 23:4-5

“...beware of covetousness...”

JESUS OR MONEY?

Jesus here warned against the inordinate desire to want more and more. The worldly mind is materialistic. It is greedy for money and goods. It does not know what contentment means. Many seek bigger salaries, houses, cars, etc., to show that they are well to do, to keep up with the rich and powerful. The Lord, on the contrary, said, *“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”*

Who is the fool? It is *“he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”* There is great danger in greed, but *“godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 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. But thou, O man of God, flee these things...”* (1 Tim 6:6-11).

*I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
I’d rather be His than have riches untold;
I’d rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I’d rather be led by His nail-pierced hand
Than to be the king of a vast domain
And be held in sin’s dread sway;
I’d rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.*

THOUGHT: “No man can meditate on the heavenly life, unless he be dead to the world, and to himself.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I want to work for Thee, and not for money.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 23

LUKE 12:35-48

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

"Be ye therefore ready..."

JESUS' SOON RETURN

Jesus Christ said He can return at any moment. He thus enjoined His people to be prepared and ready always.

By means of a parable, Jesus told His disciples that there would be two types of believers when He returns: the true and the false (cf. Matt 24:42-25:13). True believers will be found doing God's will when Jesus returns. False ones will do the opposite. Such ones will be cut off, and lumped together with unbelievers; a separation of the goats from the sheep, the tares from the wheat. These claim to be believers but are imitation or fake ones. They reveal that they are truly unbelievers by their works. They call themselves Christians but behave no differently from the world. Christians, though in the world, are not of the world. But these pseudo-Christians are not only in, but also, of the world. When the Lord returns, He will judge them with fire together with the world.

But before Jesus comes back as the King of kings and Lord of lords (the Lion from the tribe of Judah), He must fulfil His mission as Servant of servants and Man of sorrows, the Lamb of God. Jesus had to go through the baptism of death, and was flooded with anguish until it was accomplished. The cross is terrifying, and the pain excruciating. In deep agony, He displayed His humanness. The mental suffering Jesus went through was very real. But the greater the agony, the deeper His resolve. He could not be stopped from fulfilling His mission on the cross. What a Saviour!

THOUGHT: Can Jesus return in our lifetime?

PRAYER: Father, I want to be ready when Thou returns.

THURSDAY, JULY 24

LUKE 12:49-59

REVELATION 6:9-11

*“Suppose ye that I am come
to give peace on earth?*

I tell you, Nay; but rather division.”

THE CROSS IS A SWORD THAT DIVIDES

Jesus said He came not to send peace on earth, but a sword (Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51). Isn't Jesus the Prince of peace? At Jesus' birth, didn't the angels sing, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”*? What did Jesus mean by those enigmatic words? The Jews in the days of Jesus thought that their promised Messiah would come and dethrone Caesar, and they would be supreme. Yes, Jesus would do this at His second coming, but He came the first time to give spiritual peace. This peace from God was not obtained without a price. Jesus had to atone for sin on the cross so that His people could be redeemed by His blood.

However, when a sinner has made peace with God, Jesus said he would not have peace in the world. The world is hostile towards Christ and His Church. Jesus expressed this through the words *“sword”* (Matt 10:34) and *“division”* (Luke 12:51). Thus the Church can expect to find herself at odds with the unbelieving world. The Church will be hated because, as the salt and light of the world, she exposes evil and stands in the way of evil doers. The world does not like this and will do whatever it can to put the Church down. The Church must remain loyal to Christ. She must not compromise, but must stand separated from the world.

It must be emphasised that the sword Jesus spoke of was not one of violence, but division. He was talking about personal separation, not armed revolution.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to suffer and to die for Christ?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be strong in faith in times of persecution.

FRIDAY, JULY 25

LUKE 13:1-9

ACTS 2:38-40

“...except ye repent,
ye shall all likewise perish.”

IT IS TIME TO REPENT!

Many a time we think that disasters befall certain people because they are great sinners. Such judgments are often passed with smugness. Those people who die terrible deaths must be greater sinners than us, we think. Since we have escaped such a horrible end, we are not so bad. Jesus warned all who view themselves like this with these words, *“Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”* In other words, everyone deserves to be punished by God. The Apostle Paul describes all of us as equally wicked and sinful, *“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Rom 3:9-18). There are no exceptions. All deserve to die for *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).

In His fig tree parable, Jesus stressed the fact that true repentance will result in fruitfulness. It is not just a “change of mind” but a complete turnaround of the whole person in thought, word and deed. There are those who say they have repented, but their lives do not show it. The Pharisees and Sadducees were such people. Read John’s command in Matthew 3:8,10.

The fig tree here probably represents the nation of Israel. For three years, the Lord had been seeking fruit from Israel, but found none. If no fruit was forthcoming in another year, He would cut Israel off (Mark 11:12-14; Matt 21:18-19). Indeed Israel was eventually cut off because of unbelief (Rom 11:20). But this cutting off would be for a season only. God will one day restore Israel after a period of chastisement. Read Romans 11:25-26.

THOUGHT: “The beginning of repentance is the confession of guilt.”
(Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I confess and repent of my sins.

SATURDAY, JULY 26

LUKE 13:10-17

LEVITICUS 26:13

*“...and immediately
she was made straight,
and glorified God.”*

JESUS MAKES STRAIGHT

On this occasion, Jesus took pity on a woman who had been afflicted by a painful spinal disease for eighteen years. The disease she had was afflicted by a demon. The disease caused her to be bent over. She could not straighten herself up. The Lord called her to Him, and laid His hand on her, and by His all-powerful Word, healed her and made her straight immediately.

Jesus' action solicited two kinds of reaction from the people. The woman who was healed was very happy, and responded by glorifying God. But a chief elder of a synagogue became indignant, and did exactly the opposite, accusing Jesus of desecrating the sabbath. He said Jesus could do His healing during the six days of the week, but should cease from it on the seventh. This person had the audacity to tell Jesus, the Author and Lord of the sabbath, what could or could not be done on the sabbath! Can you imagine that?! It is like teaching your grandmother to suck eggs, isn't it?

Now, the Author of the sabbath law was going to give a lecture that would shut the mouths of these “sabbath keepers.” Jesus here showed that He knew their extra-biblical laws very well, and used them against them. Their laws (Shabbat 5:1) allowed them to release their ox or ass to eat and drink on the sabbath. Jesus argued that if animals could be so treated on every day of the week according to your sabbath laws, why can't this woman who is a daughter of Abraham be released from the bondage of Satan on the sabbath? Is she not more important than the animals? Jesus showed how they had contradicted themselves. They were truly hypocrites. All His adversaries were rightly shamed, and the people rejoiced over all the glorious things that were done by Him.

THOUGHT: God needs no teacher!

PRAYER: Father, straighten my crooked life.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 27

LUKE 13:18-21

PSALM 92:12-15

“...Unto what is the
kingdom of God like?...”

SMALL BUT POWERFUL

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It starts out very small, but it will grow till it becomes a great tree. As a great tree, it provides shelter for all kinds of birds. This is a picture of the Gospel and the church. The church started out very small. In Acts 1:15, we are told that there were only about 120 members in the Jerusalem church. But within forty years, the Gospel from this little church spread throughout the Roman world, and even beyond. So from one church came many churches: Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesian, Colossian, Thessalonian, etc. Today, there are Christian churches all over the world consisting of people from every race.

Leaven has been used in the Scripture negatively to refer to false doctrine (eg. the leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees of which Jesus told His disciples to beware [Matt 16:6,12]). However, here it is used positively to refer to the permeating influence of the Christian faith when believers enthrone Jesus as Lord of their lives. When Christians behave like Christ in the world, they exert a moral influence on those around them.

The Gospel leaven has indeed permeated the whole world with its saving message that only Jesus saves. It is life to those who believe, but death to those who reject. *“And 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).

THOUGHT: “In this world we taste but the beginning of Christ’s kingdom.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Thy kingdom come, O Father!

MONDAY, JULY 28

JOHN 10:22-39

PSALM 82

"I and my Father are one."

JESUS THE MASTER LOGICIAN

Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication (or Hanukkah). On this occasion, the unbelieving Jews demanded of Jesus, *"If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."* This is a most unreasonable request. Jesus had already identified who He truly was by His words and His works. The problem was not with Jesus, but with them. These stiff-necked people simply would not believe His words, nor the miracles that authenticated those words. Jesus told them why. It was because they were not of His sheep. In other words, they were still unconverted pigs, and not regenerate sheep. He knows His sheep, and they recognise His voice and follow naturally. They have eternal life, and are forever saved. No one—not even Satan (cf. John 10:28-29)—can wrench them out of His Father's hand.

"I and my Father are one" is one of the most explicit texts on the deity of Christ. The Jews who heard those words certainly knew what they meant. Without hesitation, they stoned Jesus for making Himself God. Jesus indeed was God Himself. In His essence or being, He is the same or equal with God the Father. As much as God the Father is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, so is Jesus. Here we see also the plurality of Persons within the Trinity. *"I and my Father"* comprises two Persons, yet They are one God.

As Logician of logicians, Jesus defended the Truth that He was God Himself. He employed an argument that was irrefutable. Jesus questioned them, *"Is it not written in your law (in Ps 82:6), I said, Ye are gods (Hebrew Elohim which is also used of God Himself)? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"* (John 10:34-36). If lesser beings like human judges were called gods according to the Written Word, how could Jesus, who was certainly greater than all their judges combined, the Living Word Himself, not be called the Son of God? His enemies had absolutely no answer to such a masterful rebuttal.

THOUGHT: What is the image of God in man?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I want to reflect Thy holiness in my life.

TUESDAY, JULY 29

LUKE 13:22-30

JOHN 10:40-42

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate...”

JESUS THE NARROW WAY (I)

Jesus retired to the Transjordan region of Perea where John had initially conducted his baptismal ministry, and where He Himself was baptised (cf. Luke 3:3; John 1:28). Many went to see Him, and remembered what John had said about Him. John, during his baptismal ministry, proclaimed Jesus as (1) the Lamb of God (John 1:29), (2) the Pre-existent One (John 1:30), (3) the Son of God (John 1:34), (4) the Christ (John 3:28), (5) the Bridegroom (John 3:29), (6) the One from above (John 3:31), (7) the Speaker of God’s Word (John 3:34), (8) the One who has the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), (9) the beloved Son of the Father who has been committed all things, and (10) the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16). Having heard the words of Jesus, and seen His works, the people concluded that the things John had said about Him were true, though he performed no miracles. And many became believers.

Will the saved be few in number? Jesus answered this question indirectly by saying that the door into heaven is a narrow one. Those who want to enter into heaven must *“strive”* to do it. The word *“strive”* here in the Greek text is literally our English *“agonise.”* It has the idea of intense struggle and exertion of energy. The saved ones are those who continually strive against the forces of sin, self and Satan. Believers struggle with sin, and battle against Satan daily (Rom 7:14-21). This striving will not end until the saints receive their glorified bodies. This however should not be taken to mean that salvation is by works. Salvation is purely by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone. But true faith is a faith that works (James 2:20). The Holy Spirit works within us and makes believers more and more like Christ, but we must yield to His work of sanctification. That was exactly what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13, *“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.”*

THOUGHT: “Only one way to get to heaven, Jesus is the only way.”

PRAYER: Father, keep me in the strait and narrow way that leads to life.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30

LUKE 13:22-30

GALATIANS 3:6-14

“...behold,
there are last which shall be first,
and there are first which shall be last.”

JESUS THE NARROW WAY (II)

Not only is the way narrow because it is hard, it is also narrow because there is only one. There is only one way to get to heaven: Jesus is the only way. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). In another place, He said, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matt 7:13-14).

Will only Jews be saved? Definitely not! Jesus said that those who enter the kingdom of God will come from all over the world, and not just from Israel. Many of the Jews in Jesus’ day wrongly thought that God favoured only the Jews with salvation; Gentiles were only fit as fuel for the fires of hell. But Jesus told them that *“there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”* The Jews were first in terms of privilege and opportunity. God related to them in a special way through His covenants and His Scriptures. But if they reject Christ, they will be last because the Lord will cast them into a place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a picture of eternal torment in hell. They might have called Him Lord, dined with Him, and heard Him preach in the streets of Jerusalem, but Jesus would say to them on that day, *“I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”* For sure, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in heaven right now. The sons of Israel shall see their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in God’s kingdom, and yet they themselves shall be cast out because they have not followed after their fathers’ steps of faith (cf. Matt 8:10-12).

THOUGHT: The Church today owes Israel a Gospel debt.

PRAYER: Father, grant me an opportunity to preach the Gospel to the Jews.

THURSDAY, JULY 31

LUKE 13:31-35

HOSEA 11

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...”

JESUS LOVES ISRAEL

When Jesus was ministering in Perea, the Pharisees warned Him to leave the region immediately because Herod Antipas (the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) wanted to kill Him. Jesus told the Pharisees, who were probably in cahoots with Herod whom He called “*that fox*” (referring to his wicked cunning), to tell him that it was not Herod’s timetable that He had to keep but God’s. The time of Jesus’ death was not determined by Herod but by God, and neither Herod nor the Pharisees would be able to lay a hand on Him until the divinely perfect or ordained time arrived. Jesus would not allow Herod but His Father to dictate His movement.

Jesus then grieved over Jerusalem who kept putting God’s prophets to death. The Prophet of prophets was now present with them, and He Himself would not be spared. He had poured out all His love upon them, and they had spurned His love. What love this is! Did Jesus love His enemies? Surely, He did! He showered upon them His love, but they responded with hatred. He did good in their midst, but they reciprocated by killing Him.

What did Jesus mean when He told Israel, “*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*”? The “house” here refers to the nation of Israel. For rejecting their Messiah, God is going to cut off Israel (cf. Rom 11:15, 17). The natural branches indeed have been broken off from the olive tree because of unbelief (Rom 11:20). Jesus said that they shall not see Him until they shall say, “*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*” Indeed Israel till today is blind towards Christ, but this blindness will only be temporary. Israel will not see “*until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins*” (Rom 11:25-27). This will happen at the second coming of Christ when He will restore Israel nationally at the millennium. On that day, the nation as a whole will confess Jesus as Messiah.

THOUGHT: Has God cast away Israel? Answer: Romans 11:1-2.

PRAYER: (Pray for the salvation of Israel.)

FRIDAY, AUGUST 1

LUKE 14:1-15

1 PETER 5:1-7

*“For whosoever exalteth
himself shall be abased...”*

JESUS HUMBLES THE PROUD (I)

Jesus was invited to the house of one of the chief Pharisees for a sabbath day meal. This was done not because they wanted to honour Him, but to find a reason to accuse Him for Luke tells us they watched Him closely with insidious intent. And it so happened (or was it arranged?) that a man suffering from dropsy was standing there right in front of Him. The lawyers and Pharisees were no doubt waiting to see if He would heal on the sabbath. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asked them a question, *“Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?”* They kept quiet and would not answer. Then Jesus took the sick man, healed him, and let him go. Before they could accuse Jesus of breaking the sabbath, Jesus questioned them, *“Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?”* The question was rhetorical, expecting the answer “None.” They thus had to shut their mouths. If they allowed an ox or ass to be rescued from the pit on the sabbath, then how could they forbid the saving of a human being from sickness? They could not fault Him. If they accused Jesus, they accused themselves too.

In this parable, Jesus taught how we ought to be humble for *“whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* So, if we are invited to attend a wedding dinner, we ought not to be presumptuous and plant ourselves at the VIP table. The situation Jesus described was quite similar to Chinese wedding dinners where there are special tables reserved for important guests. The tables are usually numbered with table #1 being the chief table, and the tables nearest to it being the more important ones. It would be truly embarrassing to be told to vacate one’s seat for another, and be relegated to a lower place. Humiliation often results when one is not humble. But if we are found at the last table, and the host invites us to the first table, it would be a promotion indeed.

THOUGHT: Humility begets honour.

PRAYER: O Father, for a humble heart I pray.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 2

LUKE 14:1-15

PROVERBS 15:29-33

*“...and he that humbleth
himself shall be exalted.”*

JESUS HUMBLER THE PROUD (II)

Having talked about how guests ought to conduct themselves when invited to a wedding dinner, Jesus then directed His attention to the host. He noticed that those who hosted elaborate dinner parties tended to invite only the rich and powerful. This is often done for selfish reasons. We invite such people of influence and affluence for personal advantage. Jesus said that we ought rather to invite the poor and weak who are unable to give anything back to us in return. When we humble ourselves and befriend the lowly people, we will receive a good reward from the Lord on the day of resurrection. On that day, God as Host will bid the just to sit at His table, and eat with Him in His kingdom (cf. Rev 19:9).

Jesus practised what He preached. He is our supreme example of humility. Let us have the mind of Christ, *“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”* (Phil 2:6-9). *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:10).

THOUGHT: Where there is no humility, there is only humiliation.

PRAYER: O Father, forgive me of my pride.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 3

LUKE 14:16-27

PROVERBS 1:24-32

*"And whosoever doth not bear
his cross, and come after me,
cannot be my disciple."*

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS (I)

In this parable, Jesus described the unbelieving Jews who had rejected His invitation to salvation again and again giving foolish excuses each time. For example, no sensible person would purchase a piece of land without first examining it. And surely, no one would buy ten oxen without first knowing their condition. Another said that he was not able to come because he had just gotten married. One wonders why he could not bring his wife to dinner? It is very clear from their excuses that they refused the Lord's gracious invitation to dinner not because they could not come, but because they would not come. Indeed, the invitation to salvation went to the Jews first (cf. Rom 1:16). Since the Jews would not come, the Lord threw open His door to salvation to the Gentiles (those whom the Jews despised), the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Such ones will receive an irresistible call, and be drawn to the feast. Note that these were the same ones Jesus spoke of in the previous parable where the rich host was told to invite the lowly ones for dinner. In light of the teaching on humility there, Jesus is saying that it will not be the proud but the humble who will enjoy His great supper in heaven.

Jesus demands wholehearted loyalty from His followers. They must love Him more than they love their parents, wife and children, brothers and sisters. The Christian must also love the Lord more than his own life. Jesus is not telling us to hate our loved ones. That would have contradicted Exodus 20:12: "*Honour thy father and thy mother,*" Ephesians 5:25: "*Husbands, love your wives,*" and 2 Corinthians 12:14 where fathers are told to provide for their children. The word "*hate*" here must be taken relatively. In other words, Christians must love the Lord so much that their love for their loved ones would seem like hate. In other words, Christ must be first in our lives. It is total surrender to Him. We must bear our own crosses, and follow in His steps. The cross is a symbol of suffering and death. To be His disciple, we must be willing to go to that extent.

THOUGHT: "They are a blessed people whom God exercises with the cross" (Calvin).

PRAYER: "Lord, here I take my cross now to follow thee."

MONDAY, AUGUST 4

LUKE 14:28-35

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

*“...whosoever he be of you that
forsaketh not all that he hath,
he cannot be my disciple.”*

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS (II)

A builder who wants to erect a tower would first calculate how much it would cost before he decides to build it. It is laughable if one is not able to complete what he has set out to do. This parable teaches the need to count the cost if one wants to follow Jesus. The Christian road to heaven is not an easy one (see Matt 7:14; Luke 13:24, cf. John 16:33; 2 Tim 3:12). If the Christian wants to make the journey, he had better know what he is getting himself into and be prepared for it.

A king who is facing war must first consider whether it is better for him to go to war or to send for peace. He must weigh the cost of war. Likewise, those who wish to be a disciple of Christ must count the cost. The cost is not only high, it is total. Jesus said, *“whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”*

Disciples of Christ are the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13). Like salt, a Christian must live a godly life in order to draw people to God. But if he does not exude Christlikeness in his life, then he is good for nothing, and as the saying goes, “not worth his salt.” Everyone who names the name of Christ must be salty, and not saltless.

*“Take up thy cross and follow Me.”
I heard my Master say;
“I gave My life to ransom thee,
Surrender your all today.”
Wherever He leads I’ll go,
Wherever He leads I’ll go,
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so,
Wherever He leads I’ll go.*

THOUGHT: Once I have decided to follow Jesus, there is no turning back.

PRAYER: Father, I have decided to follow Thee, and will not turn back.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 5

LUKE 15:1-16:13

EZEKIEL 33:11

*"I have found my sheep
which was lost."*

LOST AND FOUND

The parable of the lost sheep was spoken against the Pharisees and scribes who considered themselves so righteous that they would not contaminate themselves by being with publicans and sinners. Jesus had to tell them that sinners are important to Him. He taught us to search for the lost with love. When one sinner gets converted, heaven rejoices greatly.

The parable of the lost coin speaks of searching for the lost with diligence. God has committed the work of evangelism not to His angels in heaven, but to His people on earth. When Christians do their work diligently, and souls are won into the kingdom, the angels are very happy. I am sure they not only cheer when the lost is found, they cheer when Christians fulfil their Gospel duty by seeking out the lost.

The parable of the lost son actually deals with not one but two prodigal sons. The younger son who took his inheritance money and had a worldly fling represented the publicans and sinners. It tells us that no matter how much we have wronged Him, God is ever ready to forgive us, and welcome us home. The older son who stayed with his father appeared filial but actually his heart was far away from him. This is seen in the way he treated his father and his younger brother. He was selfish, and loved only himself. This unloving older brother represented the Pharisees and scribes. The younger son was lost and is found; whereas the older was lost throughout.

In the parable of the lost steward, Jesus was not commending the steward for cheating his master for his own gain, but for his shrewdness. Unbelievers know how to make use of money to promote themselves. Why should believers be any less clever? We know that the world's wealth will last for only a while. So, we should be all the more wise in making use of it to gain the rewards that would last for eternity. We must make money our servant, and not our god. When we use the money that God has entrusted to us for the furtherance of His kingdom now, we can expect to be entrusted with greater things in His kingdom to come.

THOUGHT: "I once was lost, but now am found."

PRAYER: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6

LUKE 16:13-18

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10

“...Ye cannot serve
God and mammon.”

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). The Pharisees who heard Jesus say that one cannot serve money and God at the same time, sneered at Him. They were guilty of the sin of covetousness because they loved money. They had broken the tenth commandment: “*Thou shalt not covet*” (Exod 20:17). They appeared spiritual, but it was all an act. Deep inside, they were materialistic. Jesus unmasked their hypocrisy. God sees the heart. “...*that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*”

Jesus came to fulfil the Law. He not only kept the Law perfectly, but also taught it correctly. The Pharisees broke the Law by down playing the seriousness of the marriage covenant. Rabbi Hillel, for example, allowed a husband to divorce his wife if she did not cook well, and Rabbi Akiba permitted a husband to divorce his wife if he found a prettier woman. Jesus reinforced the divine command that every marriage covenant is binding and permanent. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another breaks the seventh commandment: “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” (cf. Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9).

Jesus here proved that these rabbis, instead of being law-keepers, were actually law-breakers.

THOUGHT: The worship of the dollar is moneytheism.

PRAYER: Father, teach me godliness and contentment.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 7

LUKE 16:19-31

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

*“Charge them that are rich in this world,
that they be not highminded,
nor trust in uncertain riches...”*

LIFE NOW AND HEREAFTER (I)

Jesus tells a true story. It is the climax of Jesus' teaching concerning wrong attitudes towards possessions (Luke 15) and people (Luke 16). Jesus was in particular speaking against the Pharisees for their proud reaction to His words in Luke 16:13. Jesus exposed the Pharisees for who they truly were: a covetous lot of people who were worshipping money and not God (Luke 16:14). Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus to rebuke them for their false piety. The tone of the story is one of warning or threat. It is set within the context of Jesus' admonition of the Pharisees who were (1) not following the OT Scripture (Luke 16:17-18 cf. 16:29, 31), and (2) not building up treasures in heaven but material wealth on earth (Luke 16:13-14 cf. 16:19).

In this story, we have the rich man who was well-dressed and well-fed. In those days, only the very rich or the very powerful were able to afford to purchase purple dye used on expensive clothes. This rich man was totally oblivious to spiritual matters for he was interested only in the pleasures of the flesh. William Hendriksen has no kind words for this man: “He was not just rich. He belonged to that class of people to whom the epithet filthy rich is often applied, and not without reason. His living day by day in dazzling splendor marks him as a show-off, a strutting peacock. He wanted everybody to know that he was rich. He was in love... with himself.” He may be likened to the rich fool of Luke 12:19 who said to himself, “*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*” The words of God to the rich fool is equally applicable to the rich man, “*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided*” (Luke 12:20). The divine warning applies here too, “*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 2:21). Calvin rightly advised, “If we believe heaven to be our country, it is better for us to transmit our wealth thither, than to retain it here, where we may lose it by a sudden removal.”

THOUGHT: It is better to be rich in heaven than to be rich on earth.

PRAYER: Father, help me to work for riches in heaven through faithful and loving service.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 8

LUKE 16:19-31

MARK 9:43-48

*“And in hell he lift up his eyes,
being in torments...”*

LIFE NOW AND HEREAFTER (II)

In this story, we have a beggar named Lazarus. Jesus said that he was “*laid at his (the rich man’s) gate, full of sores,*” obviously in great pain and suffering (Luke 16:20). This was an opportunity for the rich man to show some kindness to Lazarus who laid at his doorsteps greatly “*desiring to be fed.*” Lazarus was probably at the point of starving to death. The begging was not a momentary affair. Lazarus was there pleading for food daily. The fact that he laid by the gate implies that he was unable to walk. The rich man was indifferent to the plight of Lazarus and considered him no better than a dog, fit only to feed upon the crumbs which fell off the master’s table. Note that the text does not say that Lazarus was actually fed with crumbs; it simply says that Lazarus was hoping to be fed with crumbs. He was in all probability still lying outside at the gate starving to death, with his sores being repeatedly licked by the stray dogs of the street.

The beggar died and was found in heaven, and the rich man died and was found in hell. There is a reversal of roles. Lazarus is enjoying bliss, while the rich man is experiencing torment. Abraham’s words aptly describe the situation to the rich man, “*Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented*” (Luke 16:25).

Lazarus was borne by the angels to paradise (cf. Luke 23:43). He is where Abraham is and there is close fellowship between the two. Lazarus who was deprived of eating at the rich man’s table is now seated with Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man, on the other hand, is found in hades, the place of the departed dead. He is described as “*being in torments*” (Luke 16:23). He himself confessed, “*I am tormented in this flame*” (Luke 16:24). The place where unregenerate sinners are consigned is described as a fiery abode throughout Scripture (Isa 33:14; 66:24; Matt 3:12; 13:40, 42, 50; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 3:17; Jude 7; Rev 14:10; 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8).

THOUGHT: Hell is for real. The finally impenitent will not be annihilated.

PRAYER: Father, please save me from hell.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 9

LUKE 16:19-31

HEBREWS 9:27-28

“...it is appointed unto men
once to die, but after this
the judgment.”

LIFE NOW AND HEREAFTER (III)

Hell's flames had caused the rich man to be so thirsty that he now became the beggar, begging Abraham to allow Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue (Luke 16:24). But this was impossible. Abraham responded to his request in two ways. Firstly, he said that the rich man got what he deserved (Luke 16:25), and secondly, there exists “a great gulf (chasm)” which prevents movement either way (Luke 16:26).

At this juncture, the rich man became very evangelistic. He requested that Lazarus be sent to his father's house to witness to his five brothers who were not believers yet. The rich man wished his brothers to be converted so that they would not have to experience the horrors of this place (Luke 16:27-28). But Abraham replied, “*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*” (Luke 16:29). In other words, Abraham was saying that the Old Testament Scripture is sufficient for men to prevent themselves from ending up in eternal damnation. Moses (Deut 18:15) and the Prophets (Isa 53) have pointed towards the redemptive work of the Messiah, “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Furthermore, the Law and the Prophets have instructed that true faith will manifest itself in good works (James 1:27 cf. Mic 6:8). The rich man might have appeared very religious, but his failure to attend to the needs of Lazarus showed that he was still unregenerate. This no doubt was a direct rebuke against the Pharisees who were not only blind towards their Messiah, but also towards the needs of their fellow men (Matt 23:1-36). If these men would not listen to the Word of God, neither would they be convinced by a miracle of such magnitude as that of a man returning from the dead (Luke 16:31).

The justice of God requires Him to punish all evil-doers. And the greatest evil one can do is to reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Mosaic teaching of *lex talionis* (Deut 19:21) demands a judgment that is commensurate with the crime. The crime of rejecting the eternal God deserves the punishment of eternal torment in hell.

THOUGHT: In hell, everyone is evangelistic.

PRAYER: Father, grant me grace to share the good news.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 10

LUKE 17:1-10

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-15

“... *We are unprofitable servants...*”

FORGIVENESS AND SERVICE

The Pharisees treated people outside of their circle, especially tax collectors and sinners, with disdain. The rich and powerful treated the poor and weak similarly. Such an attitude effectively shuts out the people God desires to save. Jesus warned His disciples against discrimination. It is better to kill oneself than to cause any of God's people (cf. Matt 18:2-6) to sin.

When a brother sins against us, we must forgive him fully (“seven” signifies perfection). We must keep on forgiving those who have wronged us, even if they do so repeatedly (cf. Matt 18:21-22). If they are penitent, we must forgive. Does this mean that we forgive only if and when a person repents? That seems to be the implication, but there is no explicit statement. The implication seems reasonable in light of the fact that God forgives sinners only if and when they repent (Matt 11:20-21; Luke 13:3). At any rate, even if a person who has done us wrong does not say sorry, it does not mean that we are to stop loving him. Peter wrote, “*charity shall cover the multitude of sins*” (1 Pet 4:8). Did Peter not learn this from the Lord?

On the matter of service, the Lord tells us that we must serve Him obediently and humbly. We must do what He commands, and at the end of the day say, “*We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*” Sounds very Chinese! Such words reflect lowliness and gratefulness, virtues which the Lord desires of us.

THOUGHT: “Forget yourself, if you would serve God.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, have compassion on me in my troubles and struggles.

MONDAY, AUGUST 11

JOHN 11:1-46

REVELATION 20:6

*“...I am the resurrection,
and the life...”*

JESUS THE LIFEGIVER

In Jerusalem, Jesus received news from Martha and Mary that Lazarus was very sick. They had expected Him to go to them immediately, but He delayed His visit on purpose. The Lord, being omniscient, knew that Lazarus would die, and that He would raise him up from the dead. Through this mighty miracle, God the Father and God the Son would be glorified. Jesus was also going to use Lazarus as an object lesson concerning His own death and resurrection.

When Jesus finally arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead and entombed for four days. Martha and Mary, with all their friends, were weeping over Lazarus' death. It is interesting to note that after each statement of doubt by the people (John 11:32, 37), it is recorded that Jesus *“groaned”* in the spirit (John 11:33, 38). Would not Jesus be hurt by such a question, *“Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?”* Clearly, the people did not believe that He had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus knew that Lazarus was going to be made alive soon. In light of this, He wept probably because He was grieved by the doubts of the people.

Jesus went to Bethany to do a mighty miracle: the miracle of calling the dead to life. Who were the dead? There was Lazarus who was physically dead, and then there were his friends who were spiritually dead. In fact, the miracle was performed not for the sake of Lazarus the physically dead, but for the living, yet spiritually dead. Jesus, when He prayed, said, *“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”* When Jesus cried out, *“Lazarus, come forth,”* not only was Lazarus brought to life, but also many of the Jews who were friends of the family (John 11:45). Jesus, in raising the physically dead, raised also the spiritually dead. A double miracle!

THOUGHT: “The resurrection is the chief point of the Gospel.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for abundant life now, and eternal life hereafter.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12

JOHN 11:45-54

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

“...Jesus should die for that nation.”

JESUS THE SAVIOUR OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Jesus' miracle of and teaching on the resurrection led many of Mary's friends to trust in Him as their Saviour and Lord. Mary's friends loved Him for it, but His enemies who were present hated Him all the more, and reported all that had happened to the Pharisees, no doubt to persuade them to take swift action to destroy Him (John 11:47-48).

The chief priests and Pharisees convened a Sanhedrin-meeting to talk about the popularity Jesus was amassing. The Jews at large were taking Jesus to be their political Messiah. To the Sanhedrin, that was dangerous. If they did nothing to oppose Jesus, they would certainly be implicated if the Romans were to clamp down on Him. So, Caiaphas as high priest and president of the Sanhedrin, hatched a sinister plot to put Jesus away. In a hypocritical show of patriotism, he declared that in order for the nation to be saved, Jesus must die. But God made Caiaphas' words prophetic of Jesus' salvific work in His substitutionary atonement. There were times when God used His enemies to speak His words. In the OT, we find God causing the false prophet Balaam, who had intended to curse Israel, to bless her instead (Num 24:2-9; Deut 23:5). Here, God used Caiaphas.

God's prophetic words through Caiaphas in John 11:51-52 are significant. Caiaphas thought that by putting Jesus to death, Israel would be saved, but ironically it led to her destruction in AD 70 when the Romans sacked Jerusalem. This was the chastitive will of God. Nonetheless, God's promise of salvation to Israel through Christ remains true. Indeed, Christ was to die for the nation of Israel, and not only for Israel, but also for the world. Israel indeed crucified their Messiah, but God turned their wicked deed into their salvation (Rom 11:25-27). This will happen when Christ returns. Israel shall be great again when the Son of David sits on the throne of His father, and rules over the whole world from Jerusalem for a thousand years (Acts 1:6; Rev 20:6). And through Israel's Messiah, we who are Gentiles have received salvation (Eph 2:11-13; cf. John 10:14-16). What a Saviour! What a God! A God who keeps His covenant and promises to His chosen nation (Israel), and to us His saints (the Church).

THOUGHT: Our God is a Covenant-keeping God.

PRAYER: “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father.”

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13

LUKE 17:11-37

REVELATION 19:11-18

*“And as it was in the days of Noe,
so shall it be also
in the days of the Son of man.”*

JESUS THE COMING KING

Jesus made His way to Jerusalem by taking the border route between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a certain village, ten lepers, called out to Him for healing. Interestingly, Jesus did not say, “Be cleansed,” but simply told them to show themselves to the priests (cf. Lev 14). All ten obeyed His word without doubting. As they made their way to the priests, they were healed. One of them, seeing that he was cleansed, quickly turned back to thank the Lord. And he was not a Jew but a Samaritan. Surely there must have been Jews among the ten, but only the Samaritan was grateful and thankful. God has always remembered Israel and the covenant He made to their fathers, but Israel has forgotten their God time and time again. Jesus was truly saddened by this show of ingratitude. The nine were physically cleansed, but only the Samaritan was cleansed both physically and spiritually. His faith in Christ had made him whole indeed.

The Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God would come. The Messianic kingdom had already arrived in His person but they were too blind to see it. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and told them that there would come a time when men shall desire to see the kingdom, but would be unable to do so. This will happen during the Great Tribulation (cf. Matt 24:21-31). At the end of the Great Tribulation, Christ will return to establish His Millennial Kingdom. At that time, He will come with a lightning flash that will be seen throughout the world. But before Christ can come back as King, He must first suffer as a Servant in obedience to God for the redemption of man.

The end times will be characterised by great sin and evil just like in the days of Noah, and of Lot. When Christ comes back, He will destroy all unbelievers. The destruction will be sudden. Swift decisive action must be taken if one wants to live. Unbelievers will be taken away into judgment, but those left behind will survive to enter the millennium. Christ will put to death the Antichrist and all His enemies on that day, and the vultures will converge to feast on them (Ezek 39:4; Rev 19:17-18).

THOUGHT: “It behoves us to see by faith the near advent of Christ.”
(Calvin)

PRAYER: “O Lord Jesus, how long, how long?”

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14

LUKE 18:1-14

PSALM 17

"...God be merciful to me a sinner."

PERSISTENCE AND HUMILITY

The parable of the persistent widow teaches that God's people can be assured of God's speedy rescue of them from their enemies. The key is this: *"men ought always to pray, and not to faint."* If the unjust judge will help this hopeless widow lest she continues to bother him, how much more will our righteous Father help His own dear children who go to Him in prayer.

The parable of the Pharisees and Publican teaches against possessing a self-righteous, holier-than-thou, attitude. The Pharisees, being religious, were highly respected by the people. In contrast, the tax-collectors, considered traitors because they worked for the Romans, were utterly despised. Yet, which one of the two was accepted by God? Not the proud Pharisee who boasted to God of all his religious works, but the humble publican who thought himself totally unworthy to even look up to heaven, and with great remorse cried out, *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* Jesus said, *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*

*I must tell Jesus all of my trials,
I cannot bear these burdens alone;
In my distress He kindly will help me,
He ever loves and cares for His own.*

*I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
I cannot bear my burdens alone;
I must tell Jesus! I must tell Jesus!
Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.*

THOUGHT: Only Jesus, always Jesus.

PRAYER: "My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary, Saviour divine!"

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15
MATTHEW 19:3-12
DEUTERONOMY 24:1-4

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

JESUS ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (I)

Here Jesus responded to the question: “*Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*” This was a trick question by the Pharisees. In the days of Jesus, the Pharisees taught that a man could divorce his wife for the slightest reason. For instance, after marriage, if you discover that she cannot cook well, divorce! If someone more attractive comes along, divorce! 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.*” In other words, no divorce!

If that is the case, then what about Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 24? “*Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*” Jesus answered, “*Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*” 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. 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: “Marriage is a covenant consecrated by God.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, keep me true to my spouse.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16

MARK 10:2-12

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-17

“...Whosoever shall put away
his wife, and marry another,
committeth adultery against her.”

JESUS ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (II)

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 had to go to the courts in the presence of witnesses where a legal bill for divorce had to be drawn up and signed. This of course required time. There should be no such thing as getting married today, and then divorced tomorrow. Neither could a person divorce his spouse verbally by simply saying “I divorce you” (*Talak*) three times. (2) A certificate of divorce had to be served. The one who filed for divorce was required to put the document into the other party’s hand. (3) The person divorced had to move out of the house; they were no longer to live together. (4) Once divorced and remarried, they could 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 could put away his wife for every cause. Against this Jesus said, “*Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*” There is but one reason for divorce and only one, namely, fornication (i.e. marital infidelity or adultery and other sexual sins like homosexuality, bestiality and incest). Anyone who marries an adulterer or adulteress commits adultery as well. It is significant to note that the exception clause (“*except it be for fornication*”) is found only in Matthew 19:9. Mark 10:1-12 and Luke 16:18 are parallel passages on marriage and in these places the exception clause is absent. Jesus was emphasising the rule that the marriage covenant is binding, not the exception. Once married you should never divorce. The Lord hates divorce, and if you insist on divorce, it is only on grounds of adultery. Just as the Lord 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: “Jokes about marriage have come from Satan’s worship.”
(Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, keep my family intact.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 17

MARK 10:13-16

PSALM 127

*"And he took them up in his arms,
put his hands upon them,
and blessed them."*

JESUS LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

Jesus loves little children, even infants. He was much displeased with His disciples when they shooed away parents who brought their little ones to Him for blessing. He told His disciples not to hinder the children from coming to Him, for salvation belongs to those who, like children, are simple, humble, unquestioning, and trustful.

Infants and children of believers belong to God's church, and to His covenant. God desires to bless His people. Children are God's gift to us (Ps 127:3). As Christian parents, it is our duty to bring them up in the fear and knowledge of God (Prov 22:6). Pray that they would confess and believe in Christ as early as possible. God is deeply interested in the eternal destiny of our dear ones. We have a moral responsibility to preach the Gospel to them, and bear a Christlike testimony at home. When we prayerfully and diligently do our part, God will be faithful to do His part to bring them eventually to the saving knowledge of Himself.

This is especially the case with children. As Christian parents, this should be our primary concern, that our children come to know Christ as their Saviour at the earliest possible age. It is a heavy responsibility to be parents. We have brought one more sinner into the world. And if he or she does not believe in Christ, eternal punishment awaits. I am sure we do not wish at all for our children to spend eternity in hell. God does not desire that either. He encourages us with a promise that He will be faithful to save our children if we are faithful in bringing them up in the fear and knowledge of God.

THOUGHT: "The fruit of the womb is not born by chance." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, save my children.

MONDAY, AUGUST 18
MATTHEW 19:16-20:16
ROMANS 7:10-13

*"...there is none good
but one, that is, God..."*

JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER (I)

This story of the rich young ruler teaches the impossibility of salvation based on one's own merit whether it be reputation, power or wealth.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with a question. Unlike the Pharisees and the scribes, he questioned Jesus not to catch Him or find fault with Him. In sincerity, he humbled himself, and knelt before the Lord, asking, *"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* Jesus could see his heart. He first answered him with a question, *"Why callest thou me good?"* Now Jesus was not denying that He is good. As He said, "only God is good." Since Jesus is God, He is therefore good. But this rich young ruler did not see that Jesus is God Himself. He thought of Jesus only as a very good man. Wishing to justify himself, he thought that any man who did a lot of good works could be considered "good." The Lord had to correct his wrong view of man by telling him without equivocation: "No man is good (including you)." Read Romans 3:23 and 3:10-12.

It was only after telling the young ruler that only God is good, and all men are sinful that Jesus answered his question *"what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"* *"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."* *"Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother,"* *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* Was Jesus trying to teach that a man must do good works in order to be saved? The answer is both Yes and No. Yes because truly the commandments are *"ordained to life"* (Rom 7:10). If a person wants to be saved, and have eternal life, he must keep the commandments perfectly. But herein lies the problem: Man, in his totally sinful and depraved condition, is unable to keep the commandments. He is born in sin, and lives in sin. It is thus impossible for him to keep the commandments. He breaks the commandments all the time. The law is good, but he is not. The law is a sword that slays because he is not able to fulfil it. He is absolutely incapable of keeping God's Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, in his totally depraved state.

THOUGHT: The law is good, but I am not.

PRAYER: Father, I cannot help myself; please help me.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19

MARK 10:17-31

JAMES 2:10

*“...if thou wilt enter into life,
keep the commandments.”*

JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER (II)

Jesus' answer should have caused the rich young ruler to realise that, indeed, he was not good because he had fallen far short of God's moral standard, and deserved death, not life. Sadly, he did not. He told Jesus, *“All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”* Jesus looked at him lovingly, and told him what he lacked, *“Yet lackest thou one thing: If thou wilt be perfect, go thy way and sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”* But when the young man heard this, he was sad, and went away very sorrowful for he had great possessions and was very rich. Although this rich young ruler said that he had kept all those commandments from his youth up, he was still far from being saved. God says, *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). The Tenth Commandment states, *“Thou shalt not covet.”* But this rich ruler coveted his money. He loved his money more than he loved Jesus. He would not surrender his life totally to the Lord to follow Him. Jesus had already 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).

Indeed, God requires a man to be perfect in the law if he is to enter into heaven. Sinful man can never fulfil the law perfectly. Owing to his total depravity, he is an utter failure in terms of meeting the standard set by God. That is why there is a need for the active obedience of Christ. Since we are unable and incapable of keeping the law, the Lord must keep the law on our behalf if we are to be saved. Jesus had to fulfil all righteousness for man's redemption. If only the rich young ruler had trusted in the righteous works of Christ instead of his own, he would have been saved.

THOUGHT: Jesus kept the Law perfectly for me.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for fulfilling all righteousness for me.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20

LUKE 18:18-30

MATTHEW 6:24

“...come and follow me.”

JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER (III)

With regard to the rich young ruler, Jesus remarked, “*How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!*” Why is it so difficult for a rich man to be saved? It is because the rich 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. It is difficult to give up this control. It has to do with pride.

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.*” What is this “*eye of a needle*”? Some interpreters try to down play the meaning of this proverb by saying that the needle’s eye refers to a gate leading into the city of Jerusalem where camels had to kneel down in order to get through. I do not think Jesus was referring to that. The eye of a needle ought to be understood literally as 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.*” Salvation is impossible with men; it is possible only with God.

THOUGHT: The rich must become poor to win Christ.

PRAYER: Father, I surrender all.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 21

MARK 10:32-45

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

*“...Behold, we go up to Jerusalem;
and the Son of man shall be
delivered unto the chief priests...”*

JESUS PREPARES TO DIE (I)

The situation had become very solemn and grave. It was time to go up to Jerusalem. “*Going up*” to Jerusalem in pilgrim language meant not just the walking up to the hill-top city, but also the offering up of a sacrifice in God’s temple there (Ps 122). Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to offer Himself up as a Sacrifice for the sins of the world (Isa 53:10; John 1:29). Jesus in perfect obedience was all set to accomplish His Father’s redemptive mission as foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus told the disciples exactly what would happen to Him in Jerusalem: *“...the Son of man shall be betrayed [and] shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: [to be] spitefully entreated: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill [crucify] him: and the third day he shall rise again.”*

Here we find the sons of Zebedee with their mother requesting from Jesus the two highest positions in His kingdom. They pictured Jesus sitting on the throne of His glory, and desired the left and right seats of power. In other words, when Jesus becomes Prime Minister of Israel, they would like to be first and second deputy prime ministers respectively. This was requested in the presence of their fellow disciples. What audacity! It is no wonder that the ten, when they heard it, were seething with indignation.

THOUGHT: “Ambition is the mother of dissensions.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I would rather be a doorkeeper in Thy house.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 22

MATTHEW 20:17-28

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13

“...they shall condemn him to death.”

JESUS PREPARES TO DIE (II)

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?”* 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). Both the cup and baptism are symbols of His passive obedience. The cup signifies His passive obedience throughout His lifelong ministry on earth, and the baptism refers specifically to His death on the cross. The sons of Zebedee 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) 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. 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. The world measures greatness and power in terms of how high a person’s status is in society. How many people do you manage? Who are the people under your control? These are the oft-asked questions. God’s way of looking at greatness is entirely opposite. Greatness is measured by how much you are serving others. *“Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”* 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.”* Calvin restated it thus, “The Son of God became the Son of man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God.” If we want to be great, be like Him.

THOUGHT: “A life of service is a happy life.” (McIntire)

PRAYER: Father, teach me to serve Thee and Thy people humbly and happily.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23

LUKE 18:35-19:6

PSALM 62

“...Jesus, thou Son of David,
have mercy on me.”

JESUS SAVES BARTIMAEUS AND ZACCHAEUS

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. Not only were their physical eyes opened but also the spiritual. Jesus said, *“thy faith hath made thee whole [and] saved thee.”* And they followed Jesus as He walked on, and glorified God.

In Jericho, there was a very wealthy man by the name of Zacchaeus. He was the number one tax collector who had others under his charge. The Jews regarded tax collectors like Zacchaeus, traitors and crooks, because they got rich by currying the favour of their Roman masters and extorting money from their fellow Jews.

Zacchaeus wanted to catch sight of Jesus as He passed through the town. But being a short man, he could not see over the heads of the crowd. So, he ran ahead, and climbed up a sycamore tree. This tree is known to provide good shade, and its branches are close to the ground. It was easy for a short man like Zacchaeus to climb up such a tree.

Zacchaeus must have been quite conspicuous. He was probably the only guy in the crowd who was perched on a tree. When Jesus reached the place, He looked up and saw him. Although the Lord saw Zacchaeus for the first time here, He had already known him inside out. He called Zacchaeus by name, and told him, *“make haste, and come down, for to day I must abide at thy home.”* Zacchaeus must have been delighted. He quickly scrambled down the tree, and received the Lord into his home joyfully.

THOUGHT: Faith comes not by seeing Christ but by hearing Christ.

PRAYER: Father, help me to live by faith and not by sight.

LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 24

LUKE 19:1-10

PSALM 101

*"For the Son of man is come to seek
and to save that which was lost."*

BE TALL FOR CHRIST

When the townsfolk saw what had happened, they all complained, and made a disparaging remark that Jesus had become a guest of one who was a sinner. Take note of the word *"all."* It is no exaggeration that everyone in Jericho hated and despised Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was absolutely friendless, and probably quite miserable living in a town full of people who hated him. What joy he must have felt when Jesus called out to him and wanted to be his friend!

Zacchaeus must have been touched by the love of Christ. That day, he truly believed in the Lord and repented of his sins. This he showed when he said, *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."* What a contrast to the rich young ruler who loved his money more than Jesus (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). Zacchaeus was equally rich, but by the grace of God, he realised what true riches is. To Zacchaeus, Jesus was worth infinitely more than his wealth. He gladly gave them up for the sake of Christ. *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). The Lord then gave Zacchaeus this word of assurance, *"This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

THOUGHT: Zacchaeus was physically short, but spiritually tall.

PRAYER: Father, I want to be spiritually tall for Christ.

MONDAY, AUGUST 25

LUKE 19:11-28

JOHN 11:55-57

“...Occupy till I come.”

BE BUSY TILL CHRIST RETURNS

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, the people thought that His regal reign on earth would soon be inaugurated. Jesus had to correct this thinking by means of a parable. In His parable of the pounds, Jesus intimated that His physical reign on earth would not be in the immediate but distant future. Like a certain nobleman who “*went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return,*” Jesus would be departing to heaven for a season to receive His kingdom before coming back to earth again. The period between His departure and His return would be a time of work for His servants. To all Christians, Jesus commands, “*Occupy till I come.*”

*To the work! To the work! In the strength of the Lord,
And a robe and a crown shall our labour reward
When the home of the faithful our dwelling shall be
And we shout with the ransomed, “Salvation is free!”
Toiling on, toiling on,
Toiling on, toiling on;
Let us hope,
Let us watch
And labor till the Master comes.*

The Church right now, however, consists of true and false believers. All will have to report to Jesus when He returns. The Lord will reward true believers who have faithfully served Him with cities to rule over. False believers, like the wicked servant who hated the Lord and did nothing with his pound, will be judged and punished. Faithlessness and fruitlessness are signs of false belief. As James has said, “*Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:20). On that day, Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, the good fishes from the bad (Matt 13:24-30, 47-50, 25:32-33).

THOUGHT: What can I do for the Lord while waiting for the day of Christ’s return?

PRAYER: Father, may I not be lazy but quick to do Thy work while there is yet time.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26

MATTHEW 21:1-9

PSALM 118:21-29

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

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF CHRIST (I)

We now enter into the final week of Jesus' life on earth. It begins with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, and ends with His triumphal demise outside Jerusalem on Friday. Jesus was about to fulfil the first evangelistic prediction of Scripture as recorded in Genesis 3:15, *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”*

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 His week of suffering (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.”* No one can stop the proclamation of the truth that Jesus saves. *“Hosanna”* reminds us of Matthew 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”!*

THOUGHT: “Christ openly declares that he commences his reign by advancing to death.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: O Saviour, save now!

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27

LUKE 19:29-40

ZECHARIAH 9:9

“...Behold,

*thy King cometh unto thee,
meek, and sitting upon an ass...*”

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF CHRIST (II)

Zechariah 9:9 describes the Messianic King as being “*just*” and “*lowly*,” and bringing “*salvation*.” Salvation will come by means of His righteousness, and humiliation. 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 on Sunday to “*Crucify him, Crucify him*” on Friday as we shall soon read. Jesus would save Israel from her enemies, but 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 (Rev 19:11).

THOUGHT: As the Lamb and the Lion, Jesus is both Priest and King.

PRAYER: O Saviour, return soon!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 28

LUKE 19:41-44, MATTHEW 21:10-11

PSALM 122

*“...he beheld the city,
and wept over it.”*

JERUSALEM THE CITY OF PEACE?

Jesus lovingly looked at Jerusalem and wept over her. He was grieved by the people's rejection of Him. How greatly would the Jews be blessed with peace if only they had believed on Him. This peace refers to the peace with God that Jesus gives to those who are justified by faith (Rom 5:1).

Jesus also prophesied that Jerusalem would be punished for rejecting the Messiah. Indeed, this is seen in the fact that the Jews have been a persecuted people since they crucified Jesus on the cross. They were eventually driven out of their homeland in AD 70, and scattered all over the world. In these foreign lands, they were generally hated, despised and ill-treated. The Jewish holocaust in World War II saw the massacre of six million Jews by Hitler. Anti-semitism is generally a world-wide sentiment. The worst is yet to come. The time of Jacob's trouble awaits Israel. This will happen during the second half of the seven-year Great Tribulation period when the Antichrist will attempt to exterminate the Jews. Peace will come to Jerusalem only when the Prince of peace returns. Then all Israel shall be saved (Rom 11:26). Israel is presently blinded, but on that day, God will open her eyes. The Jews will then confess Jesus as Lord. Read Revelation 1:7 and Isaiah 25:9.

Since the Passover was just around the corner, there were many Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem. The question *“Who is this?”* was probably asked by those who lived outside of Palestine who might not have heard of Jesus. The answer given was, *“This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”* By this time, the people did see Him as a prophet (John 4:19, 6:14, 7:40), and as a Nazarene (Mark 1:24, 10:47, 16:6). It was really quite a superficial answer. Jesus was not simply a prophet; He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16). He was not just from Nazareth but from heaven itself (John 3:13). How dull the Jews were to the identity of Jesus, their Messiah. No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and lamented, *“If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes!”*

THOUGHT: What does “Jerusalem” mean?

PRAYER: *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...”* (Ps 122:6).

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29

MARK 11:12-18

JEREMIAH 7:8-16

“...My house shall be called of
all nations the house of prayer?”

PRODUCTIVITY AND PURITY

On His way to the temple, Jesus became hungry. Chancing upon a healthy fig tree, he hoped to find figs, 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).

Jesus cleansed the temple once before at the beginning of His public ministry (John 2:13-17). Now at the end of His public ministry, He cleansed it again. The temple was meant to be a “*house of prayer*,” but the chief priests and scribes had made it into a “*den of thieves*.” 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.

Like the first time, 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.

THOUGHT: “The purification of the Church is God’s own work.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, we desire a pure church.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 30

MATTHEW 21:14-17, 20-22

MARK 11:19-26

“...Hosanna to the Son of David...”

JESUS HOSANNA!

The authority and power of Jesus as seen in His cleansing of the temple, and healing of the blind and lame caused the children of Israel to cry out again, “*Hosanna to the Son of David.*” These young ones publicly declared Jesus to be Israel’s Messiah which greatly displeased the chief priests and scribes. Jesus then quoted Psalm 8:2 to shut the disapproving mouths of the religious leaders, “*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.*” If adults who should know better do not know how to praise God, the Lord can cause little children to understand the truth and glorify His name. We must not underestimate the supernatural working of God’s grace in the hearts and minds of covenant children. When Christian parents are faithful to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God from the time they are born, God is able to cause them to be born again from a very tender age.

The cursing of the fruitless fig tree occurred on Monday. After Jesus cursed it, it began to wither right there and then (Matt 21:19). By Tuesday, it had already shrivelled up to its very roots. The whole decaying process was amazingly quick, as observed by the disciples. This no doubt was due to the supernatural power of Jesus’ words. Then Jesus used this incident to teach His disciples about the power of faith in God. If they had true faith, they could accomplish the impossible. Jesus then told His disciples that they would be doing greater works than He (John 14:12). Indeed, they did! For in the book of Acts, we find them surpassing the Lord in the number of souls saved, and miracles performed (see Acts 2:41; 3:6-9,16, 5:12-16, 9:36-43, 19:11-12).

What is true faith? One aspect of true faith is the willingness and eagerness to forgive others. Those who have truly experienced the forgiveness of God would be so filled with gratitude that they would be quick to forgive others too. Those who do not have this forgiving spirit may not be saved in the first place. Jesus warned, “*But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*”

THOUGHT: “Faith and love is the sum total of godliness.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, may my faith be manifested in my love for Thee and for others.

JESUS THE GREATER SOLOMON

Jesus went into the temple. The temple officials took this opportunity to discredit Him. In those days, a licence must 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?

Jesus 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. If they had answered "*from heaven*," they deduced that Jesus would have replied why they did not then believe Him. 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 said, "No comment"! Jesus likewise answered, "*Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*"

In the parable of the two sons, Jesus exposed the unbelieving hearts of the Jewish religious leaders. When John came speaking the Word, they appeared to believe, but actually did not. On the other hand, the publicans and sinners eventually believed and got saved. These religious outcasts were like the first son who said no to his father but later repented and obeyed him. The religious leaders were like the second son who said yes but did not do what he said he would. Who performed the will of God the Father? Not the rebellious chief priests and scribes, but the penitent publicans and sinners. Jesus said that it is not the former who will inherit the kingdom but the latter. So the first shall be last, and the last first.

THOUGHT: Man can never outsmart nor outwit God.

PRAYER: Father, give me the wisdom that I need to live in this dangerous world.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

MATTHEW 21:33-46

1 PETER 2:6-9

“...The stone which
the builders rejected, the same
is become the head of the corner...”

JESUS' CRUCIFIXION, ISRAEL'S SALVATION

The parable of the wicked farmer was specifically addressed to the nation of Israel. Israel was a theocracy, 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 twenty kings, all of them bad, while Judah had nineteen 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 (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 (cf. 1 Pet 2:6-9).

Jesus then pronounced judgment on the nation of Israel, “*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*” What was this nation of which Jesus spoke? It was a reference to the church local. Peter called it a “*holy nation*” (1 Pet 2:9). Israel would be set aside temporarily in the church age. The church local, comprising believers of all nations, would take her place in the work of evangelism. The Church presently enjoys the spiritual benefits of the new covenant which can only be appropriated by faith in Christ (Col 1:13). Nevertheless, one day the nation of Israel will be restored. Israel will then experience not only the spiritual but also the physical blessings of the new covenant God had promised her (Jer 31:31; Rom 11:25). On that day, when Christ returns, Israel will acknowledge Him as Saviour and Lord, and will take part in His coming millennial reign on earth (Rev 5:10; 20:6).

THOUGHT: Evil can never thwart the plan of God.

PRAYER: O Father, I praise Thee for working all things well to the glory of Thy name.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

MATTHEW 22:1-14

REVELATION 19:1-9

"The wedding is ready."

JESUS' WEDDING

This parable of the wedding dinner is similar to the one found in Luke 14:16-24. Like the parable of the wicked farmer, it has a historical as well as prophetic element. God had invited the Israelites to the marriage feast of His Son Jesus Christ. It was an invitation to be saved. But they would not come. He sent the invitation out again, and assured them that everything had been prepared. Christ had done all that is necessary for their salvation; they need only to receive it by faith, and enjoy all its benefits. But they made light of the gift of salvation, rudely threw out the Gospel invitation, ill-treated and even killed His messengers. Their own worldly business was more important than this grand and gracious salvation dinner God the King had specially prepared for them.

What would God do to Israel? Israel's rebellion so angered God that He sent Titus with his Roman army to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70. He then sent out His wedding invitation to those on the highways, i.e. the Gentiles (cf. Luke 14:23). The marriage feast would be filled with people from *"every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Rev 5:9). Although all are invited, not all are elected. As Jesus said, *"For many are called, but few are chosen."* The chosen ones are clothed with a wedding garment. This wedding dress is described in Revelation 19:8, *"And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."* The righteousness of the saints is none other than the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. It is the righteousness Christ earned for His saints by His active obedience. Those who are without this wedding garment, who seek to participate in this marriage feast on account of their own righteousness or good works will be thrown out, and cast into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a description of hell and its torments (Matt 13:42; 25:30, 46). This is a solemn reminder that good works do not save; only Jesus saves! Only one way to heaven, and it is not our way, but His way: Jesus is the only living and true way (John 14:6).

THOUGHT: Am I ready with my wedding dress?

PRAYER: Father, clothe me with the wedding garment that is made by Thy Son.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

MATTHEW 22:15-22

ROMANS 13:1-8

*“...Render therefore unto Caesar
the things which are Caesar’s...”*

JESUS AND CAESAR

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 Jews to pay taxes to Caesar.

Should the Jews pay or not pay taxes 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 disloyalty to Rome. It seemed to them like a foolproof 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.”* His detractors were all amazed by 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: Borrowing without paying is stealing.

PRAYER: Father, help me settle my debts immediately.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

LUKE 20:27-40

DEUTERONOMY 25:5-10

*“For he is not a God of the dead,
but of the living...”*

LIVING GOD, LIVELY SAINTS

The Sadducees here questioned Jesus about the life hereafter which is 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 entailed. Citing Moses' words in Deuteronomy 25:5ff. concerning the custom of levirate marriage (“levir” is Latin for “brother-in-law”), they cooked up a story of a woman whose husband had died before they had a child. According to the Mosaic law, her 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 died. Then came the fault-finding question: *“Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.”* Jesus rebuked them for their theological ignorance. 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 resurrection (1 Cor 15:40-50). Like the angels, resurrected saints neither marry, nor die. 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.

Jesus went on to refute the Sadducean denial of the resurrection. He argued that the God of Israel is not a God of the dead but of the living. If the God of Israel is the God of the living, and is also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (citing Exod 3:6), then it must lead to the logical conclusion that the three patriarchs, though already departed, are still alive and awaiting the day of resurrection (1 Thess 4:14-16). All the people marvelled at the teaching of Jesus, and the scribes acknowledged the truth of His reasoning. The Sadducees dared not ask Him any more questions.

THOUGHT: Am I ready for the rapture?

PRAYER: Father, I long for the day when I would be raptured.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

MARK 12:28-34

MATTHEW 22:34-40

*“On these two commandments hang
all the law and the prophets.”*

LAW AND LOVE

Now a scribe or a lawyer (equivalent to a Doctor of Theology today) asked Jesus which commandment was foremost in the law. It is possible that this particular scribe was attempting to draw Jesus into a debate on which of the 613 extra-biblical rabbinical laws was the greatest. Of course Jesus would not be so foolish as to waste His time arguing over this. He drew this ThD back to the Scriptures. Citing Deuteronomy 6:4-5 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 and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* 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.”* 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: “The seat of the Law is not in the brain, but in the heart.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, teach me to love especially those whom I find hard to love.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

MATTHEW 22:41-23:12

PSALM 110

*"The LORD said unto my Lord,
Sit thou on my right hand..."*

JESUS THE SON OF DAVID

Now it was Jesus' turn to question the Pharisees. It is a simple and yet profound question, *"What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?"* It is practically the same question Jesus had asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15. The Pharisees correctly answered, *"The Son of David."* The Messiah was from David's line (2 Sam 7:12-14). The scribes themselves taught so (Mark 12:35). However, the Messiah was not only the Son of David, but also the Son of God. This the Pharisees failed to see. So Jesus posed them another question: If the Christ is the Son of David, *"How then doth David in spirit (by the Holy Ghost, in the book of Psalms) call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"* Jesus directed their attention to the Messianic Psalm 110. David, who wrote this psalm under divine inspiration, presents the LORD (YHWH, i.e. Yahweh or Jehovah) 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 empty. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:13-14). To save themselves from further embarrassment and humiliation, they dared not asked Him any more questions.

Jesus is the paragon of biblical fundamentalism. He not only taught the truth, but also warned against error. Here, He publicly denounced the hypocrisy of Israel's religious teachers, pronouncing seven woes on them. Teachers indeed shall receive the greater judgment (James 3:1).

THOUGHT: A Biblical fundamentalist believes the Bible and defends the Bible.

PRAYER: Father, I want to be valiant for the truth.

"GOOD MASTER"

(by Charles Spurgeon)

If the young man in the gospel used this title in speaking to our Lord, how much more fitly may I thus address him! He is indeed my Master in both senses, a ruling Master and a teaching Master. I delight to run upon his errands, and to sit at his feet. I am both his servant and his disciple, and count it my highest honour to own the double character. If he should ask me why I call him "good," I should have a ready answer. It is true that "there is none good but one, that is, God," but then he is God, and all the goodness of Deity shines forth in him. In my experience, I have found him good, so good, indeed, that all the good I have has come to me through him. He was good to me when I was dead in sin, for he raised me by his Spirit's power; he has been good to me in all my needs, trials, struggles, and sorrows. Never could there be a better Master, for his service is freedom, his rule is love: I wish I were one thousandth part as good a servant. When he teaches me as my Rabbi, he is unspeakably good, his doctrine is divine, his manner is condescending, his spirit is gentleness itself. No error mingles with his instruction – pure is the golden truth which he brings forth, and all his teachings lead to goodness, sanctifying as well as edifying the disciple. Angels find him a good Master and delight to pay their homage at his footstool. The ancient saints proved him to be a good Master, and each of them rejoiced to sing, "I am thy servant, O Lord!" My own humble testimony must certainly be to the same effect. I will bear this witness before my friends and neighbours, for possibly they may be led by my testimony to seek my Lord Jesus as their Master. O that they would do so! They would never repent so wise a deed. If they would but take his easy yoke, they would find themselves in so royal a service that they would enlist in it for ever.

THOUGHT: How am I serving my Good Master?

PRAYER: Father, grant me humility to truly serve Thee, for Thou art my Good Master.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

MARK 12:41-44

JOHN 12:20-26

*“...she of her want did cast in
all that she had...”*

GIVING ALL TO JESUS

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?

The Passover in Jerusalem was not only observed by Jews, but also by Greeks. These were Gentiles who had forsaken paganism to embrace Judaism. Non-Jews who worshipped Jehovah were either proselytes (circumcised) or God-fearers (uncircumcised). The Jews rejected Jesus, but the Greeks received Him gladly. Here we find them wanting to see Jesus to learn from Him. These are the other sheep that must be brought into the fold (John 10:16).

These Greeks, though worshippers of Jehovah, had to be ushered into the kingdom through the Gospel of Christ. In His parable on the corn of wheat, Jesus spoke of His coming humiliation and glorification. It is only when the seed dies that the life within it will sprout to become a fruitful plant. His death would result in life. Not only would Jesus live again after He died, others also will live if they die to themselves and live in Him. Jesus said, *“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”*

THOUGHT: If I want to live for Christ, I must die to self.

PRAYER: Father, I surrender all.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

JOHN 12:27-36

JOHN 13:31

“Father, glorify thy name...”

JESUS GLORIFIES THE FATHER

As Jesus contemplated His coming death, He struggled within Himself and prayed, *“Father, save me from this hour (i.e. hour of death).”* At the same time, He desired to do His Father’s will, and so prayed, *“Father, glorify thy name.”* This holy tension was due to His twofold nature: He was fully God and fully Man. His humanity desired to escape, but His deity desired to fulfil. It is impossible to fathom the hypostatic dynamics operating within Christ. As sinners, we can only thank Him for subjecting His human will to the divine.

The Father by His voice had spoken concerning His Son on two previous occasions: at His baptism and His transfiguration. Now, He spoke for the third and final time in answer to His Son’s prayer, *“Father, glorify thy name.”* The answer from heaven came loud and clear, *“I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”* In other words, “I will perfect what I have begun” (Calvin).

Jesus said those words were spoken not for His benefit, but His disciples’. The Lord readily submitted Himself to do His Father’s will. On the other hand, the disciples, being weak in the flesh, might waver. And so they were warned of trying days to come. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Son would glorify the Father by being crucified. Just like Moses who lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness for the healing of Israel, so would Jesus be lifted up from the earth for the salvation of His people (Num 21:9; John 3:14). In glorifying His Father by dying on the cross, we see His twofold obedience acting in perfect harmony.

The people could not understand what Jesus said concerning the Messiah. According to the Old Testament, the Messiah was One who lives forever. How then could He die by crucifixion? Jesus then told them to believe His words. He is the Light who had spoken to them the truth. They needed to believe in order to see. Once they had received the light, the Holy Spirit would illumine their minds.

THOUGHT: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

PRAYER: “Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!”

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

JOHN 12:37-50

EXODUS 10:1-3

*“He hath blinded their eyes,
and hardened their heart...”*

JUDICIAL BLINDING AND HARDENING

Jesus throughout His public ministry had performed countless miracles to authenticate His Messiahship and Message. Yet the Jews believed Him not. Their constant, persistent, wilful and decisive rejection of Christ constituted an unpardonable sin which brought about God's judicial blinding and punitive hardening.

Nevertheless, among the Jewish leaders, there were many who had believed but who did so secretly because of the Pharisees. Their faith though genuine was weak, *“for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”*

Judgment will come upon those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ. They will be judged by the Father when He sits on His Great White Throne on that final day (Rev 20:10-15).

Jesus said that the Father's *“commandment is life everlasting.”* Paul reiterated this in Romans 7:10 where He wrote, *“the commandment ... was ordained to life.”* Life is in the Law for the one who keeps it perfectly. But as sinners, it means death, because *“Sin, taking occasion by the commandment... slew me... that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”* (Rom 7:11-13). If sinners are to have life through the Law, it must come by means of imputation through a Perfect Law-keeping Representative who is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, the God-Man.

THOUGHT: “Unbelief makes us rebels and deserters.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for the times when I have doubted or questioned Thee.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

MATTHEW 24:1-14

1 TIMOTHY 4

“...Take heed that
no man deceive you.”

JESUS' SECOND COMING (I)

This lengthy discourse has to do with the end times. It was a response to Jesus' disciples' question, *“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”*

The Lord began by describing the world just before He returns. These are the signs of His coming: (1) Religious signs: false Christs and false prophets; (2) military signs: *“wars and rumours of wars,” “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;”* (3) cosmic signs: *“famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places, and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.”* According to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, the vision of the first four seals tallies with the signs of Matthew 24:6-8. He elaborates, *“The galloping of the four horsemen of peace, war, pestilence and death would be 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; (5) the 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; and (6) the 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.”* Jesus said, *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”*

THOUGHT: God blesses those who study prophecy and keep those things written therein (Rev 1:3).

PRAYER: Father, may Thy Holy Spirit help me to understand end-time prophecies.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

MATTHEW 24:15-39

2 THESSALONIANS 2

“...they shall see the Son of man
coming in the clouds of heaven
with power and great glory.”

JESUS' SECOND COMING (II)

Jesus also mentioned Daniel's “*the abomination of desolation*” (Dan 9:27; 12:11) in Matthew 24:15. This refers to the desecration of the Jewish temple by the Antichrist at the mid-point of the Great Tribulation week (Dan 9:27). After “*forty and two months*” (Rev 11:2; 13:5) or “*a thousand two hundred and threescore 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 a thing most hateful.

Will the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem for the Antichrist to desecrate? Rev Dr Timothy Tow comments, “Bible students generally conclude that since there would be the OT 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.”

How then can this be reconciled with Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4? Dr Tow answers 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? Only believers will escape the wrath of God to come (1 Thess 5:9). 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). Be therefore 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: Study Rev Dr Timothy Tow's commentaries on Daniel and Revelation.

PRAYER: Father, let me serve Thee with my whole life in these last days.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

MATTHEW 26:1-13

JOHN 12:2-8

“...she did it for my burial.”

ANOINTED FOR BURIAL

Jesus here predicted His death for the fifth and final time. Jesus would be betrayed and crucified immediately after the Passover meal, on the first day of the feast of unleavened bread. The Jewish leaders had already conspired to kill Jesus. They decided not to execute their plan during the Passover week for fear of a revolt by the people. But Jesus overruled their timing by fixing the date of His death ahead of time. This shows that God is in control, not man. Moreover, Scripture must be fulfilled; Jesus had to be the true Passover Lamb (Exod 12; Isa 53).

Simon the leper, healed and full of gratitude, had Jesus over to his house. This took place in Bethany, the town of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, whose home Jesus resided 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 a very expensive perfume from an alabaster jar. 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 felt that it was a terrible waste. Judas Iscariot spoke up and complained that what Mary had done 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. He had been made treasurer, but pilfered from the moneybag. It is no surprise that he betrayed Jesus for only thirty 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 (Matt 26:2 cf. 16:21).

THOUGHT: I wonder have I done my best for Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, help me like Mary to give my best to Thee.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 14

LUKE 22:3-18

MATTHEW 26:14-16

*"...they covenanted with him for
thirty pieces of silver."*

SOLD FOR THE PRICE OF A SLAVE

Satan was the mastermind behind the conspiracy to kill Jesus (cf. Gen 3:15). Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, was his key pawn. He entered into Judas (cf. John 13:2), and took control of him. Then Judas went to the Jewish leaders, and agreed to betray Jesus for thirty shekels, a miserly sum, the price of a slave (Exod 21:32).

In the early morning of Thursday, Nisan 14, Jesus instructed Peter and John to prepare the Passover for all of them. A large 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. must 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. 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 (Rev 19:9).

THOUGHT: I must not give place to the devil.

PRAYER: Father, strengthen me to resist Satan's temptations.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

JOHN 13:1-20

EPHESIANS 5:25-27

“...If I wash thee not,
thou hast no part with me.”

JESUS WASHED HIS DISCIPLES' FEET

The appointed time had arrived that Jesus should lay down His life for the world. He was about to descend to the lowest depths of humiliation; He was about to depart from this world (i.e. His crucifixion), and return to His Father in heaven (His exaltation).

Jesus took this opportunity at the Passover to teach His disciples humility by example. In dramatic fashion, He removed His outer wear, and wrapped Himself with a towel. He poured water into a basin, and went about washing His disciples' feet one by one (including those of Judas). The washing of the feet of guests was the duty of slaves. But Jesus as Master did the work of a slave, stooping down to wash His disciples' feet. This He did, not only to teach them how they ought to humble themselves in their future apostolic ministry, but also to impress upon them how greatly He had loved them (*“He loved them unto the end”*).

Peter objected to Jesus washing his feet. Jesus told Peter that if he wanted to be a member of His family, he must subject himself to such a cleansing by Him. Peter then told Jesus to give him a full bath instead. Jesus responded by saying that a person who had bathed was clean already, and needed only to wash his feet. Jesus was telling them that they had all received the salvific cleansing of sins past, present and future, through the baptism with the Spirit (Titus 3:5). Nevertheless, so long as they were in this sinful world, they would continually need to cleanse their sinful thoughts, words and deeds by means of the sanctifying power of the Word of God (John 17:17). The Word of God acts like a detergent. As we read, study and meditate upon God's Word more and more, we would become more and more holy, growing in Christlikeness. Indeed, *“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:25-27). However, they were all clean except Judas the traitor who was never saved in the first place.

THOUGHT: A Christlike leader is not a dictator but a servitor.

PRAYER: Father, I do not want to be served, but to serve.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

JOHN 13:18-26

PSALM 41

“...one of you shall betray me.”

JESUS IDENTIFIED THE TRAITOR

Blessed is the believer who is forgiven of his sins, and walks in the humble steps of his Lord. But there was one among the twelve who was not blessed, but cursed. The Lord had loved him truly by washing his feet, and eating bread with him. Yet this disciple filled his heart with hatred and his mind with murderous thoughts. All this happened in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, “*He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me*” (Ps 41:9 cf. 2 Sam 15:12; 16:23). As Rev Dr Timothy Tow puts it, “Ingratitude is the half-sister of treachery.” But both ingratitude and treachery are found in Judas. He is doubly cursed; the son of perdition indeed (cf. Heb 6:4-6).

At the Passover table, Jesus told the twelve that one of them was about to betray Him. 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.

Then Peter gestured to John to ask the Lord to identify the traitor. John obliged and asked, “*Lord, who is it?*” Jesus answered, “*He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.*” And Jesus gave the sop to Judas Iscariot. It was the custom in those days for the host to dip a piece of bread in gravy and offer it to the most honoured guest at the table. It was the Saviour’s final loving attempt to move Judas’ heart to repentance. Judas reacted to Jesus’ loving act by hardening his heart even more. Calvin wrote, “Judas delivered himself entirely to Satan when he had taken the sop. ...His heart ought to have been softened by Christ’s great kindness, but it was harder than iron. And so his desperate and incurable obstinacy deserved that God should, by His righteous judgment, harden his heart still more by Satan. When by kindnesses to our enemies we heap coals of fire on their heads they are, if they are incurable, the rather burnt up to their destruction. And yet our kindnesses is not to blame, for their hearts should have been so influenced to love us.”

THOUGHT: Did Jesus love Judas?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be kind even to those who do evil against me.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

JOHN 13:27-35

MARK 14:18-21

“...That thou doest, do quickly.”

JUDAS BETRAYS JESUS

Jesus delivered a very hard saying concerning Judas, *“The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written (as it was determined) of him: 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.”* 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? To illustrate this mystery of predestination, Rev Dr Timothy Tow tells his banana skin story, “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.

Jesus told Judas to carry out his treacherous plan quickly. This reveals Jesus’ readiness to enter into His hour of suffering. After Judas had left under the cloak of darkness, Jesus announced that the time had arrived for the Son of man to be glorified, and for God to be glorified in Him. The Son glorifies the Father by obeying His decreative will in fulfilment of His redemptive plan. The Father in turn glorifies the Son by raising Him from the dead, and exalting Him above all His creation. The Father’s glorification of the Son will also redound to His own glory: *“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”* (Phil 2:9-11).

Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment that they should love one another as He had loved them. Of course, the command to love one another was not new. It was already in the Old Testament (Lev 19:18). The newness of this love command lies in the words, *“as I have loved you.”* The disciples were about to witness the greatest demonstration of love ever seen in history. The Cross is God’s symbol of love. It defines in concrete terms what true love is and how far it must go.

THOUGHT: God is not the author of sin.

PRAYER: Thou art sovereign, O Father!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

MATTHEW 26:26-29

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

*“...Jesus took bread,
and blessed it...”*

THE LORD’S SUPPER

Towards the end of the Passover meal, Jesus instituted a new sacrament, the Lord’s Supper, that would replace the old. The Passover pointed to the cross-work of Christ. 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. Neither are the actual flesh and blood present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine. The bread and cup merely represent the body and blood of our 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 perfect obedience in His life as well as in His death. In the flesh, He fulfilled the Law perfectly. 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.

The Lord’s Supper also points towards what Christ will do in the future. Jesus said, *“I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* It points to the second coming of Christ. The Lord will return one day to receive His Bride, the Church. The Church at this time observes the Lord’s Supper alone, but at the Marriage Supper (Rev 19:9), Christ will be there to eat with them!

THOUGHT: “When celebrating the Supper, we shall indeed worship Him as present, but with minds upraised to heaven.” (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy body broken and blood shed for me on the cross.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

LUKE 22:24-38

JEREMIAH 23:3-8

“...he that is chief,
as he that doth serve.”

TRUE GREATNESS IS LOWLINESS

The disciples disputed among themselves who should be considered number one. Jesus took this opportunity to teach them what true greatness is. They were chided for their worldly egotism. The one who is greatest ought to behave as the lowest in rank. And he who leads must serve. At the table, Jesus was the Master, yet He did not think it beneath Himself to serve His disciples. He had earlier washed their feet. The world measures greatness in terms of how much one is being served, but God measures it in terms of how much one is serving others.

There was no need for the disciples to fight over position and authority. By virtue of their loyalty to Him during the trying days of His ministry among the Jews, Jesus promised them that they would “*sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*” They will receive this appointment when the Lord returns to set up His millennial kingdom on earth. When Christ sits on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, His twelve Apostles will sit with Him to rule over the twelve tribes (Jer 23:3-8).

Peter affirmed his loyalty to Christ by saying that He was ready to die for Him. But Jesus knew the frailties of the flesh. He told them that they would soon desert Him (cf. John 16:32). Fulfilling Zechariah 13:7, all His disciples would flee when the time of His arrest came. Although Peter avowed that he would not, yet the Lord told Peter that before cockcrow, he would have denied Him thrice. But the Lord comforted Peter by telling him that He had already prayed for him so that his faith might not fail. Satan would sorely test him. Peter would fall, but not fail. He would come out of this trial matured to strengthen his fellow disciples.

Jesus would soon be numbered among the transgressors, and the lives of His disciples would also be in jeopardy. He warned them to be prepared for any eventuality, and that if they had no sword, to buy one. This is not to say that Jesus was ordering them to stage an armed revolt (cf. Matt 26:51-53). The sword was meant for self-defence, and for that purpose, two were enough.

THOUGHT: Promotion comes not from man but from the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, may I not build my own kingdom but Thine.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

JOHN 14:1-11

REVELATION 21

*“In my Father’s house
are many mansions...”*

JESUS THE COMFORTER

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.”* Jesus was telling His disciples to focus on who He is: God Himself. They ought not to feel downcast. His death meant victory, not defeat. His death would lead to His resurrection, subsequent ascension, and eventual return. 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 heaven itself.

What road must man travel to get to heaven? Jesus said that there is one road, and only one: He is *“the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* All other religions do not lead to the living and true God, nor to heaven. There is only one true religion, and that is Christianity. According to all other religions, including Roman Catholicism which is pseudo-Christianity, the way to heaven is by good works. It is only Biblical Christianity which says that salvation is free; not by works but by grace through faith in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Christ has already done all the good works necessary for us to be saved. We need only to trust in the good works Jesus has done for us in His life and in His death for our entrance into heaven. It is as simple and as easy as that. Not work but believe: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31).

Philip asked Jesus, *“Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”* Philip wanted to see in order to believe. Jesus replied, *“he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”* John makes this very clear, *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). As the eternally begotten Son of God, Jesus is *“the image of the invisible God”* (Col 1:15), *“the express image of his person”* (Heb 1:3). In essence, God the Son is the same as God the Father. When one sees the Son, it is as good as seeing the Father.

THOUGHT: Live with heavenly thoughts, and earthly desires will fade.

PRAYER: Father, help me live as a citizen of heaven, not earth.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 21

JOHN 14:12-31

ROMANS 8:1-16

*"...he shall give you
another Comforter..."*

THE HOLY SPIRIT ANOTHER COMFORTER

Jesus would not leave His disciples helpless or defenceless when He departed to heaven. In the name of Jesus, God the Father would send to them an Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Truth who would cause them to understand correctly all the spiritual truths that they, up till this time, found so difficult to grasp. Not only that, He would bring to memory all the things Jesus had taught them. This no doubt points to their God-inspired Word ministry. The Holy Spirit would cause them to preach, teach, and write His Truth infallibly and inerrantly (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21).

Jesus would grant His disciples power from on high to do greater works than He had done. By "greater works" Jesus meant their worldwide ministry of evangelism. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said the Spirit would empower them to spread the good news of salvation not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but also Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jesus ended His personal ministry on earth with just 500 disciples (1 Cor 15:6), but Peter in a single day led 3,000 souls into the kingdom (Acts 2:41). This is the greater works of which Jesus spoke.

Jesus promised His disciples not only the power of evangelism, but also the power of prayer. Twice He said, *"If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."* William Hendriksen wrote, "A prayer in Christ's name is a prayer that is in harmony with whatever Christ has revealed concerning Himself."

Christ displayed His active obedience when He said, *"But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do"* (John 14:31a). Jesus obeyed His Father's command right till the end. He was always on the go to do His Father's bidding. Even to His death, He wavered not and said resolutely, *"Arise, let us go hence"* (John 14:31b).

THOUGHT: "Everyone's advancement in piety is the secret work of the Spirit." (Calvin)

PRAYER: Father, fill me with Thy Holy Spirit.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

JOHN 15:1-27

1 JOHN 3:23-24

*"I am the vine,
ye are the branches..."*

JESUS THE LIFE-GIVING VINE

Jesus is the true life-giving Vine, and the Father is the Vine-dresser. The Vine has two types of branches: (1) fruitful branches which represent true believers, and (2) fruitless branches which represent false believers. True believers genuinely possess Christ and are born again. False believers on the other hand merely profess Christ but are spiritually dead (eg. Judas Iscariot). That was why James, having learnt from Jesus, said, *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone"* (James 2:17). A dead faith can produce no good works, but a lively faith which saves will lead to good works to the glory of God. False believers together with unbelievers will be cast into hell-fire on judgment day. It must be said that the salvation equation is not Faith + Works = Salvation, but Faith = Salvation + Works. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith... it is the gift of God: Not of works..."* (Eph 2:8-9).

The branch cannot produce fruit on its own. It must be attached to the Vine itself if it is to bring forth fruit. A person must *"abide"* (Greek *meno*, "I remain") in Christ not only to receive but also manifest life. John echoed Jesus' words, *"And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth (meno) in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth (meno) in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us"* (1 John 3:23-24); *"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth (meno) in him, and he in God"* (1 John 4:15); *"Let that therefore abide (meno) in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain (meno) in you, ye also shall continue (meno) in the Son, and in the Father"* (1 John 2:24).

THOUGHT: Without Christ, I have no life.

PRAYER: "I need Thee every hour, Most gracious Lord."

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

JOHN 15:19

ROMANS 8:14-16

*“...ye have received
the Spirit of adoption...”*

“I HAVE CHOSEN YOU OUT OF THE WORLD”

(by Charles Spurgeon)

Here is distinguishing grace and discriminating regard; for some are made the special objects of divine affection. Do not be afraid to dwell upon this high doctrine of election. When your mind is most heavy and depressed, you will find it to be a bottle of richest cordial. Those who doubt the doctrines of grace, or who cast them into the shade, miss the richest clusters of Eshcol; they lose the wines on the lees well refined, the fat things full of marrow. There is no balm in Gilead comparable to it. If the honey in Jonathan's wood when but touched enlightened the eyes, this is honey which will enlighten your heart to love and learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Eat, and fear not a surfeit; live upon this choice dainty, and fear not that it will be too delicate a diet. Meat from the King's table will hurt none of his courtiers. Desire to have your mind enlarged, that you may comprehend more and more the eternal, everlasting, discriminating love of God. When you have mounted as high as election, tarry on its sister mount, the covenant of grace. Covenant engagements are the munitions of stupendous rock behind which we lie entrenched; covenant engagements with the surety, Christ Jesus, are the quiet resting-places of trembling spirits.

“His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the raging flood;
When every earthly prop gives way,
This still is all my strength and stay.”

If Jesus undertook to bring me to glory, and if the Father promised that He would give me to the Son to be a part of the infinite reward of the travail of His soul; then, my soul, till God Himself shall be unfaithful, till Jesus shall cease to be the truth, thou art safe. When David danced before the ark, he told Michal that election made him do so. Come, my soul, exult before the God of grace and leap for joy of heart.

THOUGHT: Am I sure that God has elected me?

PRAYER: Father, may Thy Spirit grant me full assurance that I am Thy child.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

JOHN 16:1-14

EPHESIANS 5:1-11

“...when he, the Spirit of truth,
is come, he will guide you
into all truth...”

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (I)

Jesus prepared His disciples for the sufferings ahead. They would be excommunicated (“*They shall put you out of the synagogues*”) and executed (“*whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service*,” eg. Saul in Acts 8:1-3, 22:3-4) because they belonged to Him. They were to remember His words of prediction so that such persecution and tribulation would not take them by surprise. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Jesus assured them that after His departure, the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit Himself) would come to help them in their Christian faith and living (cf. John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26). The Church needs the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Gospel for it is He who will both convict and convince the world of (1) Sin—This refers to the sinful state man is in. Man stands condemned if he refuses to believe in Christ (John 3:18); (2) Righteousness—This refers to the righteousness found in Christ. Man can be righteous only in Christ (Phil 3:9); and (3) Judgment—This refers to the end-time judgment of the Great White Throne. The finally impenitent together with Satan and the demons shall be thrown into the lake of fire to suffer eternal conscious torment (Heb 2:14; Rev 20:11-15).

The Holy Spirit would also superintend the Apostles as they wrote the New Testament. The Holy Spirit “*shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*” (John 14:26), and “*will guide you into all truth... and he will shew you things to come*” (John 16:13 cf. 2 Pet 1:21). The Apostles were to be the divinely appointed and inspired interpreters of the words and works of Christ, and all the prophecies concerning Him. By virtue of this special anointing of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the Apostles of Christ had an infallible ministry of preaching (1 Thess 2:13) and writing (Eph 2:20; 2 Pet 1:21) the Holy Scriptures. The Gospel writers need not depend on one another for the facts of Christ’s life. They only needed the Holy Spirit who is the infallible source of all truths about Christ whom He has come to glorify (John 16:14).

THOUGHT: “The Spirit of God acts the part of a judge within us.”
(Calvin)

PRAYER: “Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.”

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

JOHN 16:7-12

ACTS 2:1-21

*“...for if I go not away, the Comforter
will not come unto you...”*

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (II)

What did Jesus mean when He said that the Holy Spirit will not come until or unless He departs (John 16:7)? Was Jesus implying that the Holy Spirit never “*came*” or was inactive before this time? Some theologians suggest that the Holy Spirit will “*come*” to indwell believers which did not happen in the OT. If the Spirit only indwelt NT and not OT saints, then how could the latter be considered saved and a child of God (cf. John 3:5; Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 2:9-16)?

If the Holy Spirit was already present and active in ministry, what then did Jesus mean when He said the Spirit will not come until He departs? From Genesis to Revelation, we find all three persons of the Godhead at work. (1) In the time of the OT, we see the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the creation of man (Gen 1:26-27); the Son in His preincarnate appearances (Gen 12:7; 18:1; 32:30); and the Spirit moving upon the face of the waters of the formless and empty earth (Gen 1:2), and anointing the prophets, priests, and kings for ministry (1 Kings 19:16; Exod 40:13; 1 Sam 10:1). Although all three persons of the Trinity were at work, the Father was the prominent figure in the OT. (2) In the time of the Gospels, we see the Father sending the Son (John 17:3, 8; Gal 4:4), the Spirit empowering the Son (John 3:34); and the Father and the Spirit present and active in the baptism of the Son (Matt 3:13-17). Although all three persons of the Trinity were at work, the Son was the prominent figure in the Gospels. (3) In the time of the NT Church, we find the Father receiving the prayers of the saints (Matt 6:6, 9, 7:11), the Son interceding for the saints as their great High Priest (Heb 4:14-16), and the Spirit doing the work of reproving, calling, converting, indwelling, assuring, revealing, teaching, guiding, sanctifying, praying, gifting, restraining etc. Although all three persons again are at work in the NT Church, it is the Holy Spirit who is now prominent. Thus, when Jesus said that the Spirit would descend only after He ascended to heaven, He was intimating that He would be passing on the baton to the Spirit who would run the final lap in the cooperative work of the Trinity in the redemption of man. Now is the age of the Spirit.

THOUGHT: The Acts of the Apostles can be rightly called the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER: “Lord, send the old time power, the Pentecostal power!”

JESUS DEFINES UNITY (I)

Jesus' high priestly prayer—“*That they all may be one*” (John 17:21)—is cited in the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) document of March 29, 1994 as a proof text for Protestant-Catholic union. According to the ECT, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.” The term “Christian” applies to “All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior” regardless of how He is actually known, understood or embraced. If this be the case, then all the cults should be included, for they too accept Christ in their own respective, albeit heretical ways.

The Roman Catholic Church is still steeped in its idolatry and heresies. The ECT affirmation that Catholic and Orthodox churches are part of Christ's body despite the serious errors in doctrine and practice that remain, betrays its contempt for the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation under Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli and others.

The question thus raised is: What did Jesus really mean when He prayed, “*That they all may be one*”? Was Jesus praying for Evangelical-Catholic unity in John 17? What kind of unity was He really praying for?

It is significant to note that when Jesus prayed, “*that they may be one*,” it was not any kind of oneness, but a qualified oneness, “*as we are*” (John 17:11). What is this oneness between the Father and the Son?

The word “*one*” here refers to the divine mission. There is perfect concord between the Father and the Son in the work of redemption. Thus, Christ's mission on earth when He first came was a spiritual one. He came as the Lamb of God; to suffer, to bleed, and to die for sinful humanity. In perfect obedience to God the Father, He successfully accomplished that mission when He conquered death by His resurrection on the third day. The mission Jesus committed to His disciples was the same as that which He had received from the Father; to preach the Gospel of His death, burial and resurrection to a lost and dying world so that those who believe might receive the forgiveness of sins, and have eternal life.

THOUGHT: “Protestantism has surrendered the citadel to the Roman Catholics when it calls them Christians.” (McIntire)

PRAYER: Father grant me courage to defend the faith.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

JOHN 17:12-17

ACTS 20:24-31

“Sanctify them through thy truth...”

JESUS DEFINES UNITY (II)

The Christian mission is thus not a temporal one—to “contend for the truth that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth”—as the ECT endorsers would have us believe. On the contrary, the primary duty of the Christian Church is a spiritual one—to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). This is because the present world system as predicted by the Holy Scriptures is not getting better. The Christian duty of this century and in the third millennium, if the Lord tarries, is not to improve the world by the ecumenical power of an Evangelical-Catholic union, but to convert the lost by the uncompromised preaching of an unadulterated Gospel that only Jesus saves! The power of the Church lies not in its numbers, but in the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). The Lord used only twelve faithful Apostles to turn the world “upside down” (Acts 17:6). The Lord has never relied on numbers to achieve His goals.

It is equally important to know for whom Jesus prayed if we are to understand what He meant when He said, “*that they may be one.*” The people for whom Jesus prayed were Christians who had the following traits:

First, they were knowledgeable of the only living and true God. Eternal life was a result of knowing the one true God, and Christ (John 17:3). To know God is to have a personal relationship with Him in Christ. The object of this knowledge is not any god, but “*the only true God*” (John 17:3) who has sent His Son to reveal the only way to eternal life.

Second, they were obedient to the Word of God. Jesus taught His Father’s Word to the disciples, and they “*have kept thy word*” (John 17:6). In John 17:8, Jesus said that the disciples paid attention not only to the whole sum but also to each part of Jesus’ teaching, and obeyed them. They did not pick and choose what they wanted to believe and practise.

THOUGHT: “Purity in doctrine preserves the unity of the Church.”
(Calvin)

PRAYER: O Father, keep me pure in doctrine.

JESUS DEFINES UNITY (III)

Third, they were separated from the world. They were “*in the world*” (John 17:11), but “*not of the world*” (John 17:14). The “*world*” here refers to the world’s existing condition of alienation from, and opposition to, God. Separation from the present world system with all its ideologies and vices is an essential component of Christian unity in Jesus’ understanding. Separation, not ecumenism, is central in Jesus’ prayer (John 17:14-16).

Do those who propose this Evangelical-Catholic union manifest the above characteristics? Here are some questions to help us with the answer: (1) Can the Roman Catholic Church be said to know the only true God, even Jesus, when they include Mary in the Godhead? The Roman Church has made Mary Goddess when she accords to Mary such titles of deity as “Redemptrix,” “Mediatrix,” and “Mother of God.” (2) Can the Roman Catholic Church be said to obey God’s Word which consists of only sixty-six books when they add to it spurious works like the apocrypha and their ecclesiastical traditions, thereby violating Jesus’ command not to add to or subtract from His Word (Rev 22:18-19)? (3) Can the Evangelical Church be truly Gospel-believing and Bible-defending when she repudiates the doctrine of separation by belittling the importance of truth, and in identifying herself with the apostate church?

What did Jesus mean when He prayed, “*that they may be one, as we are*”? Jesus prayed this prayer of unity because the disciples were commissioned by Him to preach the Gospel to the world just as He was commissioned by the Father. When Jesus completed His ministry on earth, He sent them out as Apostles (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8). Inasmuch as Christ was one with the Father in the divine mission to save His people, Christ prayed that His disciples would be one in mind and spirit to do the same work. Note that, in their Gospel ministries, they never cooperated with the Pharisees and Sadducees, nor sought the help of Herod or Caesar. Such exclusivity is very much a part of the unity that Jesus prayed for.

THOUGHT: “The Devil is really on a rampage today. There is no place for neutralism, compromise, or silence.” (McIntire)

PRAYER: O Father, may I not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

JOHN 17:21-26

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

*“...that they may be made
perfect in one...”*

JESUS DEFINES UNITY (IV)

This unity that Jesus prayed for is confined to truly Protestant churches. Jesus did not pray for a unity between the church and the world, nor a unity between the true universal church and the false Catholic church. What He did pray for was a oneness of purpose in the spiritual mission of Gospel proclamation among His Blood-bought and Spirit-baptised people. This must be grounded on true evangelical creed (by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone), and true Biblical belief (in the Word of God alone made up of just sixty-six canonical books).

True Christian ecumenism, in light of Christ's high priestly prayer, can be had only when there is a clear separation by the Christian Church from all forms of unbelief and apostasy. As long as the Roman Catholic Church presents another Jesus (viz., Jesus is not sole Mediator, since Mary is co-Mediatrix), preaches another Gospel (viz., salvation is not only by faith but by good works also), and believes in another Bible (viz., the Holy Scriptures plus the apocrypha, plus papal traditions), any union with her incurs God's wrath (Gal 1:8). May the Church's Protestant sons never do a Judas (*“the son of perdition,”* John 17:12) on Jesus. May Jesus' prayer be answered, *“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth”* (John 17:14-17).

The perfect obedience of Christ can be seen in the opening words of His high priestly prayer, *“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:1-4). As the Father's obedient Son, He performed all that His Father had commissioned Him to do.

THOUGHT: “A false love is Satan's tool to promote compromise and disobedience to Christ's command.” (McIntire)

PRAYER: Father, let me love truth, and hate iniquity and every false way.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

LUKE 22:39-46

HEBREWS 5:7-9

*“...being in an agony
he prayed more earnestly...”*

JESUS' AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

Gethsemane (“oil press”) was an olive tree garden beyond the Kidron Valley, East of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives. The “oil press” garden with the twisted branches typical of olive trees vividly portrays the intense agony that Jesus went through. The agony was so great that He sweated drops of blood. Although He struggled in His flesh knowing the pain, suffering, and death to come, yet He willingly obeyed His Father’s will to go to the cross (Heb 5:7-9).

At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Now at the end, He was tested again, this time by His humanity. Indeed, Christ was tempted and tested to the uttermost so that He might be our sympathetic great High Priest who *“was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb 4:15).

Calvin said, “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.”

His prayer was answered because He prayed obediently, *“not my will, but thine, be done.”* Jesus, being fully God and fully Man, has two wills, the divine and the human. His human will would like the cup removed, but His divine will which was the same as the Father’s would have the cup drunk as eternally decreed. Jesus subjected His human will to the divine will. His prayer that the Father’s will be done was answered (Heb 5:7). Although there was a holy tension between His human will and divine will (the dynamics of which we are unable to fathom), His divine will was in perfect harmony with His Father’s—*“I and my Father are one”* (John 10:30).

THOUGHT: (Read James 5:16.)

PRAYER: Father, teach me to pray like Jesus.

Notes

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